

MAURICE BLANCHOT OR THE AESTHETIC APOCALYPSE

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Abstract: *Special figure in the New French Criticism, Maurice Blanchot, appears to be, from a certain point of view, as a Hegelian with apocalyptic accents. His different studies (German, Philosophy, and Medicine) have given him the opportunity to find a broader spectrum of the real. Influenced by Mallarmé, Heidegger, Emmanuel Georges Bataille or Emmanuel Levinas, writer and critic alike, Blanchot approaches sometimes, surprisingly, perhaps, to Indian thinking ... "*

Keywords: *New criticism, philosophy, phenomenology, aesthetic apocalypse.*

A sort of singular appearance inside the cultural space of The New French Criticism, Maurice Blanchot was a polyvalent personality and, sometimes, even a contradictory one. He was an original novelist, an essayist and a literary critic, and in analyzing his work, according to Irina Mavrodin, one must identify between the evaluator (the literary critic) and the artist (the writer): “The work of Maurice Blanchot cannot be actually tackled unless as a unitary whole, the novelists style (the poet, better said, because the novels invented by him are having a status similar to that of the poetry, as it exists from Lautréamont and Mallarmé), and critic style, being in his case, the same [1].

In the present attempt we will take into consideration only the first quality of this author, therefore the evaluator role, the literary critic. The evaluator is the one who evaluates, the one who does the evaluation, and whose definition is, according to DEX, the following: “Evaluation, evaluations, feminine noun – the action of evaluating and its result; calculation, appreciation.” [2].

Is the artist experiencing a crisis if alienation into a world of technique? According to Maurice Blanchot’s assessments, after quoting massively from Kafka, René Char, Höldrelin and Gide, the answer is yes. His intellectual meetings, which were admirable, have not been many, but it can be said that they were essential for the way in which they have influenced his personality. Because of the way they made him be what he was, and maybe live as he wrote. For that purpose, it seems to be worthy of interest the biographical phrase present on almost all of his books published at Gallimard Publishing House: “His life was completely devoted to literature and to silence which is specific to him”. At Strasbourg, during his German and Philosophy studies, he meets Emanuel Levinas, and the lecture of Martin Heidegger’s fundamental book, “Being and Time”, it will influence him deeply. After finishing writing the novel “Thomas the Obscure”, in May 1940, at the end of same year he will meet Georges Bataille, and the title of the story “The last man” from 1957 is also edifying, as well as another one from 1962, “Waiting

for oblivion”, a first writing attempt of the excerpt for a Blanchot seen as a Hegelian with apocalyptic marks. After Hegel, revived by Blanchot, art cannot bear the human need for absolute, and therefore, he considers that literature is on the verge of disappearing.

No less important will be the meetings with important names of French culture, in February 1968: Jacques Derrida, the postmodernist thinker, the father of deconstruction, the critic Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, an important French philosopher, and Roger Laporte, another modern author and critic.

Fragment practice will be retaken in “The step beyond” and “Writing of the disaster”, both books published in 1980. The exegesis considered, not only once, that Blanchotian work has often swung between the Mallarméan Hermetism and the “terrorism” as it was theorized by the writer, the critic and the editor Jean Paulhan, the huge admirer of the New French Journal (NFJ) from 1925 until 1940. This one was making the distinction by observing the writers’ attitude towards the language, between the so-called “rhetoriqueurs” (who believe in the language) and the so-called “terrorists” (for whom the language represents an obstacle in the way of the expression). [3].

Blanchot is a different evaluator. Work appreciation cannot be separated neither from its loneliness, nor from the writer about whom he is telling us: “The writer does never know if the work is accomplished. What he has finished in a book is restarted by him or destroyed by another one”[4]. The loneliness, as we are discovering, it is connected to a certain infinite: “The work infinite, in such a perspective, is no more than the spirit infinite”. This is a memorable sentence, which can only, sub textual, evoke Hegel. The one who will have written in “Encyclopedia of philosophical sciences” lines like this one: “The form (die Gestalt) taken by this knowledge is, straightforwardly – (the moment of art finite) – on the one hand, decomposition: in a work having common external existence, the subject who produces this work and the one that contemplate and reveals it; and on the other hand, it represents intuition and precise representation of the spirit, absolutely per se, as ideal, as precise form born from the subjective spirit, in which natural immediacy represents just a sign of the Idea, being transfigured by the spirit that imagines it as an expression of it, that the figure does not depict in itself nothing more than the Idea; - the form (Gestalt) of beauty”. [5].

Blanchot does not cease to surprise us in many ways. In certain situations it seems that there has been signed an invisible or unknown agreement between the work, the writer and the reader, reminding in a certain way of Baudelaire’s verse through which the reader is deeply involved: “you, duplicitous reader, you, my fellow brother!” These lines seem to speak by themselves to this effect: “The work is solitary: this does not mean that it remains in statement, which is free from readers. But who reads it, enters in this assertion of loneliness of the work, as well as the one who writes it belongs to the risk of this loneliness.” [6].

From the same perspective of the evaluator, Blanchot will try to sketch a phenomenology of writing fact. Thus, in his opinion, the writer’s power will not be in the writer’s hand, but precisely in the hand of the person who does not write, because it is able to stop the act of writing, “to pick up the pencil and to remove it” [7]. And no further, “the strange Blanchot”, as he was called by a Romanian critic[8] , will fully display this facet in enlightening rows: “The fact that the writes obligation to write ends at the same time with his own life hides the one that, through this obligation, his life slips into the infinite misfortune”. [9] And if we watch carefully the Blanchotian writing we can understand that silence itself of which he made a way of being and living has had its role in the artistic and existential experience because: "The tone it does not represent the writer’s voice, but the intimacy of silence which he imposes to the word, which

makes this silence to be his, what remains of himself in the secrecy that puts him aside.[10]. Somehow nothing should surprise or shock us to an author with his profile, Maurice Blanchot. "Mythical figure, public enemy or guru", [11] here are some aspects under which he was sometimes perceived and received in France. He was contradictory and bizarre, including in his political attitude, in his commitments as well as in his withdrawals from the world. At first he had some sympathy for the far right and has been considered in some extent as being anti-Semitic; in order that, later to swing towards communism. His German and philosophy studies were apparently not enough and started others - medicine, especially psychiatry and neurology. He wrote "Final Word" (1935-1936), and, later, in 1957 "Last man" (story). As a evaluator, a strange one, in "The Fire Part", a book of literary criticism, he will notice that literature is the right to die. A Hegel (Blanchotian of course) passed through Mallarmé and filtered through silence.

However, the work represents, as Blanchot the assessor says, a special experience. It involves entering the "loneliness", the splendid Blanchotian phrase, because: "That <<He>> which substitutes for << I >>, here is the loneliness the writer enters through his work." [12] That "he" which substitute for "I" will undoubtedly be The Self and the author will quickly understand this without omitting to note: "fascination is fundamentally linked to the neutral presence, impersonal, to the undetermined Self, to the immense "Someone" without face". [13] These rows refer to Indian philosophy: "What does Advaita philosophy teach? It destroys all the Gods who had ever or will ever be there in the universe, placing on that throne the Human Self, Atman, the one above the sun and moon, above the heavens ... " [14]

The writing seems to be a separate action, an activity that involves in a certain way abolition of time, its absence, in the opinion of Maurice Blanchot that realizes such a bizarre phenomenology of the writing fact. Obviously, involving overcoming the superficial ego, the ego blamed also by Blaise Pascal and the Upanishads. Time abolition, its absence, and also fascination: "To write is to enter the assertion of loneliness which threatens fascination. It means to entrust yourself to the risk of time absence, where it reigns the eternal restart. It means you have to move from "I" to "He", so that what happens to me it does not happen to anyone, it is anonym by the way it regards me, it repeats through an infinite dispersion". [15] About the abolition of time will have been written, and the Hindu sage Jiddu Krishnamurti. And not anyway, but in a dialogue with a physicist such as David Bohm: "The end is the beginning, isn't it? Now I want to deepen it. See in yourself, in the end of all this – on brief be called <<the end of time>> - there is a new beginning." [16]

The same Krishnamurti seems to confirm once more our evaluator, when he writes lines like these: "Creativity is the state in which the ego is absent and the mind is no longer the focus of our experience and searches. Creativity is a permanent condition, is renewed every moment, a movement in which there is no "I" and "mine", in which the thought no longer goes towards certain experiences and realizations, for a purpose or a reason. Creativity can exist only in the absence of the self; it is the only existential condition that has access to reality, creator of all things." [17] Coping was actually followed by Hegel whose influence is felt several times in the Maurice Blanchot's pages. With the observation that at the German philosopher it implied the notion of suppression: "The change of something simple perceived as something reflected in itself, of a purely sensory determinations with an organic one, loses its value again, namely by the fact that the intellect has not yet suppressed legislation." [18]

Mallarmé is one of the authors important for Maurice Blanchot. He will assess the situation just through "the concern that makes the work become a search of its origin and wishes

to identify with his own origin<< horrible vision of a pure work >>." [19] Can also represent an echo of Heidegger's readings, on the origin of the work of art...

Blanchot, the evaluator, is in some cases a lover of literary paradoxes, in this case: "The poet is the one who understands a language without understanding." [20] Literary space never ceases to claim, in this case, from the evaluator, its explanations so required for the disclosures of abstruse springs of writing. In this regard it would seem that the assessment itself is exceeded, it even seems to become something else. Somehow philosophizing, in Heideggerian style, with exactly the same sense as the author of the monumental work "Being and Time"; following the ancient philosophers of Hellas called him Aletheia. It means the removal from the hideout. Here he is writing and glossing about the necessity (for the writer) to write: "The need to write is related to the proximity to this point, where from words nothing can be done, from where it is raised illusion that, if it is kept the contact with this moment, but returning to the world of possibility <<everything>> can be made, <<everything will be said>> ". [21] We often think that, in his own way, he says the same thing as Heidegger about the work of art: "... but if it remains with too much caution himself, the work is his work, it expresses himself, it expresses its talents, but not the extreme exigency of the work of art as origin.(n.n – I.H, L.P) [22]

The circle seems not only to appear in philosophical or philological thinking. Not just for the two hermeneutics: Heidegger's and Leo Spitzer's. It is also seen in Paul Ricoeur's works, who, while speaking about the hermeneutic circle, said: "It must be understood to be believed, and it must be believed in order to be understood." [23] In turn Jean Luc Nancy notes that: "the hermeneutic circle depends on the supposition or assumption of an origin, the origin of meaning, and the possibility of participating in it, the infinite origin of the circle in which the interpreter is always caught. The circle did not come from nothing more than the motion of an origin, lost and retaken by averaging its substitute." [24] And of course about the circle will write the strange evaluator Maurice Blanchot, referring to the work, in an open mode: "The work is the pure circle where, while writing it, the author exposes dangerously to the pressure that requires him to write, while offering shelter from it." [25] And he will continue, not without a touch of mystery somehow: "The main point of the work is the work as origin, the one that cannot be reached, the only one that deserves to be reached." [26] Do we go in a circle? Is it the circle of the work? The hermeneutic circle from philosophy, especially Martin Heidegger's, to whom it appears, as one of his disciples, Hans Georg Gadamer, noticed: "the foundation [...] of the circular structure of comprehension on Dasein's temporality", [27] thus, implying specific human being, the man, y compris, the writer? Leo Spitzer's philosophical circle together with his method? "The circular and intuitionist method <<of the philological circle>> starts from the actual style, from <<stylistic spy>>, it searches the <<common spiritual denominator>> and checks in other acts of style. The idea of spiritual expressive unity echoes from Croce, and the credit given to intuition – is an influence from Bergson". [28]

In a chapter about Franz Kafka titled "Salvation through literature", Blanchot the evaluator seems to talk about the author's personal apocalypse, but also as writing remedy to the existential evil: "It seems that Franz Kafka recognized in that terrible state of dissolution of himself in which he is lost for the others and for himself, the center of gravity of the writing exigency". [29] Hegelian to a certain extent, Blanchot took this philosopher's negativity. One of them targeted the apocalyptic art extinction. On the same line of these negativity, even apparent, might fit this Blanchotian passage: "but perhaps the work agrees upon the fact that << I >> do not have personality. Clemens Brentano, in his novel "Godwi" speaks expressively about <<destruction of the self>> that occurs in the work". [30] This strange phrase of "self-

destruction" taken by Blanchot from Clemens Brentano ... strange because it reminds us of a title of Ananda K. Coomaraswami: "The destruction of the self or the release of the Divine in us" ... Therefore the negativity is not only Hegel's. But here negativity is only apparent; in fact it is actually positivity. Maybe, is paradoxically called *Akimcana* in Sanskrit, i.e. self-destruction: "Man with a destroyed Self is a happy man; the same is not true for those conscious of their human connections." [31] Blanchot the evaluator makes here a phenomenology of the work, meaning that he describes all its implications. A phenomenology sometimes resumed one that involves remembering negativity: "Yes, you have to die with the dying, truth requires it, but you must be able to satisfy you in death, to find inside the ultimate dissatisfaction the supreme satisfaction and to maintain, when death comes, a clear sight from such a balance. Contentment which is very close to the Hegelian wisdom, if it consists of doing the satisfaction and self-awareness coincide, in finding the extreme negativity in the death became possibility, work and time, the absolute positive measure "[32]. In other situations Maurice Blanchot seems to remind us of a certain Georges Bataille, one from "Sovereignty": "you cannot write unless you master yourself before death, if you had sovereignty relations with her." [33] Maurice Blanchot's Triangle is not one of Bermuda, but involves certain negativity, is composed of three sides involving art, death and game: "Maybe art represents this game with death; perhaps it introduces a game, little game, there where there is no escape and no power." [34] About Stéphane Mallarmé, especially about his experience of "Igitur", Blanchot writes extremely pertinent: "Obviously, he starts from nothing, which he felt its secret vitality, strength and mystery in meditating and the fulfillment of the poetic work. Its Hegelian vocabulary would not deserve any attention if it was not enlivened by an authentic experience and this experience is the one of the negative power." [35] Negativity which in Hegel, fulfills goals and functions extremely precise: "The act of shaping it does not have only a positive significance that his servile consciousness becomes just a pure being for himself as something present, but has a negative meaning to her first moment—the fear. For in forming the work, her own negativity, her own being, it becomes an object only because it suppresses the existing force who is its opposite." [36] But negativity and the strange radiation force of the nothing does not occur only in Hegel but in the same thinking that mentioned before, the oriental. In Zen Buddhism, for instance: "But the silence remains / undaunted in front of/ these moods. / She asks for nothing. / Ask for The nothing" [37] And here it is what Blanchot the evaluator says about Mallarmé: "It can be said that he had seen the nothing at work as he felt the absence activity, caught in it a strange power of affirmation." [38]. More over, the kinship with oriental thinking, including that of Mallarmé's texts, not only with Zen, but also with the Taoism was surprised by one of the representatives of the New French Critique, Charles Mauron in the book "Mallarmé and Tao". [39] However, the Blanchotian vision often remains near an apocalyptic vision. A proof is the following passage: "At night, silence is rest, ceasing of occupations. At night the silence is the word, there is no settlement. Here reigns what does not cease and does not interrupt, not the certainty of fulfilled death, but the eternal torment of dying." [40] But in fact, as René Gide stands out in a shocking book, "The apocalypse has its cause in man": "It is essential to understand that violence is not the apocalypse foretold by the divine Gospels. In the Gospels, this violence is always related to men, never to God. What makes her readers believe that they are dealing with old divine anger, always alive from the Old Testament, is that most apocalyptic features, large images of this painting are borrowed from the Old Testament texts." [41]

No less interesting rows will be discovered in the continuation of Blanchot's assessments. This time on reading: "Even if it requires the reader to enter in an area devoid of air and where

the land slips away, even if outside these tempestuous approaches, the reading seems to participate to the open violence of the work, it is in itself, this quiet and silent presence, pacified center of the lack of measurement, a quiet YES located in the middle of any storm." [42] The passage seems to be inviting to comment. Lack of measurement is, by using a Hellenic term, *hybris*. *Hybris* refers to violence and violence in this case is equated with reading. Therefore, through the lecture, the reader gives his sacrificial agreement, maintains sacrificial mentality. And yet ... there is a purified center, although related to "hybris", this silent YES that delays a possible Apocalypse, as we could say A center pacified as a period of silence between two Apocalypses: "The first apocalyptic end is when Messiah comes for the second time. After this apocalyptic end starts the Kingdom of Christ. " [43]

Later on, the evaluator will explain again the thesis regarding aesthetics apocalypse. Referring to art extinction and leaning on excerpts from Gide and Hegel: "In 1934, Andre Gide wrote: << For a long time from now on it cannot be about making artwork. >>(Diary, July 25, 1934). A century before, Hegel, beginning his monumental course of aesthetics, uttered these words: <<Art is for us a thing of the past>>, judgment on which art must reflect and which is not necessarily contradicted by the fact that at that time, literature, fine arts, music, produced significant works, because when Hegel was speaking, he knew that Goethe was still alive and that in the name of romanticism, all the arts in the West had acquired a new momentum." [44] Its explanations will continue and according to them art has become futile because it could not bear the need for absolute, becoming a history work. On the other hand, work requires a certain exigency and the latter leads to a sort of apparent Apocalypse of the author: "The work that requires, that the man who writes sacrifice for it, to become another person, but not to become from the mortal that he was, the writer with its debts, satisfactions and interests, but rather the with nobody, the empty and animated place where the work call echoes." [45]

Therefore, as a subtitle which is talking about death of the last writer, it can no longer be a surprise. It seems that, as the poet said there were changes, and as Blanchot the evaluator tells us, time when the writer, like any artist, enjoyed certain fame, has faded away. Is that the case of the artist; is art disappearing as Hegel's "prophecy" said? Hegel himself was not always so emphatic regarding this, as Maurice Blanchot was. Thus leaving hope a chance, let us follow the German philosopher writing about art in more serene moments: "Beautiful art (as its own religion) has its future in its true religion. The bordered content of the Idea transforms for itself into the universality identical with the infinite form - intuition, direct science, related to sensitivity, it becomes the science that intercedes itself, in itself, it becomes an actual being, which is science itself, it becomes revelation, so that the content of the Idea has as a principle in determining free intelligence and is that spirit for the spirit, as an absolute spirit. "[46]. If it were something else...

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