

You see, I have always tried to *understand* you, to *respond* to you, to take your work like one takes a hand; and it was, of course, *my* hand that took *yours*, there where it was certain not to miss the encounter. To that in your work which did not—or not yet—open up to my comprehension, I responded with respect and by waiting: one can never pretend to comprehend completely—: that would be disrespect in the face of the Unknown that inhabits—or comes to inhabit—the poet; that would be to forget that poetry is something one breathes; that poetry breathes you in. (But that breath, that rhythm—where does it come from?) Thought—mute—, and that’s again language, organizes that respiration; critical, it clusters in the intervals: it discerns, it doesn’t judge; it takes a decision; it chooses: it keeps its sympathy—and obeys sympathy.

—Paul Celan,  
from the draft of an unsent letter to René Char, March 22, 1962,  
trans. Pierre Joris

PDF Paper Color:

Ivory

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George Life