

From the Meaning of Meaning to Radical Hermeneutics

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Abstract: Primarily focusing on Steiner's *Real Presences* (1989) and Caputo's *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (1987), the present article wishes to come to an understanding of the relationship between Steiner's hermeneutics of transcendence and John Caputo's radical hermeneutics. Faced with the XXth century inhumanity, Steiner seems to be embracing the most radical move in hermeneutics, and he does so by wagering on transcendence, in which the meaning of meaning peacefully rests on the arms of God, thus rejecting the negative semiotics of Derrida. However, when looked upon by the demanding eye of radical hermeneutics put forth by Caputo, Steinerian hermeneutics soon reveals itself in alliance with a metaphysics of presence and a philosophical thought which holds back the free play of difference. Whereas Steiner seeks 'the meaning of Meaning', John Caputo, one of America's most respected and controversial continental thinkers, has been both braced and terrified by Friedrich Nietzsche's demand to take the truth straight up, forgoing the need to have it 'attenuated, veiled, sweetened, blunted and falsified,' readily confessing that we have not been handpicked to be Being's or God's mouthpiece, that it is always necessary to get a reading, even if (and precisely because) the reading is there is no Reading, no final game-ending Meaning, no decisive and sweeping Story that wraps things up. Even if the secret is, there is no Secret. 'We do not know who we are – that is who we are.'

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„Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: »I seek God! I seek God!« As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. »Has he got lost?« asked one. »Did he lose his way like a child?« asked another. »Or is he hiding?« »Is he afraid of us?« »Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?« Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. »Whither is God?« he cried; »I will tell you. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.”²

Lucidly proclaimed as a prophetic announcement, these words by Friedrich Nietzsche are so overwhelming, they are so near the heart of the being of man today, that by simply quoting them we feel that we are no longer sailing to Ithaca, but are forever lost in Minotaur’s labyrinth. For what does the Madman say, as he lights a lantern at high noon – or rather what does he shout, while running across the market place? »God is dead!« God was sun to the earth. Man split them, tore one from the other and henceforth the earth, detached from the sun, is falling into an infinite night. According to Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche’s pronouncement of the death of God is not merely a personal expression of his atheistic attitude, and it should not therefore be understood as a mere formula for unbelief. “God” names not only the Christian God, but designates in addition the supersensory world in general, the world of Ideas which, since Plato, has been taken as the true and genuinely real world. “God” designates the meta-physical world in the Kantian sense, that is, the world which is beyond the physical, sensory world. In this sense, Nietzsche’s pronouncement “God is dead” certainly means that the metaphysical, supersensory world has lost its effective power and that “God” as the name for this supersensory world of ideals no longer functions as the effective authority that determines the sensory, physical world from above and from without. Interestingly enough though, in the *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche admonishes us that we are not getting rid of God, because we still believe in grammar. For him, where “God clings to our culture, to our routines of discourse, He is a phantom of grammar, a fossil embedded in the childhood of rational speech”, rattling about like an old rag or a ghost in the attic.

Contrary to Nietzsche’s troublesome and somber message, George Steiner – one of the most outstanding contemporary international literary critics of our time – postulates in *Real Presences* “that any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God’s presence.” Against the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida, who wishes to undo “logocentrism” and to send the Word into the exile of writing, Steiner argues in *Real Presences* that “Where we read truly, where the experience is to be that of meaning, we do so as if the text (the piece of music, the work of art) incarnates a real presence of significant being.”

² Friedrich Nietzsche (1974), *The Gay Science (1882, 1887) § 125 (edited by Walter Kaufmann)*, New York, Vintage, p. 181.

Steiner opens the collection *No Passion Spent* (1996) with “The Uncommon Reader,” a tour-de-force meditation on Jean-Siméon Chardin’s painting *Le Philosophe lisant* (1734), which becomes, through attentive reading of details – “his folio, his hourglass, his incised medallions, his ready quill” – an emblem for the vanishing culture of the book and for the *lecture bien faite* (Charles Péguy’s phrase). Reading has always been, for Steiner, a quasi-priestly activity, and Chardin’s reader, in his solitary bearing, his grave demeanor, honors this most freighted obligation, which can be construed as an obligation to being itself.

Although haunted by a post-Auschwitz Jewishness that informs his tragic reading of man, Steiner’s work remains nevertheless committed to an unrelenting quest for a “poetics of meaning” embedded in his assessment of the hermeneutic act, and in so doing the ‘no one’s rose’ (Paul Celan) is unexpectedly illuminated by the “grammar of hope” implicit in his conception of reading.

The present essay, drawing upon George Steiner’s *Real Presences* (1989) and John Caputo’s *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (1987), wishes to pursue the implications of such a wager and unravel if there is any place for hope in Steiner’s tragic vision.

To do so, allow me to lay an initial theoretical foundation stone by stating that the ‘Shoah’ tragically corroborates Steiner’s suspicions about the elegiac sense that we live in a ‘post-culture,’ in a time of epilogue, after the fall – and this, I believe, cannot be easily divorced from Heidegger’s conviction that the ‘forgetting of being’ (*Seinsvergessenheit*) requires that philosophy retrace its footsteps through a productive ‘destruction’ of the history of ontology.

In *La Fiction du Politique. Heidegger, l’Art et la Politique* (1988), Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Auschwitz does represent what Hölderlin called a ‘caesura’, a radical break in history which comes into view when God and humanity draw apart from one another. Steiner, too, in *The Death of Tragedy* argues similarly that “God [...] dwells now in some other corner of the universe so remote that His messengers cannot even reach us.”²

“We come after,”³ he writes in *Language and Silence* and, in the seminal essay “The Long Life of Metaphor: An Approach to ‘the Shoah’”, he goes on arguing that Auschwitz signifies: “on a collective, historical scale the death of man as a rational, “forward dreaming” speech-organism (the *zoon phonanta* of Greek philosophy).”⁴

In addition, at the close of *In Bluebeard’s Castle* (1971), and in regard to a theory of culture, Steiner leaves us standing “where Bartók’s Judith stands, when she asks to open the last door on the night.” It is thus unsurprising that Steiner argues that absolute tragedy is a negative ontology, in which birth itself is seen as a tragic act and existing in the world as a fatality, quoting in this respect, in *No Passion Spent* (1996), Kafka’s stark finding that “there is abundance of hope but none for us.”

Despite Steiner’s dark picture of existence – clearly mediated through high Attic tragic drama, as well as through Schopenhauer’s pessimistic view of life, one can perceive in his hermeneutic writings (namely, in *Real Presences*) a dissimilar frame of mind: there is illumination, as in the tiny, free-standing phrase in what is perhaps Celan’s darkest poem, ‘Tenebrae’: ‘Es glänzte’

² George Steiner (1961), *The Death of Tragedy*, London, Faber and Faber, p. 353.

³ George Steiner (1967), *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*, London, Faber and Faber, p. 4.

⁴ George Steiner (1988), “The Long Life of Metaphor: An Approach to the Shoah”, in: Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust*, New York/London, Holmes & Meier, p. 156.

(‘It gleamed’). In fact, just as *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* was Steiner’s riposte to the New Criticism, *Real Presences* (1989), which expands on themes from previous key essays such as “The Retreat from the Word” (1961),⁵ “Silence and the Poet” (1966),⁶ and “‘Critic’/‘Reader’” (1979),⁷ is Steiner’s attempt to confront the current crisis of meaning embodied by Derridean deconstruction, especially its equation of text and commentary and its elimination of the classic humanist auctoritas. For the deconstructionist there is no distinction between the primary text and commentary, between the poem and its critique. All writings, be they primary or secondary, are part of a web of intertextuality and no text is privileged above another. All writing is the product of language, which “always precedes its user and always imposes on his usage rules, conventions, opacities for which he is not responsible and over which his control is minimal. No sentence spoken or composed in any intelligible language is, in the rigorous sense of the concept, original.”⁸

Derrida, as the reigning savant of the present “time of epilogue”, insists that literary texts can tell us nothing at all about anything outside the world of textuality itself: “il n’y a pas de hors du texte.” Indeed, as he would have it, the signifiers of which all discourse is comprised only bear upon themselves the traces of still other signifiers, so that the very distinction between the signifier and the signified proves in the end to be an utter delusion. To seek the meaning of any given signifier is only to be confronted with an alternative signifier, and thus any kind of terminal meaning is forever scattered and “not yet,” so much so that even the reality of one’s own selfhood must be found to be something thoroughly insubstantial and vaporous: in short, our condemnation is to “the prison-house of language.” “It is,” says Steiner, “this break of the covenant between word and world which constitutes one of the very few genuine revolutions of spirit in Western history and which defines modernity itself.” In this late time of the after-Word, when logos and cosmos are no longer considered to meet and when the very concept of reference, nomination, and predication are put in question (this breakdown of trust emerged in declared awareness with Stéphane Mallarmé’s disjunction of language from external reference and in Arthur Rimbaud’s deconstruction of the first person singular – *Je est un autre*), Steiner refuses any simple optimism about the possibility of subverting deconstructionist radical skepticism about meaning and morality. As he says: “On its own terms and planes of argument [...] the challenge of deconstruction does seem to me irrefutable.” Hence, Steiner wants instead to register a passionate plea that we risk “a wager on transcendence.” He sees with absolute clarity that the most essential repudiation lying at the heart of the whole deconstructive enterprise is a theological repudiation, and thus, as he feels, the one kind of faith (in unfaith) may be countered only by another kind of faith. So, against the current of deconstruction, Steiner argues, we must read as if the text in front of us is meaningful, and as if the historical and cultural setting of the text is significant to its meaning. The poem is the product of poesis, the creative act, upon which the commentary is contingent. Therefore, the primary text comes before the commentary. For Steiner, sense is a matter of trust – he calls this Cartesian-Kantian wager, our leap into sense. Metaphorically, he grounds this wager on meaning in an explicitly Christian image, that of the Eucharist: “Where we read truly, where the experience is to be that

⁵ George Steiner (1967), “The Retreat from the Word” (1961), *Language & Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*, London/Boston, Faber and Faber, pp. 12-35.

⁶ George Steiner (1967), “Silence and the Poet” (1966), *Language & Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*, London/Boston, Faber and Faber, pp. 36-54.

⁷ George Steiner (1984), “‘Critic’/‘Reader’” (1979), *George Steiner: A Reader*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 67-98.

⁸ George Steiner (1996), *No Passion Spent. Essays 1978-1996*, London, Faber and Faber, p. 28.

of meaning, we do so as if the text (the piece of music, the work of art) incarnates (the notion if grounded in the sacramental) a real presence of significant being. This real presence, as is an icon, as in the enacted metaphor of the sacramental bread and wine, is, finally, irreducible to any other formal articulation, to any analytic deconstruction or paraphrase. [...] These are not occult notions. They are of the immensity of the commonplace. [...] To be “indwelt” by music, art, literature, to be made responsible, answerable to such habitation as a host is to a guest – perhaps unknown, unexpected – at evening, is to experience the commonplace mystery of a real presence.”⁹

Steiner is here promoting an ontological encounter with the aesthetic, stressing the immediacy of interpretation and the accountability that such immediacy entails. In this respect, he quotes Rilke’s beautiful archaic torso of Apollo which bids us “change our lives” (*Du mußt dein Leben ändern*) which, to a certain extent, mirrors poetically the philosophical concept of “experience” put forward by Martin Heidegger: in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, the Black Forest philosopher claims that “To undergo an experience with something – be it a thing, a person, or a god – means that his something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us.”¹⁰

The following lines, taken from the collection of essays *Language and Silence* and expressed through sparkling prose, are a fitting testimony to this notion: “In that great discourse with the living dead which we call reading, our role is not a passive one. Where it is more than reverie or an indifferent appetite sprung of boredom, reading is a mode of action. We engage the presence, the voice of the book. We allow it entry, though not unguarded, into our inmost. A great poem, a classic novel, press in upon us; they assail and occupy the strong places of our consciousness. [...] To read well is to take great risks. It is to make vulnerable our identity, our self-possession.”¹¹ Our mode of reading should be altered so as to ethicize, to morally impassion, the process of interpretation: “to question truly,” he argues in his monograph *Heidegger* (1978), “is to enter into harmonic concordance with that which is being questioned. Far from being initiator and sole master of the encounter, as Socrates, Descartes and the modern scientist-technologist so invariably are, the Heideggerian asker lays himself open to that which is being questioned and becomes the vulnerable locus, the permeable space of its disclosure.”¹² Reversely, one is reminded of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra saying “Of all that is written, I love only what a man has written with his blood.” In addition, and rather tellingly, as an epigraph to

⁹ George Steiner (1989), *Real Presences. Is There Anything Real in What We Say?* London/Boston, Faber and Faber, p. 36.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger (1971), *On The Way To Language*, New York, Harper and Row, p. 57. In the original: “Mit etwas, sei es ein Ding, ein Mensch, ein Got, eine Erfahrung machen, heißt, daß es uns trifft, über uns kommt, uns umwirft und verwandelt” Martin Heidegger (1996 [1959]), “Das Wesen der Sprache”, *Unterwegs zur Sprache. Gesamtausgabe (Band 12)*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, p. 149. For Steiner too, who has been noticeably influenced by Heidegger’s oracular voice (For a thorough discussion of Heidegger’s influence on Steiner’s thought, see Graham Ward (1994), “Heidegger in Steiner”, in: Nathan A. Scott, Jr. and Ronald A. Sharp (eds.), *Reading George Steiner*, Baltimore/London, The John Hopkins University Press, pp. 180-204), to make an experience of a poem, a symphony, or a painting, means that is to be struck. Cf. Thomas M. Kelly (2002), “George Steiner’s *Real Presences: The Framing of the Contemporary Problem*”, *Theology at the Void: the Retrieval of Experience*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 91-118, particularly page 111.

¹¹ George Steiner (1967), *Language & Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*, London/Boston, Faber and Faber, pp. 10-11.

¹² George Steiner (1978), *Heidegger*, Hassocks, The Harvester Press Limited, p. 56.

Antigones, Steiner quotes Walter Benjamin on the “lightning bolt”, the illuminatory flash of insight, of urgent response, to a text: *The text is the thunder-peal rolling long behind.*

The act of reading, underlined by the crucial concept of responsibility, “houses a primary notion of ‘response’, of ‘answerability’”. To be responsible in respect of the primary notion of semantic trust is [...] to accept the obligation of response though [...] in an almost paradoxical freedom. It is to answer and to answer for. Responsible response, answering answerability make of the process of understanding a moral act.”¹³ In accordance with this dynamic account of the act of reading, Steiner casts a new light on Kant’s three vital questions: What can I know? What shall I do? What may I hope? – “Was kann ich wissen? Was soll ich tun? Was darf ich hoffen?” (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1787). Interestingly and significantly enough, Alexis Philonenko¹⁴ relates three of the most important works by George Steiner to these three kantian questions: in his view, *After Babel* poses the question “What can I know?”, *Antigones* solicits the question “What shall I do?”, and finally *Real Presences* raises the question “What may I hope?”, and together these three questions offer a response to the overriding question “What is man?”

In the book *Radical Hermeneutics*, John Caputo, one of America’s most respected and controversial continental thinkers, asks the same kantian questions. What are we to do now, after the “end” of metaphysics?, he asks; if there are no metaphysical foundations, if there are too many truths and if the flux is all, and linguistic, historical structures are nothing more than writings in the sand which we manage to inscribe in between tides, what then? What if *aletheia* only means the scene across which a tireless troupe of historical actors continually passes, coming and going, reciting their lines and then vanishing into the dark?

In what follows, I will be concerned with Caputo’s radical hermeneutics. Within the context of this brief theoretical account, I can do no more than sketch in the possible lines of such an inquiry, but it is my contention, and the informing hypothesis of this presentation, that it is possible, and even desirable, to stage a fruitful dialogue between these two major thinkers (In this respect, see my *Gramática da Esperança: Da Hermenêutica da Transcendência à Hermenêutica Radical*, Lisboa, Vega Editora, 2009).

Caputo’s venture is most poignantly encapsulated in the following passage from his book *More Radical Hermeneutics* (2000): “I have always been both braced and terrified by Friedrich Nietzsche’s demand to take the truth straight up, forgoing the need to have it ‘attenuated, veiled, sweetened, blunted and falsified.’ I readily confess that we have not been handpicked to be Being’s or God’s mouthpiece, that it is always necessary to get a reading, even if (and precisely because) the reading is there is no Reading, no final game-ending Meaning, no decisive and sweeping Story that wraps things up. Even if the secret is, there is no Secret. We do not know who we are – that is who we are.”¹⁵ As these words make clear, Caputo unwaveringly abides

¹³ George Steiner (1989), *Real Presences. Is There Anything Real in What We Say?* London/Boston, Faber and Faber, p. 90.

¹⁴ Alexis Philonenko (2003), “Steiner et la Philosophie”, in: Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat (ed.), *Steiner*, Paris, Éditions de L’Herne, p. 40.

¹⁵ John D. Caputo (2000), *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, p. 12. On Caputo’s concept of ‘radical hermeneutics’, see: “Desmitologizando Heidegger. A Hermenêutica Radical de John D. Caputo”, de Nythamar de Oliveira, and “Reabilitando a Hermenêutica da Facticidade: Sobre Desmitologizando Heidegger de John D. Caputo”, by Luiz Hebeche, both included in João Vila-Chã (org.) (2003), *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 59, pp. 1301-1307 and pp. 1309-1320, respectivamente. On na overall assessment of Caputo’s work, see: James Olthuis (ed.) (2002), *Religion with/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*, London and New York, Routledge; Mark Dooley (ed.) (2003), *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in focus*, Albany, State University of New York Press; and Roy Martinez (ed.) (1997), *The Very Idea of Radical*

by the Kierkegaardian suggestion that we are, from the very outset, ineluctably situated in the rush of existence, caught in the grip of factual life, exposed to the merciless vicissitudes of time and chance. As “poor existing individuals” we are always already embedded in socio-linguistic frameworks, webs of beliefs and practices that determine how we view the world and how we relate to the others with whom we share it.

Metaphysics has all along been a metaphysics of presence: from the start, it has been giving us eloquent assurances about Being and presence and taking the easy way out, thus betraying the original difficulty of life. The project of radical hermeneutics is bent on making trouble for hermeneutics in the late Heideggerian sense of an “eschatological” hermeneutics which makes everything depend upon waiting for a god to save us. The point of radicalizing hermeneutics in this way is to suggest that we are unable to override interpretation, that there are no uninterpreted facts of the matter, and that the world is unavailable to us in any naked or raw sense. Caputo’s ‘radical hermeneutics’ will never tire of telling realists Nietzsche’s story of how the real world became a fable. The thing itself, *la chose même* (which is what we love and desire; who would desire anything less?), always ‘slips away’ (*dérobe*), always eludes the play of signifiers in virtue of which any such so called “real thing” is signified in the first place. At the end of a famous reading of Husserl, after saying that the path toward presence always takes the way of Icarus, which is to say that the waxen wings of our signifiers are headed straight towards a meltdown in the sun of presence, Derrida adds: “And contrary to what phenomenology – which is always a phenomenology of perception – has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always escapes (*la chose même se dérobe toujours*).”¹⁶

For Caputo, we must be prepared to face the worst, that is to say, we must be prepared to go the distance with Nietzsche when he suggests that we are but clever animals making our way in the midst of an anonymous rumbling which is devoid of sense and meaning, in the scaring dance of the “innocence of becoming” (*Die Unschuld des Werdens*). As such, in this radical hermeneutics, we are never quite sure as to who we are or whence we came.

In his brilliant essay “Telling Left from Right: Hermeneutics, Deconstruction, and the Work of Art,” Caputo puts forth the classic division between hermeneutics on the right (Steiner’s hermeneutics of transcendence) and deconstruction on the left (Caputo’s radical hermeneutics), a hermeneutic right wing and a deconstructive left wing. And he goes on with his depiction of these two ways of experiencing meaning: “Retrieval and memorial thinking here, disruption and active forgetting there. The safely delivered messages of Hermes on the one hand (the right hand, no doubt), the dead letter box on the other. Heidegger on the right, Derrida on the left.”¹⁷ However, strikingly enough, in the conclusion of his essay, Caputo points out the porous border between hermeneutics and deconstruction: “Hermeneutics and deconstruction: all the force of the “and” is contained in the *Es gibt* which crosses back and forth between the two, criss-crossing them, interlacing them, blurring the lines between them, disrupting our attempt to

Hermeneutics, Atlantic Highlands, N. J., Humanities Press, as well as the article: Michael E. Zimmerman (1998), “John D. Caputo: A Postmodern, Prophetic, Liberal American in Paris”, in: Continental Philosophy Review, 31 (Primavera de 1998), pp. 195-214. Caputo has answered shortly thereafter. Cf. John D. Caputo (1998), “An American and a Liberal: John D. Caputo’s Response to Michael Zimmerman”, in: Continental Philosophy Review, 31 (Spring 1998), pp. 215-220.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida (1973), *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*. Translated by David Allison, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, p. 104.

¹⁷ John D. Caputo (1986), “Telling Left From Right: Hermeneutics, Deconstruction, and the Work of Art”, in: *Journal of Philosophy*, 83, p. 678.

tabularize them. The *Es gibt* issues in a hermeneutic that concedes the dissemination of truth, on the one hand, and a deconstruction interlaced with an idea of *a-letheia*, on the other. [...] We cannot even tell left from right.”¹⁸

As we move towards the end of this essay, and in so concluding, and to be a little impudent, we note that hope (the third question posed by Kant) has been a consistent, albeit not explicitly-named, theme throughout Caputo’s and Steiner’s work alike. Caputo’s radical hermeneutics invites the messianic as a structurally open-ended hope for the incoming of the *tout autre*, the hope that there is a loving presence in the flux and that Nietzsche’s aesthetic celebration of the “innocence of the becoming” will be redeemed by the prophetic call of the suffering Other. By the same token, Steiner’s wager on the meaning of meaning stares at the horizon, hoping for the *Logos*. His words are breathtaking: “The apprehensions and figurations in the play of metaphysical imagining, in the poem and the music, which tell of pain and hope, of the flesh which is said to taste of ash and of the spirit which is said to have the savour of fire, are always Sabbatarian. They have risen out of an immensity of waiting which is that of man. Without them, how could we be patient?”¹⁹

Both Caputo and Steiner talk about hope, even if it is an unknowing and a humble hope, a hope against hope (*Hoffnung auf die Hoffnung* of which Hermann Broch tells us in *Der Tod des Vergil*), definitely “a hope like that found in the closing pages of Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*: ‘a hope as spectral and muted as the last trembling cello note of Leverkuehn’s great cantata, a mere vibrant ghost on the air or scarcely audible silence’. What is being pursued here through the halls of hell is a hope beyond hopelessness – that possibility of resurrection.”²⁰

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¹⁸ *Id.*, *Ibid.*, pp. 684-685.

¹⁹ *George Steiner (1989)*, *Real Presences. Is There Anything Real in What We Say?* London/Boston, Faber and Faber, p. 232.

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