



PHILOSOPHY OF DEATH IN MAURICE BLANCHOT

FILOSOFÍA DE LA MUERTE EN MAURICE BLANCHOT

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INFORMACIÓN DEL ARTÍCULO	ABSTRACT/RESUMEN
<p>Recibido el: 4/04/2024 Aceptado el: 18/7/2024</p> <p>Keywords: Death, humanism, ethics, human beings, metaphysics</p> <p>Palabras clave: Muerte, humanismo, ética, ser humano, metafísica</p>	<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Maurice Blanchot is a 20th century French philosopher who was one of the few philosophers who started to write on death. Death has a special role in Maurice Blanchot's philosophy, he understands death from two points of view: existential death and death as a metaphor, which is mainly investigated among side the process of creation and literature.</p> <p>The aim of this work is to present philosophy of Death in Maurice Blanchot's philosophy. The presentation aims to present that death is understood from two points of view in his thinking. First, death is understood as the existential drive for living and creation; secondly death is also understood as a metaphor in the process of creativity, in this sense, death plays a crucial role in Blanchot's thinking. The article also aims to explain such Blanchotian concepts as death's space, death's transmutation and two kinds of death.</p> <p>Death's space is understood as a creative space of creation in which the representations and information is converted in the process of creation. Death's transmutation is the process of transmuting certain material (whether its painting or words) into the new form. While two kinds of death refer to two types of death: the first is the death that persons can comprehend, while the second is the death that is experienced unexpectedly. Lastly, the work also aims to talk about the relationship between death and literature as death becomes an existential and creative force that sparks novelty.</p> <p>Resumen:</p> <p>Maurice Blanchot es un filósofo francés del siglo XX y uno de los pocos filósofos que empezó a escribir sobre la muerte. La muerte tiene un papel especial en pensamiento, al ser entendida desde una doble posición: la</p>

muerte en sentido existencial y la muerte como metáfora, que se investiga principalmente en el marco del proceso de creación y de la literatura.

El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar la filosofía de la muerte en el pensamiento de Maurice Blanchot desde dos puntos de vistas. En primer lugar, la muerte se entiende como el impulso existencial de vivir y crear. En segundo lugar, la presentación sostiene que Blanchot también entiende la muerte como una metáfora en el proceso de creatividad, y –en este sentido– juega un papel crucial en su pensamiento de Blanchot. Este trabajo también pretende explicar conceptos blanchotianos como el espacio de la muerte, la transmutación de la muerte y dos tipos de muerte.

El espacio de la muerte se entiende como un espacio creativo de creación en el que las representaciones y la información se convierten en el proceso de creación. La transmutación de la muerte es el proceso de transmutar cierto material (ya sea pintura o palabras) a una nueva forma. El primer tipo de muerte se refiere a uno que la persona puede comprender, mientras que el segundo es la muerte súbita que se experimenta inesperadamente. Por último, el trabajo también pretende hablar de la relación entre la muerte y la literatura, en tanto la muerte se convierte en una fuerza existencial y creativa que genera novedad.

Introduction

Usually, we understand death as an end to our physical life on the Earth. Humans usually do not question death and are impacted by the understanding of the death which is common in society. The postmodern society usually hides any kind of appearance of death in the daily life, and death becomes something to be feared of. Postmodern society creates binary opposition between life and death in which death becomes like an unseen or not talked about topic in society (Blanchot, 1995b, p. 34) or death is mystified even though there is nothing mysterious or unknown about death. Also, humans usually focus on the definition of death that is related to human death not thinking about death in a different context.

Maurice Blanchot who was a well-known literary critic and philosopher understood death in a novel way. Blanchot's death remains a crucial part of life which we can experience through the death of the others. (Blanchot, 1995b, p. 133) He also connected the ideas of death with literature writing and philosophy of creativity. For Maurice Blanchot, death is understood as inorganic death as a crucial function for creating literature.

This work aims to analyse death, creativity and literature in Maurice Blanchot's philosophy. The work aims to talk about existential aims of writing and creating that is

impacted by human existence. Later, the work aims to analyse Maurice Blanchot's understanding of death in an inorganic way, analysing Maurice Blanchot's concept *death's space* and *death's transmutation*. The work firstly focuses on investigating the concept of death and creativity in philosophy of literature from a novel non-organic perspective.

It is crucial to investigate the new concept of death in Maurice Blanchot's philosophy because it can help us to change our regular outlook on death and understand death from an impersonal perspective in the work of art. Instead of fearing death, this investigation allows us to look at death from a new perspective. The article is also novel because it seeks to talk about death from an inorganic and creative perspective which is not often talked about in the discourses of death in philosophy as well as seeks to include Blanchot's concept of death in the philosophical discourse.

Death as Phenomenological Impossibility and the Source of Human Creativity

We cannot experience death, but we can experience death's closeness and understand that there is no such thing as death. (Blanchot, 1982, p.146) When we are exposed to the closeness of death, we can expose ourselves to this overpowering intimacy and experience peaceful affirmation that there is no death. We can't experience death, but we can experience death's closeness, who is close to death, understands that there is no death. Blanchot also compares humans with animals because animals live in the present moment, and for them death is not possible as they don't think about. Nevertheless, animals live until they die, it is a drive to survive and thrive, so death exists as survival inside them, but never as an abstract idea. Unlike animals that live in the Open (Rilke), we see only death.

Death is a limit experience for us because we do not know what happens after death, and yet, we are able to think it. However, we cannot experience death as an experience, and therefore it always remains as an outside and impersonal experience. One's own death is not one's own because it is not an experience, there is no self to experience it. As Blanchot states, "the task of culture has always been to restore a kind of purity to death, to make it authentic, personal, proper, but also to make it possible". (Blanchot, 1993, p. 180) Phenomenologically, we cannot have the experience of death

and death functions as idea that is separated from us. Death for us is impossibility of the experience, but its idea is something that we are hiding from the real death. (Blanchot, 1982, p. 95)

Blanchot also stated that “Men in general do not think about death, if they avoid confronting it, it is doubtless in order to flee death and hide from it, but that this escape is possible only because death itself is perpetual flight before death, and because it is the deep of dissimulation. Thus, to hide from it is in a certain way to hide in it”. (Blanchot, 1995a, p. 95) Here Blanchot has in mind that we always hide in the idea of death, but we are never certainly in death as it comes unexpected and unknown to us. What we have is just an idea that we hide in, thinking about it, wondering about it. If one suppresses something, one is still having that part of oneself, either in the form of identity or emotion. It doesn't disappear, but becomes like a running background, one's outside from the inside, that becomes unreachable, but it still prevails. Ones hide in it to hide from it because one doesn't want to face it, but it is the running background for oneself functioning like an unconscious thought. The same goes for death – death is, first and foremost, our impossibility as we don't experience it, but the idea of it is something that we hide in to avoid the death itself.

As Blanchot states, death becomes an aversion:

Thus, we should say no longer now that death is the side of life from which we are turned away. It is only the error in this turning: aversion. Wherever we turn away, there is death, and what we call the moment of dying is only the crook of the turn, the extreme of its curvature, the end point beyond which everything reverses itself, everything turns back. (Blanchot, 1995b, p. 147)

Blanchot states that we forgot how to die. (Blanchot, 1995b, p. 147) Blanchot says that to experience death we still must manifest will and desire, a will to live, to do something and not to give up to death's passivity. That shows our vitality and connection to life, a desire not to leave this life. Death is aversion of life, and it is extreme point reverting itself. If people are stolen from death, they are not able to perceive death, neglecting to do anything.

However, at the same time organic human death becomes like the source of creativity which makes the human act. Knowing that one day they will not exist allows

humans to speak and write in order to create one's own memory in the outside world. However, death mainly functions as a limit experience that cannot be grasped from a personal point of view. The only death that I can experience is the death of the Other. Also, we can understand the process of writing as a process of dying because when one is writing, one does not think of one's own subjectivity. In such a way, dying and death produce the work of art. As Blanchot states, death becomes the ultimate inspiration and the source of creativity.

Death, in the human perspective, is not a given, it must be achieved. It is a task, one which we take up actively, one which becomes the source of our activity and mastery. Man dies, that is nothing. But man is, starting from his death. He ties himself tight to his death with a tie of which he is the judge. He makes his death; he makes himself mortal, and in this way gives himself the power of a maker and gives to what he makes its meaning and its truth. (Blanchot, 1982, p. 96)

Blanchot states that writing is also a limit experience because one is able to pass over the threshold and question the constraints of what already exists in order to create something new. (Blanchot, 2003, p. 206) Basically, writing can be related to dying in a metaphorical perspective. When we write, we go outside our regular subjectivity and experience what Blanchot would call death as we become impersonal during the moment of writing.

Blanchot also distinguishes two types of death from analysing Rilke's poetry. He states that there are two kinds of deaths. One death is authentic, while the other one is inauthentic, inevitable, but inaccessible as an experience. As Blanchot states, such death is "It is death as the extreme of power, as my most proper possibility, but also the death which never comes to me, to which I can never say yes, with which there is no authentic relation possible". (Blanchot, 1995a, p. 155)

Also, Blanchot uniquely understood the relationship of death and consciousness at the moment of dying. A consciousness that is closed upon itself is inhabited by images. The animal's gaze does not reflect the animal nor the thing and opens animal into being. The animal looks at the world without projecting oneself to this world, thus the animal is free from seeing everything in meanings and representations; humans are learnt to see everything as meaning. The animal is because the animal is outside itself and outside what it thinks. It sees the world, the Open, and is. Animal is outside

oneself, in a thing, but not in a representation of the thing. Blanchot compares the animal gaze with death because death is intentionality. When we die, our eyes turn back, this return is to the other side. (Blanchot, 1995a, p. 135) But this is not deprived of consciousness because it is established by the consciousness outside it. The ecstasy of this movement is the turn to the consciousness, to experience without meanings and representations, to pure consciousness experiencing itself as a culmination. In death, we don't see the world in representations and meanings; we turn to ourselves, we experience the pureness of being when we die.

Blanchot talks about two issues related to death. The first one for him is temporal and spatial limits of things because it can be thought that one thing hides the other thing without an end. The second issue a bad interiority of consciousness. This bad interiority happens if one's consciousness is free from the spatial and temporal limits; such consciousness can experience everything, but we are excluded by closed intimacy and can't access stuff. We can't experience Rilke's Open because we become ourselves excluded by our own violent way of mastering things by possessing, producing them and giving them meaning.

Death's Space as Creativity Space

Blanchot here states that space needs this invisible presence, and it has a timeless duration; it is like a non-existing centre, like *le neutre*, "nothingness coming into being", the production and creation of what we may understand as matter. This space is a place where meaning is constructed or changed because it is the space of creation and death. This is what Blanchot calls the death's space because death's space is related to death which is a rebirth and an opening to the creation of the new. Another possible interpretation of Blanchot is that death's space is a space of death, where death makes visible invisible, and where invisible is transformed into something new.

The process of self-destruction can function as a transformation which imposes a sort of twist on the words, an extension of meaning to which we can make sense where a literal interpretation would be literally nonsensical. This can be related to the theory of writing and signification because one needs to destroy the old to give the voice to the new, thus death, in a Blanchotian sense, opens a way for new signification.

When we are talking about the concept of death from creative perspective, Blanchot does not have in mind the organic physical death, and he talks about death as an abstraction that is related to thing's death when meaning loses its existence and is separated from the thing. Death in Blanchot's philosophy functions as a metaphor to be used in representing the idea of limit which is at the same time excluded by the limit. Death metaphorically talks about non-being and the possibility of non-being which becomes the possibility to name. (Schwartz, 1998, p. 31) As Blanchot states "I write to die so that I would give an opportunity to the death which meaning is death as the source of invisibility; at the same time, I cannot write for death already writes in me". (Blanchot, 1982, p. 146)

Blanchot's understanding of Death's Space is related to the space of literature. The space of literature is seen as a rebelling force against dialectical power structures. As Blanchot states, we have to leave philosophy and go to literature to reach philosophy from the outside (which is connected to death's space) and vice versa. The death's space is the space of creation because it is a certain being of the consciousness in a certain state which makes a movement and creative process. Blanchot relates death's space with human's ability to convert the seen world to one's consciousness by giving something personal to the outside world which means creating a certain connection to the outside world which helps to express human's inside to the outside. Such a conversation process in the death's space is related to creation. Blanchot stated that in death's space, the writer goes into another being in which exists invisible being and time without time as a non-existing centre. (Blanchot, 1982, p. 145) Basically, the death's space is also a space of signification because it helps to convert the meaning and create new types of significations.

When certain work of art is created, it "dies", because it is formed in a material form in which it is created whether it's a form of words or paintbrushes. The death's space has a double function when it allows something to be born by talking, writing and painting, but once the thing is immediately inscribed into a certain form, it becomes stagnated and frozen. The opportunities are made to be finite in the forms of words, paintings or other material object form. This is why the death's space immaterially kills and creates. Death has the power to transmute meaning and produce something, but once this work is created, it immediately falls out of this death space and becomes

dead itself as it is trapped in words. Humans shape the world according to themselves – they make it able to die. And death's space produces the thing as a representation, not as a thing itself.

Death's space has double function because it allows something to come into being by being said, written, painted, or molded, but when this thing immediately stagnates because it is trapped in those same words. It's infinite, unseen possibilities are made finite in the form of words or a painting or other material object that also leads to representations since Blanchot said that we see things as representations of our own mind. Therefore, death's space kills things in a way that it creates them, but in the form of something finite, material that has an end. So, humans make everything around them as finite, material and eroding whether it's a form of art as painting or a form of art as writing. Thus, writing is both destructive and creative at the same time as it has the power of transformation and erosion.

Blanchotian death space concept can be illustrated by J. Derrida's experience of meeting the cat. J. Derrida sees the cat and feels shame because he is ashamed of his nudity in front of the animal. (Derrida, 2008, p. 29) Later, J. Derrida does not ask what the cat can truly feel and understand or have a dialogue with the cat. Derrida does not name the cat because Derrida and the cat meet each other as face to another face. (Merleau-Ponty, 2018, p. 408) Derrida saw the cat but not as a cat in the linguistical meanings of the language because Derrida and the cat reached the limits of the language. Derrida went into the death's space when he started to notice the other and one's relationship to this other, therefore the cat became the inspiration to write about animals. Reaching the outside is a complicated process that is not easy to each and name as it is the reaching of the death's space because it allows for a human to drift away from one's present subjectivity in order to experience something different in one's outside. When one reaches the outside, one is able to come back from the death's space in order to transform the experience into meanings, words and other artistic forms.

Death's Transmutation

Death is Maurice Blanchot's philosophy has the power to transmute and change and to name something new. Blanchot uses a non-organic understanding of death that is

related to creativity and the creative process which is related to the creation of the material world and meaning's expression in creative process. In Blanchot's thinking, death and life are related to each other and inseparable from one another even though we cannot experience death.

During the process of transmutation, we are able to create new meaning and express it in new forms. However, during the process of transmutation something is lost and is simplified because we cannot understand and absorb all the reality around us. Therefore, something always remains unseen, unthought and unwritten. Individual's creativity as well as imagination and curiosity are the origin of every kind of text. Writing becomes like a journey that metaphorically is "Writing with words". It is the process of transformation when we don't feel time and we are constantly in the movement, which is revived so that we'd reach the limit and enter the creative phase.

It is also crucial to note that for Blanchot there are two kinds of deaths. The difference between these two deaths remains in transmutation. Untransmuted death is that type of death that is sudden form of event, when one is not able to grasp it. (Blanchot, 1982, p. 148) That reminds also of Derrida, because he talked about death arriving always too late – when death comes too late, we cannot understand it or integrate it into our mind as it already happened. The true death for Blanchot is that type of death that gives intimacy. As Blanchot stated, either because bad death, the one that has the brutality of an event and of a random occurrence, remains an untransmuted death, a death not reintroduced into its essential secret, or because it becomes in true death the intimacy of transmutation. (Blanchot, 1982, p. 148)

Blanchot stated that talk about death, and our creativity allows us to express death. Death's transmutation is also a form of art in a way as by transmutation we are able to create new meaning and express it in new ways. Unlike animals, humans can state that they die and that they chose to die. It is important to note that Blanchot's account of death as a creative force could be related to other philosophers such as Heidegger, Derrida and Mallarme who also investigated subjectivity and metaphysical ambiguity from literary critique point of view.

Also, death has a two-fold function in literature. Firstly, death can be understood as existential drive that gives motivation for the human to inscribe one's own experience in the form of writing which allows to leave some short of manifestation of

oneself in the outside world. On the other hand, death as a metaphor in the creation of literature allows to use creative genius to create something novel via the process of death's transmutation.

Conclusions

Death can be understood from an existential perspective as a drive that allows to inscribe some short of human meaning and leave something after one's death. Death can spark the curiosity to create and be a form of inspiration.

Maurice Blanchot states that one is not able to experience death. Death is an impossible experience because when one dies, one has no self. In Blanchot's philosophy, death as impossibility is not investigated too much. There is more attention given to death as inorganic death that is understood as a process of creation which is also related to things and changes in meaning when the word loses its meaning and gets a new one. While *Death's space* is understood as a certain mode of creation in which human is able to convert the world around one and create new meanings by changing or destroying the old meanings. Also, it is crucial to note that the *death's space* is the reaching of the outside when the person thinks the surrounding world not from a subjective, but from impersonal position.

On the other hand, death's transmutation is a process in which death has a reorganizing and shifting power. This process of transmutation arises from our mortality, and it also encourages us to inscribe ourselves from existential point of view. Death's transmutation as a creative process also to create something new. However, transmutation can also make certain meanings simplified because something always remains unseen, unsaid and unwritten.

Even if death's space and death's transmutation function as metaphors in Blanchot's writing, the existential death drive is important for creation of literature because it drives us to create something new and leave it as a memory of our existence.

As for Blanchot, death can function both as the death as destruction of life, but also as a bringer of life. Death and dying are relate to life and existence in his

philosophy. However, it is worth to remember that there is a living creator (an artist) who creates a work. The artist lives and exists, so does the work, but in a rather different sense. The artist has the human lifespan and human death, while the book, so it seems, cannot die. Paradoxically, the book is alive and dead at the same time. It is alive because it can be printed again and again (that actually reminds of a myth because a myth can be told many times and still prevail), while the dead aspect is related to Blanchot's death's space, in which the created written work immediately "dies" after birth because it is written in certain words that don't move and can't be changed. The book can be interpreted or seen from a new light, but the words signify the same thing, so the role is given to the reader.

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