

Providing an overarching interpretation of *Thomas the Obscure* and all of Blanchot's work, Nancy in *La Déclosion* presents a powerful reading of death and resurrection. It is only by privileging *L'Espace littéraire* and a certain interpretation of death, I suggest, that Nancy can argue for the mundaneness of resurrection rather than its "fantastic" or "miraculous" nature.

Thomas the Marvellous: Resurrection and Living-Death in Blanchot and Nancy

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Toward the middle of the night, Thomas gets up and goes downstairs without making any noise.¹ Unnoticed save by an almost blind cat, a most strange feline undergoing transformation, which lets out howls and proceeds to deliver a diabolical monologue, Thomas goes on to dig the earth, preparing a great ditch, about his own size. With a stone strapped around his neck, he throws himself into this grave. This most banal of summaries attempts to capture the beginning of Chapter 8 of the first version of *Thomas the Obscure*, Blanchot's first novel. Considered by many as Blanchot's most important narrative and one of his most significant texts, *Thomas the Obscure*, begun in 1932, delivered to the publisher in May 1940, and published in 1941, was until recently only available in a much more truncated form, known as the new version, authorized by Blanchot, and published in 1950. The source of renewed attention, particularly by Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, this original version

has been available since 2005, having been published after Blanchot's death.² Nancy, who devotes two chapters to Blanchot in one of his recent books, *La Déclosion*, provides a most powerful interpretation of Blanchot's work in a provocatively-titled chapter, "Blanchot's Resurrection [Résurrection de Blanchot]."³ In this chapter Nancy uses several pages from Chapter 8 of *Thomas the Obscure* to put forward an interpretation not simply of death, dying, and resurrection in the novel, but also to present an overarching reading of Blanchot's work in general. This interpretation should be read alongside a number of texts written by Nancy in the same period, many of which are also collected in *La Déclosion*, devoted to a reconsideration, or deconstruction, of the major tenets and motifs of Christianity. Of particular importance is a short text, *Noli me tangere* (published a few months before the Blanchot essay in April 2003), in which Nancy, while discussing how a host of classical painters have depicted the famous scene from the Gospel of John and the "resurrection" announced in it, embarks upon a bold interpretation of the notion of resurrection. "Blanchot's Resurrection" may form part of a more extensive text devoted to Blanchot, if we were to believe Nancy's suggestion that a study examining the theological or "theomorphological" topics in Blanchot's writings would be necessary (137).

"Blanchot's Resurrection" was first presented at the Centre Pompidou in January 2004 at the opening of a cycle of talks organized by Christophe Bident bearing the same title.⁴ Even though resurrection does not constitute a major term or concept in the work of Blanchot—and this would be Nancy's major interpretive move—he claims at the beginning of his essay that resurrection is "indissociable" from death and "dying [mourir]." In fact, it forms "the extremity and truth of dying." Nancy's aim in this essay is to distinguish "ressusciter les morts" from "ressusciter la mort." The difficulty of adequately rendering "ressusciter" in English needs to be pointed out here: since in French the noun *la resurrection* is never used as a verb, everything hangs on how one interprets and translates "ressusciter la mort." To resurrect the dead (ressusciter les morts), Nancy explains, would be to bring them back to life, making "life reappear" where death had put an end to it. This is nothing but "a fantastic, miraculous operation [une opération prodigieuse, miraculeuse]" involving a supernatural intervention in the laws of nature (135).

The phrase "fantastic [prodigieuse], miraculous operation" is no doubt an allusion to the Preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where in paragraph 32 Hegel discusses "the tremendous power [*die ungeheure Macht*]" of the negative and the role of death. This "tremendous power" ("la puissance prodigieuse," in Kojève's translation [540-41]), Hegel writes, is "the energy of thought [*die Energie des Denkens*]." Attaining a separate freedom, this "non-actuality," or death, as Hegel calls it, is of all things "the

most dreadful [*das Furchtbarste*]” and “to hold fast to what is dead requires the greatest strength [*Kraft*].” Spirit is this very power, “only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with [*Verweilen*] it.” This tarrying with the negative is “the magical power [*die Zauberkraft*; la force-magique]” that converts it into being (19; “Vorrede” III: 36).⁵ According to Kojève’s reading of Hegel, the labour of the negative is the work of death and “the operation” of mastery amounts to a risking or putting at stake the entirety of one’s own life. “Operation [opération],” a term used by Bataille to designate the privileged moment or act of sovereignty, was the translation of *Tun*, a word that occurs frequently in the master/slave chapter of *Phenomenology*.⁶ What Nancy calls resurrection, however, is “an entirely other operation, if it is even an operation” (136).

In contrast, “the resurrection of death [la resurrection de la mort],” Nancy claims, constitutes for Blanchot “a rare but decisive formulation,” so decisive that even though it may have appeared only once in his writings, it occurred in “a manner so conclusive and striking that this sole occurrence will have appeared sufficient to him.” This notion is so significant, Nancy asserts, that we will only be able to comprehend the notion of *désœuvrement* or worklessness from out of the resurrection of death, especially if it is by means of work [l’œuvre] that “speech gives voice to the intimacy of death (*L’espace* 193)” (136).⁷

Nancy points out that the apparent lack of references to resurrection in Blanchot’s writings, or Blanchot’s *reticence*, may have had to do with his awareness of the monotheistic—and particularly Christian—roots of “the thought of resurrection” (136). Yet, he writes, Blanchot could have completely eliminated this Christian source, substituting it with terms such as “*désœuvrement*,” “work without fulfillment [œuvre sans accomplissement],” “madness,” or “insomnia.” To a certain extent, this substitution would have been understandable, Nancy informs us. What will have been lost in the employment of these other terms, however, would be “the immediate and evident link with death,” the deliverance and escape from which is announced by resurrection (136–37). That Nancy believes terms such as “*désœuvrement*,” “madness,” and “insomnia” are substitutable reveals much about his general approach to reading Blanchot. Not only does he maintain that there is an equivalence or substitutability among key terms in Blanchot’s oeuvre, but that “resurrection,” a term which Nancy is introducing, should be considered as one of them.

Claiming that resurrection is destined to function as “a logical operator [un opérateur logique]” linking together “writing” and “dying,” Nancy states that we must reckon with this notion, a notion that can only function within a theological ambit (137). Thus Nancy turns to what he calls “an explicit evangelical reference” in *Thomas the Obscure*, to a character that many would associate with resurrection—the Lazarus

of the Gospel of John. In fact, Nancy notes, Lazarus initially appears at the same time as the first, perhaps the only, reference to the expression “mort ressuscitée,” which occurs early in the first version of *Thomas the Obscure* (138). This phrase is also retained, as Nancy mentions, in the second version toward the end of Chapter 5 (42).⁸ The crucial sentence for Nancy, a sentence to which we will have occasion to return, is the following: “Il marchait, seul Lazare véritable dont la mort même était ressuscitée” (49). At this juncture, we could venture a preliminary translation: He walked, the only true Lazarus whose very death was resuscitated. Briefly discussing the modification of the text from the first to the second version, Nancy surmises that Thomas goes from a “feeling” of to the “certainty” of “being simultaneously snatched from [arraché] life and death” (*Thomas* 49, emph. Blanchot’s). In this way, according to Nancy, Thomas resembles the Cartesian *ego sum*, for he *knows* that he has been wrested or snatched as much from death as from life. As Nancy explains, he “becomes the subject dead from having been torn away from death itself [il devient le sujet mort d’un arrachement à la mort même]. This is also why he is not resurrected, that is, he does not recover his life after having traversed death, but, remaining dead, goes forth in death [il avance dans la mort] (‘He walked’) and it is death itself that is resurrected in this ‘only true Lazarus.’” For Nancy, then, “the subject is death.” It is death that is resurrected: “Neither ‘the resurrected one’ nor the corpse—but ‘death resurrected,’ as stretched out on the corpse and so raising it without subsuming it [le dressant sans le relever]” (138). Hence, resurrection is in no way an escape or exit from death, nor is it a dialecticization of death.

In contrast, Nancy writes, the other Lazarus, that of the Gospel, is not “real or genuine [véritable]”; “he is a character of a miraculous narrative [récit miraculeux],” depicting “a transgression of death by the most improbable of returns to life.” The “truth” of Thomas, Nancy writes, “resides in the simultaneity of a death and a life within it that does not come back to life, but that makes death live [fait vivre la mort] as such.” This “true [vrai]” Lazarus “lives his dying as he dies his living. It is thus that he ‘walks.’” This “underground and glorious procession [avancée],” not to be confused with an “ascension,” takes the same steps as we all take toward death (138). However, this “genuine” Lazarus is not entirely without relation to the Lazarus of the Gospel; he is not entirely other than “the Lazarus resurrected by Christ (by the one who says ‘I am the resurrection’), there remains in him something of the one who has been miraculously cured [ce miraculé]” (139).

Yet what is miraculous is not a fabulous or fantastic event, but rather “the sense [le sens] given by Thomas’s story [récit] to the miraculous narrative [récit]. This sense, or this truth, is not a crossing through [traversée] of death, but death itself as a passage [traversée], as transport and transformation, of itself in itself withdrawn from

its thingness [choséité]" (139). Nancy announces that *Thomas the Obscure* suggests nothing "other than the story of a resurrection, and better still, the story of the resurrection. For Thomas himself is the resurrection," *resurrection* here referring to what Nancy calls "access to the beyond of sense" (140, *emph. Nancy's*).

Nancy then informs us that he is going to disregard the circumstances that will have led Blanchot's 1950 text to speak "a slightly different language" from what he will have said later. In a footnote he refers to the partial effacement of Christian vocabulary and references between 1950 and 1980 in Blanchot's writings. But he claims, highly idiosyncratically, that an attestation can be found to the thought of "resurrection" in a later text such as *L'Écriture du désastre*. When Blanchot writes of K. in *The Castle* that "he is too tired [. . .] to be able to die: for the advent [avènement] of his death to change into an interminable nonarrival [inavènement]" (214), Nancy curiously asserts, "this nonarrival or nonadvent [inavènement] is 'resurrection'" (140), thus reading "resurrection" as the dying that one awaits and yet that never arrives.⁹

Even though Nancy notes "a displacement of terminology" in Blanchot's work after *L'Espace littéraire*, he states that the subsequent "gap or interval" of time did nothing to dent "the impressive reiteration [ressassement], the remarkable obstinacy of a thinking" that underwent "necessary variations." This is due to the fact that "the space of resurrection, the space that defines it and makes it possible, is the space outside sense [hors du sens]," a space that "precedes sense and follows it" (140). Since this space refers to "an outside-of-time, as much interminable as instantaneous," it makes anteriority and posteriority have no "chronological value" (140-41).

Nancy writes of the relation of life to "resurrected death" thus: "This life" is the life withdrawn from sense, which is "not revived as life, but that resurrects death [qui ressuscite la mort]: it separates death [soustrait la mort] from its advent and its event." "I withdraw my death, my expiration date [mon échéance], from all property, from all proper presence. It is from myself thus that I am freed and I 'transform the fact of death' (*L'espace* 189)." This occurs in two ways: first, death no longer happens to me as a rupture inflicted upon "me," or the "I," but it becomes something inevitable, the "common and anonymous fate" affecting us all, and, second, resurrected death, absenting me from myself (*m'absentant de moi-même*) and sense, "exposes me not only to the truth but, finally, to myself as truth" (141). Such is the opposition of death resurrected to the resurrection of the dead.

Yet, Nancy is quick to point out that resurrection is not merely borrowed from the vocabulary of the miracle. It presents itself as a rewriting of the Holy Scripture. However, this would be "a holiness removed from religious wonder [*la merveille religieuse*]." It would also remove from "this marvel [*merveille*] itself an access [. . .]

to what is no longer fit to be called 'death'—the reality of the unreal—but 'consent' [consentement]." Nancy employs this term *consent* toward the end of his essay, claiming that what is called consent in *L'Espace littéraire* undoubtedly appears much later in *L'Écriture du désastre* under the name "the patience of passivity" (145).

Nancy then proceeds to connect this reality of dying to resurrection: "Resurrection, or to use the Greek term *anastasis*, erects dying [dresse le mourir] like the thick and heavy stone of the tomb, like the stele on which is inscribed, to be effaced at the end, the name of an imprescriptible and uninscribable [ininscriptible] identity, always exscribed. This stele erected before the void, a void without a beyond, comforts with all its weight, but without consolation, a desolation already borne very far from itself and from lament [déploration]" (145). Nancy further elaborates, differentiating faith (*foi*) from belief (*croiance*), a distinction that he consistently makes in *La Déclosion*: "The consent to resurrection, consents above all to the refusal of belief." "If consent, or resurrection—the raising up [surrection] that erects death in death like a living dead—remains in writing, or literature, this means that literature bears [supporte] the cessation or dissipation of all sense" (146).¹⁰

The conclusion of "Blanchot's Resurrection" contains the most striking of Nancy's pronouncements, a declaration, counter-intuitive at least on a first reading, that seemingly goes against all that one might associate with onto-theology, that very endeavour bound up with the preservation of what is destroyed, the rebirth and rise of the phoenix from its ashes: "Philosophical onto-theology practices embalmmment, or metempsychosis, or even the release of the soul—but never resurrection." Metaphysical practices, Nancy explains, are always bound up with "the future of a rebirth [renaissance]," with possibility and power, "whereas literature," praising a notion indebted to Blanchot, "only writes the present of what has always already happened to us, that is, the impossible into which our being consists in disappearing" (146).

On his knees, back bent, surrounded by open graves, Thomas tried to dig the earth. He gently prepared "a sort of pit" for the seventh time, but "his labour was met with resistance" from the void that "he could not conquer."¹¹ "The tomb was full of a being whose absence it absorbed." Thomas, having tied a stone around his neck, threw himself into the grave, landing on an "immovable corpse." "The grave, which was exactly his size, his shape, his thickness, was like his own corpse, and each time he tried to bury himself in it, he resembled an absurd dead person, who had tried to bury his body in his body." For there was present "another dead person, who had arrived ahead of him, and who, identical to him, drove the ambiguity of Thomas's death and life to the extreme." In the subterranean night,

Thomas came into an encounter with his “double [sosie],” realizing that this double “occupied his place,” since he “was the same as him” (47). Thomas, who was at one with his double, “felt himself [se sentait], at the moment he knew he was dead, absent, completely absent from death [tout à fait absent de la mort]” (48).

“The terror and the anxiety of the one who awakens living among the dead [vivant au sein des morts] is nothing” in comparison to “seeing himself dead without the ability to treat himself as dead.” Worse than “the horror of Lady Madeline,” the enshrouded sister of Roderick Usher, wandering the earth, Thomas was “faced with death as if he were not dead.”¹² He found himself in a state between life and death; not living but not dead. “Even the fact that by no right could he pass for living could not suffice to make him pass for dead.” This “was not a misunderstanding” for he was “really dead [réellement mort] and at the same time rejected from the reality of death [repoussé de la réalité de la mort]. He was, in death itself, deprived of death, a horribly destroyed man who was arrested [arrêté] in the void by his own image, by this Thomas who ran before him,” “who was like the very existence of the last death” (48).

Leaning over the void, in the absence of all images Thomas “saw his image.” Closed in by the night, he was seized by a violent vertigo, which prevented him from falling. “Although on the surface of the earth, which he could not penetrate, he was within it.” Truly dead and yet denied death’s reality, Thomas stirred in his coffin: “Like the dead person who awakens alive in his coffin” (48), he felt “in the same desperate flash [dans le même éclair désespéré] that he was living and that he could no longer be alive. He was now truly buried. If he still existed, he only existed to feel [. . .] the impossibility of revival [revivre]” (48–49). Experiencing asphyxia, he paradoxically “regained his breath.” He regained “the possibility of walking, seeing, and shouting in the heart of a prison that he was confined in, in impenetrable silence and darkness.” It was then that “he appeared at the narrow gate of his sepulchre, not resuscitated [non pas ressuscité] but dead, having abruptly, by the most merciless flash [le coup de foudre le plus impitoyable], the feeling that he was snatched from life and death at the same time.”¹³ Then, Thomas “walked, a painted mummy.” “He walked, the only true Lazarus whose very death was resuscitated [Il marchait, seul Lazare véritable dont la mort même était ressuscitée]” (49).

Nancy’s entire interpretation of what he refers to as “the difficult, strange and obstinately evasive thought of resurrection” in Blanchot pivots on this last sentence (144). He naturally takes *ressuscité* not to mean “reanimated [réanimé]” but, observing the context of Thomas’s tribulations, “resurrected.” Nancy seems to be equating the strange existence that Thomas leads throughout the novel—the *neutral* condition of

being dead-alive—with what he is calling “resurrection,” understood as a kind of transformation of death. For Nancy, this resurrection is not a reanimation, but a prolongation, a deepening of death, death emptied and hollowed out. Thus, *Thomas the Obscure* is not the depiction of the resurrection of Thomas but the resurrection of death. Nancy focuses on the phrase in *Thomas the Obscure* in which, in comparison to the Lazarus of the Gospel, Thomas is described as the only “true” or “genuine” Lazarus. According to Nancy, what happens to Lazarus is not a resurrection, for Lazarus is brought back to life: *he* is resurrected, but *his death* is not. Rather, it is Thomas who, in truth, undergoes resurrection. It is as if, at Nancy’s urging, resurrection itself, the event and the concept, is to be understood and interpreted from the standpoint of *Thomas the Obscure*.¹⁴

Yet, Thomas’s ordeal cannot be a matter of resurrection as it is conventionally understood—if it is at all a resurrection. Thomas’s “resuscitation” is not a sudden change of state, like the resurrection of Lazarus in the Bible, but an almost imperceptible, perpetual, bi-directional transition between “states.” This “resurrection” is either so far removed from its usual sense, which then begs the question as to why it has been called that and assigned such a great role in Nancy’s interpretation, or it is a kind of “resuscitation.” Perhaps *mort ressuscitée* has a different meaning in Blanchot’s text than “death resurrected” as chosen by Nancy. According to the *Littré*, *la resurrection* entered the French language in 1110. Most of the dictionary definitions of this term, whose source is the Latin *resuscitare* (*ranimer*), involve some relation to life, to a coming back to life. To refer to Thomas as “the only true or genuine Lazarus” can mean that Thomas is the truly real Lazarus whose death reappears or is recovered. Not having come back to life from death, but since already alive *and* dead, his very death is recovered or revived, it reappears (having never really gone away). In this way, we can make use of the figurative sense of *ressusciter*, which entered French in 1400: “To become again [redevenir], to reappear, to show a new influence,” and which is synonymous with *se relever*, that is, to stand or get up (again), to recover, to rise from. Or we could resort to a sixteenth-century definition of *ressusciter*, that is, “to come out of an *apparent* state of death.” Never quite dead, then, Thomas is thus not resurrected as such.

Given the narrative arc of *Thomas the Obscure* and its strange goings-on, it would by no means be inaccurate to say that what walks is alive *and* dead, has been alive and dead. He walks, not having come back to life from the dead, but, like a mummy, dazed, in a strange somnambulist, *neutral* “state,” exactly like Anne, who “alive and dead [vivante et morte]” staggers on her path in the thirteenth chapter of the first version (265). As the narrative of *Thomas the Obscure* unfolds, the reader is confronted with the strange fluidity or metamorphosis of states, entities, forms, and bodies characteristic of

all of Blanchot's writing. Figures and feelings pass into each other, haunt one another. Thomas's experience of living and dying is in the *neutral* (*au neutre*), neither . . . nor, both *x* and not *x*. This is why Thomas feels himself dead *and* absent from death. He sees himself dead but is unable to treat himself as such, thus facing death as if he were not dead.

An examination of Nancy's general interpretation of Blanchot would allow us to distinguish a number of essential motifs in his reading:

1. Nancy's reading privileges a certain Blanchot, the Blanchot of *L'Espace littéraire*. His focus on the Blanchot of *L'Espace littéraire* almost to the exclusion of other texts draws a veil over the fact that the notion of "dying" becomes further enriched in subsequent texts, such as *Le Pas au-delà* and *L'Écriture du désastre*, through an engagement with Levinas, especially the Levinas of *Otherwise than Being*. Nancy writes as if Blanchot's texts had not been in constant and vigilant engagement with the Hegelian and Heideggerian notions of death with the accompaniment of Levinas all along.

For example, in *L'Écriture du désastre*, Blanchot gradually develops a relation between writing, patience, and passivity, and then between passivity, dying, and the rapport with *Autrui*. In dying, Blanchot emphasizes, there is always a relation to the other. Patience, he explains, opens me entirely to a passivity beyond measure. In this "passivity of dying," an "I" that is no longer myself responds (29). In the relation of myself to *Autrui*, *Autrui* wrests me of my identity, causing me to take leave of it. There where the other replaces or substitutes for the Same, where passivity makes me idle (*me désœuvrer*) and destroys me, I am also pressed into a responsibility that exceeds me. This responsibility "distances me from myself" (46). This "I" responsible for *Autrui*, an "I without I [un moi sans moi]," is fragility itself, a patience beyond passivity (37). In this patience, Blanchot notes, "where power or initiative does not reign [. . .] dying is living [le mourir est le vivre], the passivity of life, escaped from itself" (40). Blanchot calls this "passivity without subject [passivité sans sujet], dying outside [one]self [le mourir hors de soi]" (50). When the subject "becomes absence, the absence of the subject or dying as subject" exposes "life to its passivity" (51). Explicitly distinguishing "death" from "dying," Blanchot, in the later fragments of the text, goes on to associate the former with "power [pouvoir]," "force [puissance]," and with "the limited," whereas the latter is linked to "non-power" and the crossing of boundaries (81). Dying, what further on in the text he calls the "impossibility of dying," is not a purposeful activity but that which is without goal.

2. Nancy's special attention to the Blanchot of *L'Espace littéraire* and the notion of death developed in that text allows him to interpret Blanchot as a profound thinker of death and to further reflect upon and rewrite this theme in his own work.¹⁵ The

stress placed on the phrase “mort ressuscitée” in *Thomas the Obscure* thus permits Nancy to present a general reading of Blanchot in which the term or concept of resurrection plays an extremely significant role. A sentence in *L'Espace littéraire* in which the noun *la resurrection* appears in relation to death, however, could support Nancy's reading. In “Rilke et l'exigence de la mort” Blanchot notes that “dying,” for Rilke, “would not be to die, but to transform the fact of death.” Blanchot details the shift in Rilke's thought from a personal death to the transmutation of death in us, accomplished by death itself. “In this readier [plus prompt] death resurrection is expressed, the joy of a transfigured life [l'allégresse d'une vie transfigurée]” (189). Blanchot later writes of an “inward conversion,” “a purification of death by death,” a death to which no authentic relation is possible (195). This “transmutation” of death “makes of death the infinite movement of dying,” a transformation or metamorphosis that does not ever cease. It is as if, he adds, it were a matter of “dying always more [mourir toujours plus]” (205). In this way, Nancy's newly-coined concept of “resurrection” could stand for Blanchot's “dying.” Resurrection, thus, can be read as the transmutation or transfiguration of death.

Yet to read the phrase *mort ressuscitée* as “death resurrected,” given the historical weight and religious significance of the term *resurrection*, is not a simple, innocent gesture. Resurrection, one of the most important tenets of Christian worship, is such a highly charged term that it is impossible for it not to function, whatever Nancy's wishes, as part of a strange recuperation for and in the name of Christianity. Perhaps dying, this death without truth, a death without death, is not the reprieve that the term *resurrection*, regardless of Nancy's denials, implies.

3. In order to underscore his reading of resurrection, Nancy is insistent upon the status of Thomas as “the only genuine” or “true” Lazarus in *Thomas the Obscure*. However, Blanchot's phrase “le seul Lazare véritable” cannot be taken as an underscoring of the “true” or truth itself because in all his writings Blanchot has shown suspicion regarding the relation of truth to death. As early as *La Part du feu* he emphasizes that “no true death [mort véritable]” is to be found in Kafka's work (78).¹⁶ In *L'Espace littéraire* Blanchot associates the real and the true (*le vrai*) with a conception of death that he contests. In Part IV of that text, “L'Oeuvre et l'espace de la mort,” in a section entitled “Puis-je mourir?,” Blanchot explains that no one can be sure of dying, for “no one is linked to death by a *real* certitude [une certitude véritable]” (emph. Blanchot's). In fact, to think death would be to introduce into thought the supremely “doubtful” (117). In what he calls “the great religious systems of the West,” death is a relation to another world where precisely truth (*le vrai*) is believed to have its origin. Death brings with it “the guarantee of the incomprehensible but unshakable certitude of the

eternal.” According to such systems, “there is thus no difficulty in considering death as true [tenir la mort pour vraie]” (118). Turning to Kirilov’s contemplation of suicide in Dostoevsky’s *Demons*, Blanchot asks whether Kirilov, whose task becomes the search for the possibility of death, can “truly [vraiment]” die (123). Can he maintain the sense of this active and “industrious [travailleuse]” death; can he make death be for him “the force of the negative,” “the moment of supreme possibility?” In other words, Kirilov wants to know whether, “by the force of his action, he can render death active [agissante],” “make it true [la rendre vraie]” (124). Kirilov, who, like Mallarmé’s Igitur, believes that “death is true,” “a genuine act [un acte véritable],” wants to attain certainty, mastery, and truth through death (138). Yet, as Blanchot’s reading shows, perhaps death is not a particular relation to the negative, an absence that remains an active force in the world. Perhaps “the true [vraie] reality of death,” Blanchot writes when commenting on Rilke, is not simply to quit life; perhaps death is something other than its worldly reality (200-01). Perhaps it is that inevitable and inaccessible thing toward which “I” cannot go forth, in which “I” do not die, but where “one” does not cease or finish dying. It can be said of Thomas that he is *le seul Lazare véritable, véritable* not in the sense that he is *truly genuine* or the only *real* Lazarus, but in the sense that it is only Thomas’s story that reveals something *original* about death. Unlike Lazarus, Thomas’s is a “death” that would not be a rebirth, a “death” that could not be amortized and recuperated.

Moreover, Nancy is undoubtedly aware that in texts other than *L’Espace littéraire* Blanchot tends to refer to and favour not the “true” or “genuine” Lazarus but “the other” Lazarus, the lost Lazarus, the one that is *not* resurrected. For example, in a piece published in *L’Entretien infini* on Yves Bonnefoy entitled “Le Grand refus,” using wording consonant with the early texts, Blanchot contrasts Lazarus “saved and resurrected [sauvé et ressuscité]” with “what is there and makes you recoil [reculer], the anonymous corruption of the tomb, the one who already smells bad, the lost Lazarus, and not the Lazarus returned to the light of day [rendu au jour], by an undoubtedly admirable power [puissance], but precisely a power [. . .] that comes from death itself.”¹⁷ This would be death as “a power of being [un pouvoir d’être],” through which everything is determined as a possibility. Perhaps this is “the true death [la vraie mort], death become the movement of truth.” Yet, Blanchot asks, isn’t there “concealed in this true death [cette mort véritable]” “death without truth [la mort sans vérité], what in death is irreducible to the true, to all unveiling; what does not hide, reveal itself, or appear?” (50). What Blanchot contests here is not only death as a principle, as that which can and should be mastered, but also death linked to any notion of truth. Thus, the *other* Lazarus is “genuine” precisely because he does not belong to truth.

4. For Nancy, resurrection does not speak of a fantastic event or a spectacle. If resurrecting the dead is “a prodigious, miraculous operation” (135) and if the Lazarus of the Gospel is “a character of a miraculous story [le personnage d’un récit miraculeux]” (138), then resurrection is something much more earth-bound and mundane. Nancy notes the “*Lazare, veni foras*” section of the chapter entitled “Lire” in Blanchot’s *L’Espace littéraire*, where reading is described as akin to the act of calling Lazarus forth.¹⁸ According to Nancy’s interpretation of this section, there is “no reanimation [reviviscence] or miracle” involved. “If the operation of reading, inasmuch as it reveals [en tant qu’elle révèle], can be considered a ‘miracle’ (a term that Blanchot places in quotation marks, signaling at once an ordinary way of saying ‘miracle of reading’ and the operation carried out by Christ on Lazarus),” this miracle is not understood as a nature-defying operation, a fabulous, supernatural, fantastic event that exceeds common sense—for this would be the work of the negative (142). For Nancy, Blanchot’s invocation of thaumaturgy “provides a clarification of the sense of miracle.” This term “thaumaturgy,” Nancy notes, “distances itself from the evangelical miracle, pushing it in the direction of [du côté de] a scene of the magical or the marvelous [une scène magique].” This latter term, however, is used by Blanchot “with a slightly deprecative connotation.” Thomas, the name as well as the book, points to “a ‘marvel’ more marvellous [une ‘merveille’ plus merveilleuse], therefore less dazzling, than all the marvels of the Gospel, or . . . of the literature of the marvelous” (143). This “marvel” achieved through reading is read by Nancy as something that takes place “each instant in everyday language” (257).

While Nancy emphasizes the mundanity of the “miracle” of reading that happens every day, it is worth briefly turning to Blanchot’s text to see how much more ambiguous this “every day” is and how much hinges on the way the relevant passage from “Lire” is interpreted. Like the action of the sea and the wind on objects “fashioned by men,” Blanchot writes in “Lire,” reading transforms the book—making it smoother, making the work become a work. Yet, this “making [faire]” is not an activity but a yes-saying, an affirmation in the space opened by the yes (255). Drawing a comparison between “the work” and “the book,” Blanchot comments: “The book is there but the work is still hidden, perhaps radically absent, in any case dissimulated, obfuscated by the evidence of the book, behind which it [the work] awaits the liberating decision, *Lazare, veni foras*.” It is perhaps the mission of reading, Blanchot adds, “to make this stone,” the stone before the tomb, “fall.” Blanchot further elaborates what he calls the “miracle” of reading:

The “miracle” of reading—what perhaps clarifies for us the meaning of every thaumaturgy—is that here the stone and the tomb do not only hold back the cadaverous void which it is a matter of animating, it is that this stone and tomb constitute the presence, though dissimulated, of what must appear. To roll back the stone, to obliterate it [faire sauter] is

certainly something marvelous, but it is something that we achieve each instant in everyday language. And at every moment we converse with this Lazarus, dead for three days, perhaps since always [depuis toujours], who behind well-woven bandages, sustained by the most elegant conventions, responds to us and speaks to us in our hearts. (257)

Reading is the easiest thing, it is what we do all the time, but what responds to the call of literary reading, Blanchot writes, is not a door falling open or becoming transparent, but a “rougher, harsher stone,” what we could call the *other* stone, “tightly sealed, a crushing weight” (258). And the “opening” that constitutes reading is “a passage” to a space where nothing as such has meaning yet.

A non-literary book, composed of a tight web of already determined significations, has already been read by all even before it has been read. Its already determined meaning assures it its solid existence. Literary reading, however, is not comprehension, revelation, or unveiling. It is not a conversation or dialogue with the book or the author. It produces nothing, yet it is “more positive than creation, more creative” (259), for it is “each time the first and each time the only [chaque fois la première et chaque fois la seule]” (256). Even though “Lazarus” has been dead “since always,” he is also alive—and not simply brought back to life—through reading. To call him forth is not to make him live but to engage with that which is alive *and* dead, a living-dead—the very condition of every reading. For Blanchot, then, what is miraculous is the undecidability of the act of reading in the sense that it combines transparency *and* opacity, clarity *and* obscurity, gravity *and* levity.

Literary reading, then, can be said to involve a “logic,” if it can be called a logic, of “the both and,” “the neither-nor,” beyond dialectic. This neutral, spectral “logic,” beyond the opposition of real and unreal, is that of the spectre or *phantasma*. Literary space, that is, fictional space, is the very space of *phantasmata*. And the miraculous structurally belongs to this phantasmatic space, the space that also gives place to the marvellous (*le merveilleux*) and the extraordinary.¹⁹

Working with an opposition between the mundane everyday and the otherworldly miracle, Nancy’s reading equates the latter with something belonging to the religious. In this sense, the miraculous would simply be the hyperbolic opposite of the ordinary. This is why in Nancy’s reading of “Lire,” Blanchot is favoured as siding with the quotidian. One might even be able to say that in his interpretation Nancy is appealing to a certain view of the marvellous expressed by Blanchot in his 1947 essay “Du merveilleux.”²⁰ Yet the miraculous, or the marvellous, is what disturbs oppositional logic, exceeding dialectics. Preceding the distinction between the everyday and the otherworldly, the phantasmatic is not a matter of goblins or Scottish manors

found in fantastic tales. Rather, literary fiction is nothing but a *thaumatourgia*, “a wonder-working,” the “working” of miracles or magical feats without work.

Perhaps it is not a matter of Blanchot’s resurrection, but that of a “living death,” for he survives “buried alive.”

NOTES

1/ A first version of this essay was presented at the Maurice Blanchot and the Work of Thought Symposium at the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash University, Australia in August 2007. I would like to thank Andrew Benjamin for his generous invitation, Christopher Fynsk for his encouragement, and Nicholas Royle for kindly reading a draft of this essay.

2/ On the difference between the two versions of *Thomas l’obscur*, see Jean-Philippe Rimann’s “D’un Thomas l’autre” (*Furor* 29 [1999]: 53–72. Print).

3/ Even though I have greatly benefited from the published translation by Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (*Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*. New York: Fordham UP, 2008. Print), I have occasionally modified it.

4/ Nancy’s text was the opener for a series of papers organized around a workshop of readings of Blanchot by Pierre-Antoine Villemaine at Bibliothèque publique d’information de Beaubourg in 2004.

5/ Blanchot refers to this “pouvoir magique” in *La Part du feu* (27).

6/ This is what Derrida’s essay “De l’économie restreinte à l’économie générale: Un hegelianisme sans réserve” teaches us (*L’Écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil, 1967. 373. Print). Also see *Writing and Difference* (Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980. 254. Print).

7/ I have consulted the following published translations of Blanchot, which I have silently modified to reflect my reading: *The Space of Literature* (Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1982. Print); *The Infinite Conversation* (Trans. Susan Hanson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992. Print); *The Writing of the Disaster* (Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986. Print); and *Thomas the Obscure* (Trans. Robert Lambert. Barrytown, NY: Station Hill P, 1988. Print).

8/ According to Nancy, the phrase *mort ressuscitée* appears only once in *Thomas l’obscur*. In fact, it never appears as an isolated phrase in Blanchot’s text but only as part of the sentence “seul Lazare véritable dont la mort même était ressuscitée” (138).

9/ Ann Smock renders *inavènement* as “nonarrival” in her translation of *L’Écriture du désastre* (*The Writing of the Disaster*).

10/ We will have to leave aside for another occasion whether what Blanchot names “literature” corresponds to Nancy’s description.

11/ All translations are my own, as there is no current translation of this version. It must be noted that the recent edition of *Thomas l’obscur: Première version* does not have the same pagination as the edition to which Nancy often refers.

12/ An allusion to Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” in which Madeline, having been entombed alive, finds her way out.

13/ Modifying this passage for the new version, a fact that Nancy remarks upon in his essay, Blanchot removes any hint that Thomas has undergone a sudden change: “He appeared at the narrow gate of his sepulcher, not resuscitated but dead, having the certitude of being snatched at the same time from life and death” (*Thomas l’obscur: Nouvelle version*. Paris: Gallimard, 1950. Print).

14/ For a fascinating interpretation of resurrection we must refer to Nancy’s *Noli me tangere*.

15/ In fairness, Nancy discusses “life” and “joy” in relation to the question of death in “Fin du colloque” (a later text that brings the conference *Maurice Blanchot: Récits critiques* to an end) following the passing away of Blanchot. See, for example, “la mort joyeuse” (628) and “une vie allegée de la vie” (629, emph. Blanchot’s) in *Récits critiques* (Tours, FR: Farrago/Léo Scheer, 2003. 625–37. Print).

16/ This comment appears in “Le Language de fiction” (*La Part* 87).

17/ Lars Iyer astutely notes the references to Lazarus in *Blanchot's Communism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 91-92. Print).

18/ It is interesting that Blanchot's references to Lazarus always involve a relation to literature and literary reading.

19/ In a discussion of bearing witness and testimony in his book on Blanchot entitled *Demeure, Maurice Blanchot* (Paris: Galilée, 1998. Print), Derrida suggests that any testimony or bearing witness by essence testifies to the miraculous and the extraordinary. He goes on to note that since testifying and literary fiction share the same condition, they both belong *a priori* to the order of the miraculous. What links literary fiction and testimony, then, is the miracle. In this admittedly undeveloped parenthetical remark, Derrida also connects the miraculous, the fantastic, and the marvellous to what he calls “the phantasmatic,” a connection that he emphasizes in “Maurice Blanchot est mort” (*Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*. Paris: Galilée, 2003. 321-32. Print). The notion of the miraculous thus, I would like to argue, becomes a very important node of contestation between Nancy and Derrida's readings of Blanchot. What is at stake between them is not only a reading of resurrection in relation to the *merveilleux* and the miraculous, a reading that would also involve an interpretation of Hegel and the power of the negative, but also of death and the status of the literary.

20/ Writing of the extraordinary and the marvellous (*merveilleux*) in a 1947 essay “Du merveilleux,” Blanchot reminds us that the marvellous is a term Breton used in the first *Manifesto*, writing on behalf of Surrealism against the fantastic (*le fantastique*). “What is admirable in the fantastic,” Breton there wrote, “is that there is no [longer anything] fantastic: there is only the real.” See *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962. 25. Print) and *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1972. 15. Print). In Blanchot's reading of fantastic tales, it is everyday existence that reveals the fantastic. For E.T.A. Hoffmann, for example, the experience of the imaginary takes place in the most quotidian reality. Blanchot's article, which is a review of a slew of fantastic tales that had been published in France, explains that in these tales reality is “the very site of the unreal [irréel] that unceasingly interrupts it, tears it apart, that is its profound manifestation and guarantee.” “The unlikely, the improbable [l'invraisemblable] is the truth of the real” (123). For further discussions of Breton and Surrealism by Blanchot, also see “Réflexions sur le surréalisme” in *La Part* and “Le Demain joueur” in *L'Entretien*. This view of the fantastic and the marvellous undergoes rewriting and reconsideration with the notion of the image and the imaginary, and is displaced with a deepened reading of Kafka.

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