



Paul Celan's No One's Rose (*Die Niemandrose*) : Desolation and Re-defining the Self

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ABSTRACT: This work of Paul Celan raises the issue of the agonizing experience of human being in its historicity. A link between this agony and humanism is the hallmark of the writing of Celan as depicted in this work. The idea of the sustenance of the values of humanism rests on the conceptualization of the other as an encounter amplifying the notion of meridian. The Other for Celan is not only the fallen fellows of dark times rather also the people of distant lands who are equally worthy of being welcome beyond and apart from the faiths. Celan has seriously taken the question of naming, for the names testify to the ineffaceable existence. Names of the Others beyond space invoke the compassion towards them, a sense of the tender meeting with them in the awareness of responsibility. Celan's Jewish existence and experience of the War II lends this work a recognizable shade of holocaust survival.

Keywords: Others, Humanism, Sartre, Naming, Holocaust.

The cycle of the poems under the title No One's Rose (*Die Niemandrose*) by Paul Celan is dotted with the agony and gloom of a self which searches for a reinforcement in the terrain of darkness of the mute existence. Poet's self is strewn in the myriad of layers still seeking contacts. The opening line of the poem articulates the question of having seen once-whom (!). It is not certain as to where the poet saw himself or the other; probably the double of the poet himself. Not being sure about his own reckoning, he speculates to have met the other or the veiled self in a world beyond.

Inaugurating the poem he posits this anxiety:

“Ich war,
als ich dich ansah-wann?-,
draußen bei
den andern Welten.”[1]

The poet is very much sure about a lack of his name in such a despairing plight. The night, which he invokes to put into the word his own destitute destiny, throws him into an orb, where he experiences the burdens-the burdens of the names. Not to celebrate the name, rather to experience it as burden bespeaks the moment of qualm and wariness of a self in the shadow of being at the verge of loss.

The very certainty of a feeling to be living cheats the poet's consciousness. This cheating is but complimentary to the subtle awareness of the poet that he meets the other or his afflicted self in other worlds. He lives in a quandary of indecision about the substance of his soothed existence. The temporal and spatial notions of his existence do not corroborate his perception of intimacy to life. People live, hope, act and end in the spheres of time and a consciousness about their belongingness to a rootedness.

The poet, however founders on his attempt to locate his self in such terms. Following lines prologue this:

“Esist,
ichweisses, nichtwahr,
dasswirlebten, esging
blindnureinAtemzwischen
Dort und Nicht-da und zuweilen” [2].

These lines divulge the dilemma about the incapacity of the poet to communicate with the other whom he would like to speak to or approach in that moment when he summons his unhesitant voice to lend fearless words to a doubt whether he can even testify to the certainty of his life, for he unambiguously proposes his doubt as to he truly lived or only survived in the way that only a breath joins him with the other or his own harrowed self. The oblique reference to his own actual life cannot be slighted here, for he survived as a captive of the concentration camp. As likely as not, the other (-s) seem to be his fellows whom he tries to glimpse through the words, words of destiny. The ‘eye’ which buzzes around the obliteration alludes to the impasse of temporal and spatial suspension under the shadow of still stand. The poet speaks of the ‘eye’:

“kommenthaftschwirrteein Aug
aufErloscheneszu...”[3].

Approaching of this eye towards a moronic survival intimates a predicament of having grown to the degree of the ceasing of those senses that relate a man to the world in every shred of time. The loss involved steals the attachment of the lively bits of existence to the harmony of life-sustaining ‘time’.

Temporality takes on the tinge of counterfeit and absurdity. Time bewitches as such, for the eye beholds not the ‘existing’, instead the ‘extinguished’.

The excruciating grief of experiencing the ‘nothingness’ and having no other alternative to live through that marks the construction of another poem of the cycle titled Psalm. The poems Niemandrose and Psalm converge on expressing the pain which takes the poet into its uncompassionate fold. In Psalm, the existence of the poet amounts to be the absolute and bare minimum, least human and even non-living dust. A complaint underlines this painful state, in that ‘no one listens’ to the subject undergoing the disconcerting state of being, whom the destiny has doomed to helplessness and remaining unsolicited in a state of real historical chaos emanating from the War II. At no other place than this in the poem Psalm, the title of the cycle Niemandrose finds its enduring justification, for the poet invokes an existential condition, in which he gives a remorseful expression to his awareness that in the past as well as in the present and also in future he was, is and would be a ‘nothing’. Paul Celan, one has to recognize the truth, was a poet less of phantasy and more of actual reality. The subtlety of his experience of ‘nothingness’⁽¹⁾ immediately connects to the dire fate which he and his family met in the concentration camps during the War II. The aspects of ‘in-itself’ and ‘for the other’ conflate at this juncture of historical devastation. The war ‘in-itself’ proves to be a situation of indifferent and callous scene of the spatio-temporal rage. On the other hand, this war ‘for-the-other’ identifies in the survivors a gloom, which either invites acquiescence or re-narration of the reality of the ‘time’. The poet insists yet and despite of the vicissitude of time on his pathos of ‘blossoming’, a fervent and assiduous commitment to ‘hope’. This insistence calls into mind the unflagging hope of village-boy to get being heard by the law, even though he grows in waiting into an old person, in Kafka’s seminal work *The Trial*.

Even in an agonizing spectacle, the poet raises his sublime soul of expecting to ‘meet’ the other. The sanguine hope of meeting percolates in his soul in the very awareness of ‘nothingness’ as a bridge to the other. The hope survives and it survives undeterred by the pathos of nothingness and rage thereof. He lends words to the gloom:

“undzuweilen, wenn
nur das Nichtzwischenuns stand, fanden
wirganzzueinander.” [4].

Pain suffocates and maims. The agony captured into the words by the poet, by contrast, fills him with a hope of meeting the other, a feeling stirred by the unpretentious belief in the chain of ‘awakening’, an ‘awakening’ to the similar vicissitude of fate at the hand of the morose envelope of perilousness. One is pungently reminded of Pablo Neruda, who held high the passion of human love streaming in the circle of life shrouded by ‘nothingness’. Paul Celan worded the floating and cheerful splendour of his heart even in the loneliness in his another poem *Kristall*,

where he is elated by the sight of a bird flying high with a piece of icy corn in his beak and coming back through the brightness of summer.

The sombre sight of the flying bird arouses and kindles the streak of recovering, rejuvenating of a torn self within the emotional expanse of the poet. He envisions the sparkles of the shining stars on the horizons of sky in the night. The distance between him and the stars are so bridged that his own hands beam and glisten with the promising rays of the starry sky. These rays draw closer yet to him at the moment of his self-conciliation insinuating in him a flicker of cognition of the mesmerizing oscillation of the stars on the stretch of his own hands. In the light of stars, which spin away the agonizing darkness of fate, the poet suddenly overcomes the fragility of his existence and draws close to the other or his double. An entire world rises up to the prominent sight between the poet and the other. It suffuses the core of the poet with overwhelming compassion with a tormented self and the sacrificing fellow and brings forth the tranquillity to a soul fraught otherwise with the dismaying nothingness.

The poet paraphrases his rejuvenated being:

“ZuBeidenHaenden, da
wo die Sterne mirwachsen, fern
allenHimmeln, nah
allenHimmeln:
Wie
Wachtessich da! Wie
tutsich die Welt uns auf, mitten
durchuns!” [5].

The bond of the stars and the hands of the poet conveys a threshold on which nature and man calmly rest for a while in an enthronement of nature’s magnanimity and human’s self-recovery. The eye that in its fixed gaze on the extinction represented the appalling fate turns now into a source of recognition of the other. Much more than the recognition, the words are redolent of the discerning and weighty fraternity with the other. The other nears the self and the self too is convenient with a sense of fellowship with the other enchanted in the play of far and close, below and above. They forge an unbreakable tie, in which the trust and trust pervade gloriously. The melancholy of the dismayed self momentarily mildly abates. The proximity is so persuasive that it takes on the symbolic expression to narrate the closeness between the stars in the skies and the poet on the earth, for he tries to speak a language of ‘You’ and ‘I’, in which scheme the ‘You’ is above and the ‘I’ is below on the earth.

In this dialogic state, the poet recovers his redefined self in relation to the other whereby the mist of separation no more looms between two poles of profound affiliations. The poet depicts the course of mutual exploration:

“Du bist,
wodein Aug ist, du bist
oben, bist unten, ich
finde hinaus.” [6].

Despair and hope, loneliness and love for the other [7], being restrained and simultaneously released highlight a chronicle of angst pervading the existential foliage of being human in the tumultuous state of things. This finesse of fate involves though a gesture of dialog instead of an existentialist monologue of the self. The poet refrains from elevating his soul into the mystery of an existence which seeks its recognition in the solitude of the soul. Poet’s gesture of dialogue betrays poignantly his human concern for those who met the same haplessness in the face of war. It is the flow of humanism, which lurks behind the existential enigma. Sartre had alluded to this undercurrent of humanism in his famous lecture *Existentialism is Humanism* held in 1946. Respecting the everlasting pulse of a human compassion within the man, he professed that man possesses a human nature; a “human nature” which is the conception of human being.

Undeniably, the core value of humanism truly encompasses in its realm the unimpeachable essence of upholding the discerning inner propulsion to be responsible for the fellows who fell into petrification of existence. This responsibility instils in the poeta passion for ‘rescuing’ the remnants of human survival after the excesses of history. He faces the imminent task as to whether he should not be able to wrest the survivors from the calumny of time, which was so unalterable. Poet’s vision assures him that whatever went as ‘unconditional’, ‘unalterable’ and the disaster following it, may yet prepare a ground for existing for self only insofar as existing for the other too for the sake of the change of the consequences of the catastrophe, for the assertion of those subjective values which should

be respected at all the moments of the 'misfortunes' of time. It is this profound human value of 'responsibility' which couples with the crux tenet of existentialism. In his lecture *Existentialism is Humanism* (1946), Sartre had formulated precisely this notion of responsibility associated with the human existence. He spoke: "And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men." In the words "for all men" echoes a sublime cogitation of 'humanism' and 'responsibility' underlying the existential specification of man.

The motif of 'we' which resonates in the lines of the poems of Paul Celan presents nothing other than an express tale of being 'with the other', being 'responsible' in the dark entropy of fateful time.

He announces his 'coming to the other' in a moment of having been encircled by the shadow of death. The heart of the poet ceases to be the harbinger of message of wreckage, instead it is charged with the realization of experiencing the need to go to the other when the 'unalterable catastrophe' has hurled the poet into a state of finding himself close to his fellows who would be surviving the ravages. The lines "were you I, were I you" suffice to lend credence to this reality. The sharp and profuse expression of this mood informs several poems of Celan, principally among them "Sprachgitter"^(II) and "Schneebett". Behind this readiness percolates a resolution to identify the recesses of the "self". The poet participates in the episode of tracing his own compass of being in the world for the beings of the 'others'. It inaugurates the moment of birth of self-realization and knowing the direction of 'living' in the hard times. The poet lives in consonance with a repute, which Sartre categorizes with the exploration of the 'purpose'. Of this urgency, of the renunciation of Quietism^(III), Sartre was emphatic in his lecture *Existentialism is Humanism* (1946): "Quietism is the attitude of people who say, "let others do what we cannot do." The doctrine I am presenting before you is precisely opposite of this, since it declares that there is no reality except in action. Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only insofar as he realises himself." The task of cognizing a responsibility for the other has been a dominant theme in the Jewish thinking in the time following the War II. Emmanuel Levinas, in his conversation with Richard A. Cohen, spoke of this responsibility as an act of ontological necessity and invoked that in the assumption of this ontological necessity and ethical diktat, the 'I' would be saying "the other...asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do were to become an accomplice in his death"^(IV).

In assuming the responsibility for the other in the vortex of catastrophe,^(V) the poet takes recourse to the utmost undiluted commitment of the self in the nurturing of the promise to envision a future of existential supremacy of man. In his poem *Le Menhir*, Celan captures the image of the earth which he and his fellows raise up anew and reassuringly claim that this earth now belongs to them and it is reverberated with the desire to guard it from falling down in any future. The Babel fell down, but this poem bespeaks the aspiration of himself and his double to safeguard the dreamt future from being toppled, from being dismembered from the state of human glory. Celan's use of the metaphoric use of the concept of Babel is compellingly subtle and informative. As is known, the tower of the Babel became unstable in a maze of languages used for communication by men to raise the tower to the sky height beyond the surface of the earth. Celan insists that his 'men', filled with the hope that couples the dreams of a future resplendent with dignity of existence, would not be heaved from the beautiful height on to an earth which at present smacks of inhumanity and defacement, ignominy and brute punishment, robbing of the identity and unbridled game of power aimed at releasing the gush of anguish to the humanity.

Celan's engagement with the 'other' emanates from his cosmopolitan world-view. The War enmeshed into its fold of destructions the territories far and wide. The humanity, which bore the brunt of the War, knew but one truth in the vast distances-the truth of being subjected to the marauders, which regaled in the game of violence. Celan puts a vision of humanity, which speaks the language of love to all men on the earth, to all faiths on the earth and in line with that to all the names on this Other. The Other has a name, it has a faith, it has a habitat and the poet opens his soul to all the paradigms of the Other as a survivor. Through his words and through his poems he reaches to the Other (-s) beyond any borders delineated by the people who, in the name of culture, thrive on separations of humans who cannot be lead to live in an make-believe system of maintaining the identity in separation (-s).Celan's poem *In Ägypten* deserves a merit in this context.

In this poem, the poet puts across his inclination towards the inter-cultural identification of the Other. The Other owns his substantiation only like him as a human being distinguishing itself only as a custodian of different name and culture. Cultures express themselves in providing and sustaining the name-giving to men and to the places and to the nations in languages which vary bearing nuances of inviolable possible affinities. Celan's poems stand on the threshold of exploring his love for other names of the other cultures and other lands. Being witness to the War and at the same time preserving within himself the urge to honour the names, faiths and cultures of distant cultures testify to a humanism in Paul Celan, which has a universal and cosmopolitan touch.

The responsibility for the Other in the dark, tempestuous times of the War and the intimate reverence for those who are somehow divinely untouched by the agonizing trauma of the War are two sides of a gracious truth which converge on responsibility for the Other and the envisioned perpetuation of peace on earth. In this poem 'Ruth', 'Noëmi', 'Miriam' are the names representing diverse faiths, and resplendent multiplicity of the Other. The poet exhorts that the Other should be adorned when 'you' move towards their welcoming in the moment of proximity to them. As this adornment of the Other with love is correlated with the experience of the War, the Others will have to be adorned with nothing less than the unveiled 'pain', an uncovered sentiment which operates unhidden in the soul of the poet.

The catastrophe fails yet to hinder the poet from protecting his aspirations of transcending the given barriers of cultures in the act of love for humanity. One may plead that Celan's poems discerningly betray the questioning of the barriers in the name of bracketing seemingly convenient cultural identities.

It poses a difficulty for the author to subscribe to the rhythm and rhyme of the words and lines when trying to express the agony, deceit, façade and trash which the War has flung on the face of time. Celan's poems provide an uncompromised commitment to express the unspeakable in the most direct language. The metaphors which stand as the signifiers of truth in his poems bespeak an attempt to test his self-determination to project a worldview of 'associating', when the world is shattered and emptied of its immaculate 'wholeness'. The poetic technique, which becomes highlighted in his poetry is that of folding together two signifiers. This technique has come to be known as the rhetorical motif of *Katachrese* or *Hypallage*. In practicing this, Celan has been able to attribute to his writing the two-fold dimension of the presentation of reality in a language, which explains, rather than camouflaging. This kind of writing has secured Celan a prominence among the poets living and writing under the dreadful time of the War. Critics have noted that Celan's poetry exposes instead of imposing. The poetry, which he has churned out, possesses the force to tellingly and convincingly embody the ghastliness and the perpetration of inhuman violence in the concentration-camps.

The boldness and vivid indefatigability of Celan stems from his belief that the 'encounter' with the time can and must escape timidity of soul. This sways his poetic commitment to the full and he gains his 'self' amidst the rubbles and ravages of War. His 'self' rebuts any dissipation of sort. In his essay *Meridians: the poem as a place of encounter* in Paul Celan and J.H. Prynne, Nicolas Thomas has noted: "Celan's metalinguistic explorations are prompted by his fraught relationship with German language. German was his first language, the language which his parents spoke, but also the language in which many members of his family were condemned during the Holocaust^(V). Celan suggests that German became 'greyer' after the Shoah, arguing that the language 'distrusts "beauty" and 'has become more sober, more factual...concerned with precision...it names, it posits'" [8].

But, in fact, the Jewish streak of renunciation of name charges equally the writing of Celan, which marks the strong presence of the Kabbalistic faith and the respect towards it. A befitting remark by AnttiEemeliSalminen highlights the force which Celan applies to act in the name of his awareness of his tradition, in which he was born and which he cannot do without. Salminen writes: "Hannes Fricke traces Celan's use of this classical topos of anonymity back to the works of Kafka, Picasso, Mandelstam. Celan's Jewish heritage is not to be underestimated here. As Fricke observes, Celan's *Niemand* is also a mystical theme, as it is forbidden to pronounce the name of the Jewish God, Tetragrammaton, which is a conception of the utmost importance especially from the Kabbalistic point of view, into which Celan was thoroughly initiated."

Rose is emblematic of a sustained and pure peace and harmony. Celan entitled his poem *Niemandrose* (No one's Rose). Rose is here robbed of its preserver or, better said, its preserver in line with Celan's Kabbalistic anonymity is without name. Namelessness for Celan would not have been expressive of philosophical abstractness, rather in his real and personal experience of the terror of Holocaust it must have attained to its historicity. For his readers, Celan has left this historical anonymity to the countless concrete understandings in the face of the civilizational attempts at sparking out the effacement of names.

The agony of the poet, to summarize, is released on multitude of the reflections and explorations in the 'inner' and the 'outer' realms of the conscious and minutely experienced survival. He stumbles upon the non-communicability with the other, for the temporal reality dictates the extinction of the human belongingness. The sight of the buzzing eye portrays this excruciating tribulation. Inability to reach out to the other in an attempt to communicate fills the poet with the aggrieved sensibility. He goes through a realization of the repulsed state, when the ground of the awareness of self appears trapped into the cobweb of 'nothingness'. The humanism within the poet yet evolves at this moment, when the passion of unlocking the self in a state of capturing the hope charges his parched soul. The birds flying in the sky, the stars nearing him revive him with the depth of hope.

Humanism entrusts him to develop a passion not only for his own self rather also to prepare a ground for communication with the other. This humanism bears the task of the realization of the responsibility to change the state of the things around him. Those who are fallen and those who are afar must be addressed to. The poet widens his sensibility of passion based on humanism, when he insists on listening to the fellows of other lands and faiths with a resoluteness of lending love to them. Their nearing names prove to be representatives of the 'identities' which the poet does not want to remain alien to. The poem *In Ägypten*, in which the poet encounters the mistiness of the eyes of the distant fellows, endorses this idealism of the poet. The entire sphere of his experience brings us close to the dialectic between agony and re-understanding/ re-defining the hopeful self through the values of humanism, compassion and responsibility.

Thus the comprehension of *Niemandsrose* begins and continues in being comprehended.

CONCLUSION

This work draws on the core values of humanism and responsibility of the human being toward the Other. Recognition of this Other in the circumstances which are pressing and perilous adds perceptively to the volition of humanism based on the self-expression of the self as the compassionate character. This compassion transcends the spatial barriers created in attempts of cultural compartmentalization and differences of faiths. Celan's poem *In Ägypten* resonates with this poetic passion. Celan lived through holocaust preserving yet the mother tongue German in which he created the names for all which was trustworthy and beautiful in the ravages of time. A deep sense of belonging to his own root disowned yet him not. Being Jew, conscious of his Kabbalistic heritage he was aware that the Jewish God Tetragrammaton shall not concede him total 'naming' of all around and with him. His work *Die Niemandsrose* is a poem of humanism, a commitment to responsibility, an urge of welcoming the Other and recognizing the task of upholding the 'names', hinging partly though on the scepticism. The civilizational message contained in this work makes it a point of departure in any serious discussion on the themes of humanism, culture, faith and trust of the language.

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End notes

[I]. 'Nothingness' was philosophically introduced in Sartre's major work *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Nothingness denotes that the 'for-itself' or man becomes aware of his freedom in the state of nothingness, it points to a blank canvas on which everything is created.

www.the-philosophy.com/being-nothingness-sartre-analysis

[II]. From "Sprachgitter"

[III]. Quietism in contemporary analytic philosophy is the view or stance that entails avoidance of 4 substantive philosophical theorizing and is usually associated with certain forms of scepticism, pragmatism, and minimalism about truth.

[IV]. <http://www.myjewishthinking.com/article/responsibility-in-the-face-of-the-other/>

[V]. About the trope of 'naming' in Celan, Antti Eemeli Salminen has pointed out: "In the Flinker letter Celan states that poetry "names and posits [nennt und setzt], and endeavours to measure out the domain which is given and what is possible."

[VI]. "Holocaust, Hebrew Sho'ah, Yiddish and Hebrew Hurban ("Destruction"). The systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II. The Germans called this "the final solution to the Jewish Question."

[VII]. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Holocaust>