

Vegatations: Truth and Disguise from Bertolt Brecht to Paul Celan

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This essay works on the links and shifts between Paul Celan's poem "A Leaf. Treeless" and Bertolt Brecht's "To Those Born After" as displaced expressions of the simultaneous needs of assertion and perils of silencing faced by poetry in dark times. It works out the way in which both poets, in their particular ways and attending their own obstacles, present as a question what ideology tends to silence and display as a paradox the communal and individual claims to be alive through the action of poetry. It moves from T. S. Eliot's vegetal similes from his Virginia lectures of 1933 included in *After Strange Gods*, to Joseph Brodsky Nobel Prize lecture of 1987 in which he discusses Theodor Adorno's questioning of the relevance of poetry after Auschwitz. It also analyzes the way in which plants and human beings relate and interact based on their biological differences and equivalences both as individuals and as communities, and how this has been used both as metaphor and ideology, either to liberate, as it happens rhetorically in Brecht and Celan or to reinforce forbiddences through ideological impositions, as it happens in Adorno. It goes back to T. S. Eliot's It traces the presence of plants as a metaphor for the human being in metaphors and ideology. [Article copies available for a fee from *The Transformative Studies Institute*. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2022 by *The Transformative Studies Institute*. All rights reserved.]

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In 1959 Paul Celan published a poem entitled "Ein Blatt, baumlos"², dedicated to Bertolt Brecht, which in English would mean "A Leaf, Treeless", and in Paul Felstiner's translation it comes as:

What kind of times are these,
when a conversation
is well nigh a crime
because it includes
so much that is said?

¹ See author biography at end of article.

² *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. Translated by John Falstiner, Norton, New York, 2001, p.342.