

**Who is Paul Celan,  
and how do the 'Seven Fragments' relate to his work?**

Paul Celan was a poet, born in Czernovitz (present day Romania) in 1920 and he died in Paris in 1970.

Fluent in a number of languages, he wrote in a dense German: creating new words, and frequently drawing on medical terminology (Celan studied medicine in Paris in 1938 before returning to Romania).

Both of Celan's parents were killed in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War and his poetry bares the scars of this loss. (Most famous in this regard is his poem *Todesfuge / Death-fugue*.)

Celan's poetry can be both angular and lyrical. While it is thoroughly crafted, there is a sense of searching, of trying to find the right way to capture an elusive, underlying idea.

The starting point for these 'Seven Fragments' was the idea of trying to capture this elusiveness in a large instrumental composition. A plan of seven smaller works began to take shape (with the practical consideration that these might enjoy a life of their own and could be performed outside of a 'complete' performance – so far this has not happened).

The form of the whole work continued to evolve as the actual composition took place: instruments were added to the ensemble as they were needed (with the practicality of finding players an important consideration), and the voices were not added to the ensemble until work was well under way.

For the concluding (seventh) Fragment I chose the text of another German language poet: Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926). Unlike the Celan texts, of which only a few lines are sung, the whole text of *Schweigen* is performed.

Schweigen. Wer inniger schwieg,  
rührt an die Wurzeln der Rede.  
Einmal wird ihm dann jede  
erwachsene Silbe zum Sieg:

über das, was im Schweigen nigh  
schweigt,  
über das höhnische Böse;  
daß es sich spurlos lose,  
ward ihm das Wort gezeigt.

Being-silent. Who keeps innerly  
silent, touches the roots of speech.  
Once for him becomes then each  
growing syllable victory:

over what in silence keeps not silent,  
over the insulting evil;  
to dissolve itself to nil,  
was the word to him made evident.

*R.M. Rilke  
January, 1924*