ЛІТЕРАТУРОЗНАВСТВО

AN EXCURSUS ON TRUTH AND LANGUAGE IN PAUL CELAN

Riccardo Bravi, MA
University of Urbino "Carlo Bo",
Via Aurelio Saffi n.2, 61029, Urbino (PU), Italy
E-mail: rixbravi@gmail.com

The article aims at giving an overview of the complex relation between truth and language in Paul Celan, poet and translator born in 1920 in Chernovtsy (Rumanian territory à l'époque – nowadays Ukraine).

If German language was at the same time mother tongue of the poet (in heritage from his mother's side) used to establish an autonomous poetical corpus and starting point for translating other languages, then it was also the idiom spoken by the Nazis who disseminated death all over Europe killing the most important person in poet's life. The paper deals with this continuous research on the limits of language, willing to find a sort of reality located beyond something yet impossible to pronounce – especially after Auschwitz, the destruction of European Jewry. At this point, Celan's messianism has been recognized as an important aspect of this process thus guiding the essay to some theoretical hypothesis.

Key words: language, ethics, silence, reality, truth, messianism.

The **object** of the present study is the literary heritage of Paul Celan, **subjected** to analysing he complex relation between truth and language. The following article **aims** at Paul Celan's exploration on language and truth through a merely linguistic approach, opening to contemporary poetical and philosophical trends. Already acknowledged by many critics – European or not –, the reflexion on language is an important aspect which might not be dissociated from author's entire corpus thus giving it its proper originality in 20th century intellectual panorama. This fact determines the **topicality** of the paper.

Celan's figure still appears to be one of the most controversial in the Western World literature both concerning his works as a translator, both his poetical œuvre. Differently from other important authors, whose celebrity gained with their own verses also seems to reverberate into their sometimes less representatives or maybe occasional translations with the main purpose to install an autonomous work, Celan's greatness is widely recognized among critics for the unquestionable variety of German versions and for the extreme number of languages he was able to translate from: this production includes versions from Hebrew, French, English, Italian, Russian, Romanian and Portuguese. Even though it is not completely right to assert that Celan had felt the same intellectual attraction towards each one of the above mentioned idioms, it is a matter of fact that this huge multilingual commitment constitutes an outstanding and distinctive aspect only apparently contrasting within the will – many times acknowledged and restated from his biographers – to produce an entire corpus of poetry in German: on the contrary, the elaboration of a complex and dense translating work going hand in hand with the own poetical research justify *ab extra* the employ of the German language as a starting point for translating other languages [3, p. 94].

Hence, to confirm hermeneutically the hypothesis that lay bare of a collateral and complementary role of translations towards the poetical production itself, it is necessary for a while to abandon these interpretative constraints reckoned from a scientific literary

approach, and analyse from a merely linguistic point of view the translations made by Celan from German: the *reconnaissance* of a complementary task given to the translating corpus depends nevertheless from the possibility to trace a linguistic and poetical line that might support the whole corpus of texts and address them *ad intra* – to the deepen nucleus of a philosophical and theological reflection on German language after the destruction of the European Jewry.

Only after a correct clarification of a translating strategy which Celan had the will to respect regularly, it would be possible though to return to a complex evaluation of the relationship between his translations and the poetical corpus: thereby, the hypothesis that all his poems as well as the translations have contributed to a requalification and a redefinition of his poetry and of the German language according to one of the most biggest tragedies occurred in the twentieth century, sets up the assumption that in both cases a determinate style is strongly retraceable – a personal and distinctive touch that seals an extreme poetic endeavour bringing at least the language itself to be profoundly shacked and deprived from the weight of the metaphysical question of evil [3, pp. 96–97].

If reality is explicitly considered as the aim of poetry, it would be hard to find in Celan's poetic corpus a specifically moral, religious or political content. Of course there are lots of political and religious references, and nevertheless it comes rather from them poet's own idea of language.

The meditation is about poetry and not about ethics, and this one is almost never mentioned in the theoretical work: therefore, ethics seems to be always present.

Despite in the Celanian *corpus* the ethical dimension of poetry has never been quoted – we might say the same for the political one –, the linguistic space corresponds to the ethical space and then, though, the act of creating poetry does not exclude the possibility of ethics to take place.

In a letter addressed to Max *Weber*, the poet states: "The language, especially in poetry, is *ethos – ethos* as a fatal project of truth" [5, p. 139] (translation mine – R. B.).

From this statement we can truly observe the indissoluble relationship among language – *in primis* poetry – ethics and truth: the idea of truth relied to the destiny itself of poetry, to be placed beyond it, beyond its space.

Thinking about space and time of poetry means to reflect on phenomenological issues (the problem of the Other), even though some attention would be needed on how to intend this special relationship. Critics have already acknowledged, for Celan's case, that a linguistic ethics is being born through speech and brings within itself, not resolved, dialogue and contraposition. For example, in *Sprich auch du* the author suggests: "Speak – / but don't distinguish yes from no [*Sprich – / Doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja*]" [1, p. 63]. The relation is open, absolute vocative is the tense used for addressing to somebody else. In this regard, Celan does not see "any difference between an handshaking and a poem" [5, p. 140].

The word does not pronounce, it is otherwise addressing itself to an unknown You. Poetry and handshaking are the same thing: they are not in a metaphoric relationship but have full identity: Celan's poetry, thus, is not "like" gesture, but "it is" gesture, "it is" *ethos*.

The same identity has been represented, speaking philosophically, by Wittgenstein, according to whom ethics does not belong to a disciplinary field apart from logics and language: the idea of "ethical" as something related to the organisation of a discourse leads in fact the German philosopher to make a grammatical analysis of both ethics and religion.

Closer to Wittgenstein seems to be the radical inversion of semantics and ontology: there is a continuous research on the limits of language, a kind of reality located beyond something yet impossible to pronounce, still not at all implemented.

Although, we cannot know for sure, if Celan had read Wittgenstein, even if it is almost proven that he discussed him during the meetings with Ingeborg Bachmann. Indeed, in his philosophical collection, now set in Marbach am Neckar (Germany), some works of Wittgenstein have been found despite any sign of reading in them.

This aspect of the limit of language and the continuous tension of overcoming noticeable in Wittgenstein's thought should have influenced Celan. The truth is relied to the metaphorical process of language, hidden into the torments of metaphors used in the poetical corpus.

More than a materialistic utopia, critics agree on Celan's meditation of a messianic spirit, strongly recognizable in some authors the poet appreciated throughout his life, like the idea of "redemption" in Franz Rosenzweig, whose philosophy was merely concentrated on the relation "truth"-"God": useful distinction to deepen enlighten the complex relationship between "truth" and "reality" in Paul Celan [4, p. 56].

So far, as Rosenzweig described the process of redemption taking place only in the person of God and in his silence, he added moreover another important detail, the one that God itself cannot be fully identified with reality for he overcomes it. In the statement "God is truth" Hegel interprets the immediate of the subject complementary to the predicate; according to Rosenzweig, the predicate always transcends his mediations. For both authors the truth is the becoming of God, even though Rosenzweig considers God as a matter of fact who transcends the truth itself.

In some way we can assert that also for Celan reality transcends truth, overcoming it. As Rosenzweig, still quoting Hegel, intends truth the "becoming" of God, of course Celan takes into consideration the conception of truth he had in heritage from Heidegger, called *aletheia*, as a being who manifests himself. But when the Rumanian poet uses the word "truth", he focuses more on the aspects of "non-showing" and the impossibility to speak – of silence.

It is obviously clear the reference on the fact that the modality and possibility to tell the truth after Auschwitz appears to be broken, crushed, lost.

However, the attempt of searching this kind of redemption takes place in Celan through and within German language, at same time mother tongue (it was the language of his mother) but also something that didn't belong to him: language of those who disseminated death all over Europe and killed the most important person in poet's existence. Finding the right phoneme, the most appropriate one, is an important point to allow this crossing of language *tout court* (*hindurchgehen durch*).

We can also add that Celan's reflection on language never goes through abstractions, for he rather preferred to use a language historically and socially determined: the first is obviously German, without forgetting the presence – as we already pointed out – of Latin, French, Hebrew – whose religious lexicon has been revoked by Celan.

It is mostly in the German language that the word exile is searching for a path, a sort of liberation – thus the idea itself of translation, so important in Celan's production, is the attempt to bring the word beyond, to donate, translating yourself into the language of the Other.

Another interesting problem is the fact that the Celanian idea of "non-sense" and "not to show the truth" are mixed, in a complex and sophisticated way, within the Jewish imperative of "not to make image" of the truth itself. Truth seems to be in poet's work something preceding poetry, and keeps on resurfacing just to prove that this cannot be pronounced anymore. Although poetry might show reality, which is foremost far from something already given, yet to be made either created. Only language is not lost, within the perspective of reality it carries on. Reality goes beyond truth, as ontology goes beyond metaphysics. Ontology is the only way to reply to the answer: "what is there?", when metaphysics on the contrary has always been trying to reply to the other question: "what is it what exists?", taking for granted that something should obligatory exists.

The Word aims at searching what exists, what remains. The concept of truth is always in the background and it is always a constant element of attention in Celan's work, also visible in his philosophical frequentations and through his abundant correspondence.

Another element helping us to discern reality and truth is retraceable in the distinction emerging in the famous *Tractatus* (where language and truth are the couples this important oeuvre deals with) between "sense" and "truth". Wittgenstein clarifies that his attention

moves only towards the first problem as the question of "showing sense" explicitly brings up the dimension of modern philosophy. If we want to deal with an ontological trace in Celan, it has to be searched in the axe of reality leading to the research of the proper Noun, precise, individual and individualizing, trying to nominate that reality, however not able to catch it at all. If truth could be located in the field of an absolute universality's pretention, reality must be searched in the field of radical individuality and uniqueness. Thus Celan's expression *"Im Singularen spricht das Gemeinsame"* implies that in the singular we may find what is shared, despite of the Aristotelian relationship between primary substances (or individual) and second (general), where in the single appears what is in common. Truth – as well as metaphor – rests attached to the centrality of word, and the name is still a central element of poetry.

The Name which cannot be pronounced still means that the last pronouncement on reality never happens, as it is shown by poetry, remaining unspeakable until the end – towards silence.

It is known that Walter Benjamin had discovered in allegory the figurative method representing what it is not finished yet, missing from the historical process [2, pp. 110, 116]. Although, there is no pattern of a figurative process alluding a reality also alluded by history in Celan's corpus, but probably this reality would have been present according to a gradual process of development of history.

ЕКСКУРС ДО ПРОБЛЕМАТИКИ ЗВ'ЯЗКУ ПРАВДИ ТА МОВИ У ТВОРЧОСТІ ПАУЛЯ ЦЕЛАНА

Ріккардо Браві, магістр
Урбінський університет,
вул. А. Саффі, 2, Урбіно, 61029, Італія
E-mail: rixbravi@gmail.com

Стаття репрезентує аналіз комплексних відношень між правдою та мовою у творчості поета та перекладача Пауля Целана, що народився у 1920 р. в м. Чернівцях (раніше територія Румунії, тепер – України).

Німецька мова була рідною мовою поета (по лінії матері): нею створений його власний корпус поетичних творів, нею він виконував переклади з інших мов. Водночас це була й мова нацистів, що сіяли смерть по всій Європі та вбили найважливішу людину в житті поета. Стаття являє собою суцільне дослідження на тему лінгвальних меж з метою віднайти реальність, що ховається за чимось ще замовчуваним, як-от Аушвіц – символ викорінення європейських євреїв. За таких засновків у месіанстві Целана вбачається важливий аспект такого процесу, що уможливлює формулювання певного роду гіпотези.

Ключові слова: мова, етика, мовчання, реальність, правда, месіанство.

ЭКСКУРС В ПРОБЛЕМАТИКУ ОТНОШЕНИЙ ПРАВДЫ И ЯЗЫКА В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ ПАУЛЯ ЦЕЛАНА

Риккардо Брави, магистр
Урбинский университет,
ул. А. Саффи, 2, 61029, Урбино, Италия
E-mail: rixbravi@gmail.com

Статья представляет собой анализ сложных связей между языком и правдой, представленных в творчестве поэта и переводчика Пауля Целана, рожденного в 1920 г. в городе Черновцы (ранее территория Румынии, теперь – Украины).

Немецкий язык был родным для поэта (по линии матери): на нем создан его собственный корпус поэтических произведений, на него он переводил работы с других языков. В то же время это был язык нацистов, что сеяли смерть по всей Европе и лишили поэта важнейшего человека в его жизни. Работа представляет собой целостное исследование на тему языковых границ с целью отыскать реальность, спрятанную за чем-то еще не высказанным, как, например, Аушвиц – символ истребления европейских евреев. С этих позиций мессианство Целана представляется определенно важным аспектом такого процесса, позволяющим сформулировать определенную гипотезу.

Ключевые слова: язык, этика, молчание, реальность, правда, мессианство.

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Celan, P., 2004, *Von schwelle zu schwelle*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, – 309 p.
2. Cowan, Bainard, 1981, Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory, *New German Critique*, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism, p. 109–122, Access: https://www.academia.edu/7659025/Walter_Benjamins_Theory_of_Allegory.
3. *The Craft of Translation*, 1989, in Riguenet, J. and Schulte, R. (ed.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 170 p.
4. *The Jewish Past Revisited : Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians (Studies in Jewish Culture and Society)*, 1998, in Myers, D. and Ruderman, David B. (ed.), Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 256 p.
5. Rascente, Marianna, 2011, Metaphora Absurda. Linguaggio e realtà in Paul Celan, Franco Angeli, Milano, 210 p.