

«Gigantic Sacrifice to the Obscure Gods»: Slavoj Žižek's and Paul Celan's Visions on Evil, Darkness and an Absconding God in the Aftermath of the *Shoah*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper establishes a dialogue between Paul Celan's poetry and Slavoj Žižek contemporary thought, centered on the *Shoah* and its repercussions as its focal point. By means of the analysis of three aspects in particular –the notion of evil, the sense of darkness and the idea of an absconding God– it also approaches questions of the poetic representability of the Shoah and the aesthetic accessibility of Celan's poetry, which eventually leads to a slightly broader conclusion on the role and importance of aestheticization of trauma, in the Lacanian sense, in general.

Keywords: Paul Celan, Slavoj Žižek, *Shoah*, representability, hermetic poetry, German poetry, Lacan, contemporary philosophy.

«Gigantesco sacrificio a los dioses oscuros»: las visiones de Slavoj Žižek's
y Paul Celan sobre el mal, la oscuridad y un Dios en fuga
en las repercusiones de la *Shoah*

RESUMEN

El presente artículo establece un diálogo entre la poesía de Paul Celan y el pensamiento contemporáneo de Slavoj Žižek, alrededor del enfoque central de la *Shoah* y sus repercusiones. A través del análisis de tres aspectos en particular –la noción del mal, la sensación de oscuridad y la idea del *Deus absconditus*– se aproxima también a cuestiones sobre la representabilidad poética de la Shoah y la accesibilidad estética de la poesía de Celan; lo que finalmente conduce a una conclusión ligeramente más amplia sobre el papel y la importancia de la estetización del trauma (en sentido lacaniano) en general.

Palabras clave: Paul Celan, Slavoj Žižek, *Shoah*, representabilidad, poesía hermética, poesía alemana, Lacan, filosofía contemporánea.

1. Introduction

The primary objective of this paper is a very concrete one: to establish a dialogue between the Paul Celan's poetry and Slavoj Žižek's contemporary thinking centered around the focal point of the *Shoah*¹, this «gigantic sacrifice to the 'obscure gods'» (2001a: 44), as Žižek once called it in allusion to the famous notion from Lacan's twenty-first seminar. The *Shoah* is, of course, the event that can (and should) be regarded as the single most decisive moment in Celan's life and poetry, which has left its intense imprint on the entirety of his work: In 1942, Celan's parents were deported to an internment camp, where his father eventually died of typhus and his mother was shot when she was completely exhausted by the forced labor she had to endure. Celan himself was held captive for more than two years in various Romanian camps (Felstiner 1995: 3-76; Emmerich 1999: 176). These two calamities are, however, only the final episodes in a series of escalating acts of discrimination and outspoken crimes against Celan and his family. His experience of the *Shoah* and the repercussions it had on almost every aspect of his life would remain the central thematic of his works; a fact that has been stressed by many of his scholars, especially by the key figure of modern Hermeneutics and friend of Celan's, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1997), as well as by John Felstiner (1995) whose monographic volume about the life and work of Celan is certainly one of the most (if not the most) comprehensive and complete to date.

Celan's poetry is known for its hermetic approach² (hermetic poetry as such is one of the prevalent currents of German postwar poetry) and has created a sealed universe that proves challengingly difficult to enter (Adorno 2002: 219 & 321-322; Derrida 2005: 65-96; Gadamer 1997: 127-135). Precisely because of this often barred access to the level of signification, complementing Celan's poetry with other textual sources on the same thematics –in this case the Shoah and its repercussions– is often necessary and can result very beneficial for the broadening of our understanding. On a more general level, this complementation can also illuminate how one and the same phenomenon may be accessed through a range of different approaches, with each one offering its own unique insight and content, the combination of which may lead us to a bigger picture (for a similar reflection, see Agamben 2000: 12-15; 159-165).

The analysis of Celan's works, enriched and complemented by pertinent passages from some of Slavoj Žižek's key publications, will be clustered around three notions that are particularly of interest when contemplating his poetry: the idea of

¹ Although the terms *Shoah* and *Holocaust* are not strictly synonymous, they do share a strong semantic bond and will hence be used in this paper in a synonymous fashion, as the subtle differences in meaning between them are not the subject to be discussed here.

² Although this claim has often been made by a number of scholars, it has also been contested, most notably by Peter Szondi, Theodor Adorno (2002: 321-322) or by Celan himself, who famously once said to Israel Chalfen (who would later become the biographer of Celan's youth), when asked for interpretative help about a particular poem: «Lesen Sie [...], das Verständnis kommt von selbst» («Just read, understanding will come on its own», see Emmerich 1999: 12).

evil, the sense of darkness conveyed by his creations and the motif of a *Deus absconditus*, a hidden or withdrawn God as the theological entity that could have allowed the ultimate catastrophe to happen. In a way, this paper intends a reading of Celan's poems perhaps not *through* Žižek, but with his ingenious and bold thought always close at hand; and hopefully it is not only Celan's creative production that will benefit from this complementation, but also Žižek's contemporary thinking that will be invigorated by this mutual complementation.

As a general introduction –and a means of preparing the ground for the subsequent analysis– let us briefly contemplate a question that might even seem slightly timeworn, as it has been the source and destination of many discussions and reflections, from Theodor Adorno to Elie Wiesel, Jorge Semprún or Georges Didi-Huberman, just to name a few. This question is, of course, the one about the representability of the Holocaust, of whether it is possible, should be possible and, if so, how can it be possible to engage in artistic activity after Auschwitz, and, more specifically, to make Auschwitz and the *Shoah* the subject of art. Adorno's universally known verdict –“Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch” (Adorno 1963: 26); «To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric»– has been the subject of a series of discussions. On the one hand, it has frequently been interpreted as «writing a poem *about* Auschwitz is barbaric» because of the literally unspeakable horror that simply resisted any form of symbolic inscription, or that at least could never be adequately portrayed by any form of artistic representation. There are others, however, who posit that Adorno means much more than that, and that we have to understand his sentence, curiously enough, in a wider and more literal sense at the same time: what he is actually saying is that any form of poetry *after* Auschwitz is a form a barbarism. This occurs because the *Shoah* altered the fundamental coordinates of our entire existence so drastically that Poetics as a whole was depleted, that there were no means of artistic (or, at least, poetic) expression left that could aptly represent *anything* (Adorno's own understanding of his sentence tends more to this second option as well; see e.g. Adorno 2002: 136-163).

But still, although the first possibility of interpretation of his sentence as «it is impossible to write poetry *about* Auschwitz [since the horror of the concentration camp experience can never adequately be grasped by artistic representation and any attempt is, therefore, an eventually unsuccessful, barbaric approach]» might display a certain insufficiency in its scope, it is equally inviting to critical reflection, particularly with regard to those works of poetry that consciously and deliberately transgress Adorno's dictum.

Such is the case, first and foremost, of Paul Celan, as his most prominent and internationally acclaimed poem *Todesfuge* (*Deathfugue*) is not only an example of poetry after Auschwitz, but also one that deals with a concentration camp experience. Slavoj Žižek, in stark contrast to Adorno, also openly advocates the aestheticization of the Holocaust, even going as far as calling it a «survival mechanism» (2012: 23), adding the following question he immediately answers himself: «From a Platonic standpoint, what does a poem about the Holocaust do? It provides a 'description without place': it renders the Idea of Holocaust» (2012: 31). Thus, for Žižek there exists not only the possibility, but also a certain necessity of aesthetic

processing of the *Shoah*; a thought that displays affinity to Semprún's stance on the same matter. Žižek remarks:

Semprún argues that the Holocaust can only be represented by the arts: it is not the aestheticization of the Holocaust which is false, but its reduction to being the object of a documentary report. Every attempt to 'reproduce the facts' in a documentary way neutralizes the traumatic impact of the events described –or as Lacan, another atheist Catholic, put it: truth has the structure of a fiction ... [W]hen truth is too traumatic to be confronted directly, it can only be accepted in the guise of a fiction. (2012: 23)

One has to bear in mind here, of course, that the *Shoah* is widely (and rightfully) regarded as the single most traumatic event, the ultimate trauma, to ever occur in Western history.

Against this backdrop, the three notions selected —evil, darkness and an absconding God— will be analyzed one by one with examples of Celan's poetry (the *Todesfuge*, published in German in 1948, being the first one, the other three having been published at a later date, in the volume *Atemwende (Breathturn)* in 1967)³. Each notion will be complemented —in a manner similar to how it has been carried out in this introductory comment— by pertinent passages from key works by Slavoj Žižek.

2. Evil

The first notion to be examined is the one of evil in relation to the Holocaust. The most prominent conceptualization widely used to explain the kind of evil that brought about its unspeakable horrors, is Hannah Arendt's notion of the *banality* of evil, as she elaborated in her observational report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann (1978). As she very pertinently points out, the heinous crimes of the *Shoah* committed by Nazi Germany are anything *but* the manifestation of a centralized, ingenious, viciously evil force; it is the overwhelming mediocrity of its agents —as exemplified in the figure of Eichmann who declared that all he did was to act according to the categorical imperative, apparently without ever having correctly understood Kant's concept— that renders it so difficult to finally comprehend the incommensurable pain and suffering they inflicted *nonetheless*.

Žižek fundamentally backs Arendt's posture, adding a slight twist by contrasting it with the more distinctly Kantian category of radical/diabolical evil, as embodied by such literary characters as Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*. In doing so, Žižek

³ For reasons of spatial limitations, the poems in question cannot be reproduced here in their entirety. There exists, however, a variety of possibilities of retrieving them, other than the *Breathturn* collection mentioned above (which does not feature *Todesfuge*): Celan's poetry, apart from having been published in numerous volumes in English, also appears prominently in a wide range of anthologies and happens to be readily available online as well. Additionally, *Todesfuge* can be found in Felstiner's monograph on Celan (1995:31-32), while the remaining poems are to be found in Gadamer 1997.

also inserts a new dimension into this conception of evil: the one of a certain romanticism residing in it. At the same time he highlights that this conception is utterly inadequate when it comes to describing the horrors of the Shoah:

one should turn around the standard notion of Holocaust as the historical actualization of 'radical (or, rather, diabolical) Evil': Auschwitz is the ultimate argument AGAINST the romanticized notion of 'diabolical Evil,' of the evil hero who elevates Evil into an a priori principle. As Hannah Arendt was right to emphasize, the unbearable horror of Auschwitz resides in the fact that its perpetrators were NOT Byronesque figures who asserted, like Milton's Satan, 'Let Evil be my Good!' – the true cause for alarm resides in the unbridgeable GAP between the horror of what went on and the 'human, all too human' character of its perpetrators. (Žižek 2001b: 38)

This gap, this categorical split between the impact of the *Shoah* as one of the most traumatic (and most evil) events to ever occur in history, and the absolute mediocrity of those who account for it, can itself be considered one of the constitutive elements of the *Shoah*. In the poetic account Celan gives of it in his *Todesfuge* – a direct artistic adaption of a concentration camp experience – we find that he, too, portrays evil in a way that does not elicit the idea of radical, diabolical evil.⁴

Celan's composition is incredibly potent for a variety of stylistic features and devices – such as its structure that has been conceived in analogy to the musical form of the fugue or its powerful metaphors (Felstiner 1995: 25-41) – but in the light of the brevity of this contribution, it has to be the figure of the camp guard who receives the majority of the attention as he serves as the agent of evil, as the central antagonist.⁵ What is striking about Celan's conception of this figure is that there is no clear sign of an evil higher power, there seems to be no mastermind behind what is occurring inside the camp; there is also, on the contrary, no indication that what is happening could be interpreted as an event of transcendental qualities, some kind of divine wrath or punishment. Instead, we find dull, blunt violence and pain: The overseer is clearly a cruel man, but appears to be rather simple-minded. He might think himself a distinguished *homme de lettres*, walking about the compound under the stars' sparkle like a romantic, but his dull disposition is evidenced by the way he addresses his companion in the letter he writes: «Your golden hair, Margareta»; perhaps one of the most vapid and insipid ways of making a compliment.⁶ We find cru-

⁴ At the risk of resulting repetitive: the full text of Celan's poem, together with what is most likely the most accomplished translation to date, can be found in Felstiner 1995:31-32.

⁵ The setting and atmosphere evoked by Celan of course also contribute to the sense of evil in his poem, but they occupy a minor role in comparison to the impending danger and brutal attitude that emanates from the figure of the overseer.

⁶ We have to acknowledge, evidently, that the intricate interplay Celan establishes between the two female names of Margareta/Margarete and Sulamith/Shulamith opens up a whole dimension of different images and associations (just think, for example, of Goethe's Margaret/Gretchen in *Faust*). This tangled web of two concepts of femininity intertwined is in itself worthy of analysis; the above comment refers strictly and exclusively to the uninspired way of addressing one's companion by complimenting their 'golden hair'.

elty and viciousness in him, sadism, but the poetic layout of the overseer's figure designed by Celan lacks any clear signs of diabolical inspiration, of the overseer obeying to some radically evil entity behind the scenes.

There is but one symbol that *could* qualify as embodying an evil of more insidious properties: the vipers in Felstiner's translation –snakes in others– the camp guard plays with inside his cabin. And there is also quite a number of scholars who have tried to interpret this symbol in a number of ways, alluding for instance to the connection between the snake and evil that is to be found in Judeo-Christian mythology (Felstiner 1999: 30-41); the snake as the bearer of evil. In any event, we should take note that evil and death are omnipresent here, but in an almost brutally mundane way: there is no, as Žižek puts it, 'romanticized, diabolical evil', just evil in its overwhelming bluntness.

3. Deus absconditus

The second notion to be addressed in this paper is the one of a *Deus absconditus*, of a hidden or withdrawn God who could have been the theological entity whose absence and/or disinterest allowed the *Shoah* to happen.⁷ The motif of a somehow 'godless' environment or setting is very palpable already in *Todesfuge*, and there is a great number of Celan's subsequent creations that deal with it, take for instance the equally well-known *Psalm*. At the same time, this sense of divine absence is perhaps less flagrant in other examples, although it still remains traceable in a shifted, more subtle form. Two poems that convincingly illustrate this somewhat softer and more recondite idea of a godless (god-abandoned) world are *Into the Grooves...* and *Paths in the Shadow-Rock...*⁸

As a first step, let us once again contemplate what Slavoj Žižek offers on the matter of the role of God in the context of the Holocaust, especially in regard to the pressing question of «Why God at all? Why theology to explain the *Shoah*?» or, with an added twist, «Isn't the Shoah the perfect proof that there is no God?». Žižek affirms that quite the opposite is true:

That is the paradox of the theological significance of *shoah*: although it is usually conceived as the ultimate challenge to theology (if there is a God, and if he is good, how could he have allowed such a horror to take place?), at the same time it is *only theology which can provide the frame that enables us somehow to approach the scope of this catastrophe*– the fiasco of God is still the fiasco of *God*. (Žižek 2006: 185)

⁷ It is Hans Blumenberg who sees the conception of the *Deus absconditus* as modernity's predominant theological paradigm, even more so than that of a dead God, although he concludes that both modalities ultimately amount to the same. He writes: «The modern age began, not indeed as the epoch of the death of God, but as the epoch of the hidden God, the *Deus absconditus*, –and a hidden God is *pragmatically* as good as dead.» (1985: 346).

⁸ As the *Breathturn* poems lack a proper title, their first verse is given here instead. Find them, also in a very skillful translation, for example in Gadamer 1997: 78 & 95.

What he refers to here is that with an event like the Holocaust, that is of such magnitude, such evil and monstrosity and provoked an unfathomably deep trauma, cannot be explained without recurring to some kind of transcendental, theological categories, to say the least. We need the support of a theological framework to be able to fully realize the extent of the catastrophe and to make an attempt at examining it through the lens of history and philosophy.

In close connection to this observation –there is a necessity of a theological framework in order to be able to approach the *Shoah*–, Žižek goes on to establish a typology of three different modes of God and their possible position in relation to the *Shoah*: the first one is the classically absolute, unlimited, vengeful God who imposed the *Shoah* as a form of divine punishment, etc., the second is a somehow finite, restricted God who could or would not do anything to prevent humankind from the catastrophe, and the third one is constituted by Žižek's concept of the *suffering* God (an idea that shows considerable affinity to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous sentence, «Only a suffering God can help us now»):

[T]his brings us to the third position, above and beyond the first two (the sovereign God, the finite God), that of a *suffering God*: not a triumphalist god who always wins in the end, although 'his ways are mysterious', since he secretly pulls all the strings; not a God who dispenses cold justice, since he is by definition always right; but a God who –like the suffering of Christ on the cross– is agonized, assumes the burden of suffering, in solidarity with human misery. (Žižek 2006: 184)

This conception of a God who suffers just like a human being, who is not simply absent (as would be a classical *Deus absconditus* or the *Deus otiosus*, an idle God), but is, to a greater or lesser extent, weak; who has no power over the outcome of events, and who may, to a certain degree, be deprived of his divine capacities, is also very apt when it comes to Celan's poetry. Gadamer (1997: 78-82) has already –correctly and lucidly– pointed out the importance of the *Deus absconditus*-motif for the poems comprised in *Breathturn*; by means of the notion of the *suffering god*, however, we are able to characterize Celan's theological component even more accurately.

Upon a closer look, we find that both poems convey just this idea of a barren, somehow dried up, poor, helpless, sad and suffering God. Or, to put it in other words, in both cases, what is predominant is the impression of a divine figure that has almost disappeared, that has been rendered powerless (Blumenberg 1985: 346): in the first poem (*Into the Grooves...*), we find signs of a divine entity only accessible through «cracks» and «grooves», gaps and splits, while the final verses («for the sake of the copper- / shimmer of the beggar's- / pan up there») conjure up the image of God reduced to the status of a beggar. The second poem (*Paths in the Shadow-Rock...*) employs a similar strategy: we find a hand that perhaps long ago freely gave out blessings, but is now petrified, and, even worse, finds itself transformed into a mere «shadow-rock». To obtain its «petrified blessing», the speaker has to dig into it, laboriously trying to extract what is left of the benediction. Hence, we can conclude that in both examples, there is not only a feeling of a lingering absence, but

one has the impression that whatever is left of the God that appears here, has been reduced to just a residual afterglow, leaving nothing but an inkling of the greatness it might have had once.

This idea of a profoundly limited, of a residual God we have to search for in the littlest things is, in addition to all the above, perfectly epitomized in the second poem by Celan's use of the word «Gebräch» in the German original –in English merely translated as «rock»– which has a very specific connotation; a fact that evidences –as do several other of his creations– Celan's great interest in, and quite uncommon knowledge of, the terminology of geology, of mineralogy and of mountain engineering (Emmerich 1999: 13). «Gebräch» refers to a specific type of rocky material that is defined not by its composition or its geographic situation, but by its degree of hardness: «Gebräch» is used to refer explicitly to medium-hard rocks, not too hard to be used for industrial purposes (it is possible to extract ores or certain minerals from them), but still hard enough to require an enormous amount of physical force, labor, etc., to do so. It is the speaker's hand, thus, that acts here, one could say, almost as a mining tool looking to extract the blessing from the rocks of the now petrified divine hand. Although there are, of course, other interpretations possible here –it could very well be the hand of a friend or a lover instead of God's, for instance, but, to say it with Gadamer, there are no mutually exclusive interpretations, just the uncovering of layers of signification, and the more we can obtain from each and every one of them, the better (Gadamer 1997: 127-128)–, if we continue in this line of thought, we are able to obtain a rather concrete conclusion about the status of God here: he still exists, but he is *petrified*, transformed into a hard rock; obtaining his blessing, extracting it from his stony hand, is an arduous task.

The first poem, as we have seen earlier, evokes a strikingly similar idea: here, it is not so much the image of a petrified, depleted god but that of a *poor* god, deprived of his divine power and reduced to the status of a beggar, whose only possession seems to be the copper pan «up there» to collect those heavenly coins from one of which the speaker originated, God himself thus being the receiver of charity. It is this image of a beggar that also elicits a certain impression of decadence, of other times, when this divine entity had, and did not have to depend on the kindness and sympathy of others.

4. Darkness

The third and final notion to be discussed and illuminated through complementation with Žižek's thought in this paper is the one of darkness, of a sense of obscurity that can be found throughout Celan's body of works. One should bear in mind that darkness is a notion that appears in a redoubled form in Celan's text: In the first place, it appears on a manifest, intratextual level as the semantic, more 'literal' notion of darkness conveyed by a range of metaphors and other stylistic devices, of poetic imagery, etc. If one recalls the disturbingly powerful image of the «black milk» from *Todesfuge*, for instance, one can already begin to ascertain the vital importance that this notion of darkness has in the context of Celan's poetry in the

immediate aftermath of the *Shoah*, but even later on, in many of his posterior works, it plays a central role (Breithaupt 1995). The first verses of the last poem selected for this paper, *Thread-suns*⁹, also underscore this more direct approach to the phenomenon of darkness: «Thread-suns / above the gray-black wasteland». Here, we find a sense of darkness that is conveyed on a plainly semantic level: «black wasteland»; associatively combined with the evocation of a barren, almost hostile environment, with the peculiar «thread-suns» hovering over the scenery: a dry strip of wasteland.

This semantic and intratextual level of the notion of darkness, however, might be the less significant of the two levels. The other one –a feeling of darkness that is palpable on a more general, structural level– comprises the idea of certain darkness or obscurity of *access* to Celan's poetry, a general impression of it being rather difficult to penetrate, of being a kind of poetry that seems to flee from all too direct attempts of interpretation, that juggles a variety of fleeting meanings hovering over the text and withdrawing themselves from the reader who seeks to enter them forthrightly (Derrida 2005: 164-169 [extract from an interview with Évelyne Grossmann]). Celan himself, although not fond, as we have seen earlier, of the application of the term 'hermetic' to his poetry¹⁰, does emphasize this idea of the occluded/obscured access to his creations when he characterizes the poem, in his Bremen prize speech, as a standalone, autonomous unit of inscription and signification, comparing it to a message in a bottle that exists completely on its own once it has been released into the ocean, and drifts through the seas (Celan 1986: 186). The advice he gives to Israel Chalfen, already alluded to on the first pages of this paper, strikes a similar chord: «Just read, the understanding will come on its own». In other words, the reader will have to read the poem repeatedly, study it, meditate on it, mull it over. Even if understanding comes eventually (which is desirable, of course, but not guaranteed), the reader will have seen him or herself confronted with this darkness of access, will have had to traverse it –undoubtedly with varying results in terms of understanding.

Then again, this idea of, as we have dubbed it, 'darkness of access', is not only of value from the *aesthetic*/receptive perspective, but also from a *poetic*/creative standpoint –both terms employed here in the purest, most classical etymological sense. Once again, Žižek's reflections may shed a new light on why the approach of poetically representing (or, better, *trying* to represent) the *Shoah* and its aftermath might just be one of the few that are completely viable:

The reason for [the] impossibility of representing the Holocaust is not simply that it is 'too traumatic', but, rather, that we, observing subjects, are still involved in it, are still a

⁹ Please find a complete transcription for example in Gadamer 1997:111.

¹⁰ While there is a general consensus that Celan's poetry is, to a greater or lesser extent, hermetic, the specifications of this debate will not be discussed here at length. Instead, the idea of the 'darkness of access' is proposed as a supplementary element that could prove useful both in regard to the possibilities of (mis)understanding his works and in relation to the (un)representability of trauma (i.e. the *Shoah* in our case).

part of the process which generated it. [...] The traumatic Real is thus that which, precisely, prevents us from assuming a neutral-objective view of reality, a stain which blurs our clear perception of it. And this example also brings home the *ethical* dimension of fidelity to the Real *qua* impossible: the point is not simply to 'tell the entire truth about it', but, above all, to confront the way we ourselves, by means of our subjective position of enunciation, are always-already involved, engaged in it... For that reason, a trauma is always redoubled into the traumatic event in itself, and into the trauma of its symbolic inscription. (Žižek 1997: 276)

As we see, Žižek's musings –here flavored, as often occurs, with a distinctly Lacanian tinge that shines through in his allusion to the Real and the Symbolic Order– make the point that there is no possibility whatsoever of representing the *Shoah* in a direct fashion, of portraying it as it 'really was'. Traumatic events like the *Shoah* (which serves as the ultimate example of the single most traumatic event to ever occur) are built around a painful core of the Real in the capacity of its traumatic dimension –this core is precisely what makes them traumatic, as being exposed too directly to the Real (in the Lacanian sense) always results in trauma–; subsequently, this remainder of the Real resists any attempts of integration into the Symbolic Order, which means it can never adequately and entirely be described and grasped –'just exactly how it was'– by any means of human expression, artistic or other. This impossibility, which is experienced as impotence by those who seek to integrate this traumatic event into the Symbolic Order, then is likely to result in yet another trauma for the afflicted.

As we now approach the conclusion of this paper, we see that it takes us back to the start: there is no possibility of portraying the *Shoah* as it really was (cf. e.g. Agamben 1999: 12-14), there are no means of any kind that would enable us to register the event 'correctly', and then, in a second step, be able to really feel what a Holocaust survivor felt, or, as Žižek puts it: «my pain can never be fully shared by the other» (1997: 277). As there can be no clear, 'objective', neutral views that are able to really capture what happened during the *Shoah*, Celan's strategy of spreading darkness, of obscuring his own poetic creations is at the same time a logical consequence and a masterly artifice: by making his poetry (more) hermetic, obfuscating the level of direct signification and access, Celan is able to give perhaps the most detailed and suitable account of all: providing a screen of fiction that is capable not of presenting a detailed account of (ultimately) meaningless facts, but of conveying the dimensions of the traumatic impact of the *Shoah*. Bearing this in mind, one cannot but be reminded, once again, of Lacan and his well-known observation: «[T]oute vérité a une structure de fiction» (Lacan 1986: 21).

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