

On Paul Celan's *Corona*

Paul Celan writes about love. Shrouded in darkness and thrust into the pits of obscurity, still, Celan writes about love--and its urgency. Not to insinuate that love should be rushed but just not abandoned, that it must remain ambitious and self-believing. *Corona* signals love as an antidote for inhumanity. If the horrors of the Holocaust were at once "inconceivable," "unsayable," then so be the immensity of the resilience of love. And Hope. Yes, "Hope" with a capitalized "H," because it stands firmly on its own. No differently than the capital H in Holocaust. But Celan--he doesn't make this commentary of what the heart can do lofty and far-removed; instead, he's fed up with relegating the feeling, no matter how pressing his despair feels, so the poem reads with punching brevity. My favorite line illustrates the fierceness of his attitude: "It's time that the stone took the trouble to bloom." Hearts of stone are still hearts.

Celan straddles the piece with the notion of time: the spirit of mortality. The first stanza writes, "Autumn eats its leaf out of my hand: we are friends/We shell time from the nuts and teach it to walk: time returns to the shell." Autumn is the life-cycle. It projects decay as a consequence of time. Our minds and bodies and our capacities to remember wither like leaves until Winter, when we're no more but reduced to our *corona*: our glimmering hope in darkness. However, when "time returns to its shell," encasing itself in the oblivion of the warmer months and freer days, the lovers in the poem momentarily delude themselves. The bliss of Sunday isn't blissful for long; they realize that their love is still one traversing thorny, traumatic terrain.

Where is the justice in that? Why should oppressors any more get to experience the ease of loving another? Their hearts and souls are wretched and forsaken and all the more human for it. Victims are tasked with becoming lucid contortionist-lovers. Even submitting to the supposed ease of a Sunday is a guilt-ridden trip. "In the mirror is Sunday,/in the dream we sleep,/the mouth speaks true.../we speak of dark things." The two most pronounced traits of genocide are the obliteration of people; and the obliteration of the obliteration of people. I'd argue that just as sinister, though more discrete, are the effects of latency on the heart after trauma. And I'm so glad that Celan brings this experience to the surface. He could very easily and justifiably wallow in his darkness, assign blame to the people who broke him and his lover (I'm assuming that he wrote the poem about himself), but he chooses possibility and hope and light instead. Standing at the window, embraced and yelling:

"it is time, for this to be known!
It is time that the stone took the trouble to bloom,
that unrest's heart started to beat.
It's time for it to be time.
It is time."