

In Wildness is the Refusal of the World: Gerald Bruns's Reading of Maurice Blanchot

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As the subtitle of Gerald Bruns book indicates, the guiding motif of his study is Maurice Blanchot's "great refusal," the refusal of philosophy. This refusal is manifest, on Bruns's reading, in Blanchot's conception of poetry as well as his political dissidence, where it takes the forms of an insubordination toward aesthetic categorization, the spiritual teleology of history, and instrumental rationality. This "philosophical anarchism" (xxi) is a primordial and paradoxical "ontological" event rather than a subjective act, but it must nonetheless must be understood in terms of exigency, responsibility, and justice. In Blanchot's texts, this event is an interruption of philosophical thinking given such monikers as poetry, writing (*écriture*), the "relation" of the third kind, the Neutral, the Disaster, the Outside, the *Il y a*. Moving carefully from fragment to fragment of Blanchot's major works, Bruns offers a careful exposition of these terms which aims to be philological rather than philosophical; the goal is to clarify Blanchot's texts, not to "lay bare anything like an underlying logic" (xii). Proceeding in a roughly chronological fashion, the book opens with an investigation into the confluence of Mallarmé, Heidegger, and Hegel in the development of Blanchot's conception of poetry, and closes by examining the discussions of community and responsibility found in the later, fragmentary works. Interrupting these chronological sections, between the poem and the fragment, a section explores Blanchot's engagement with the works of Celan, Bataille, and especially Levinas. Levinas is of central importance, here and throughout the book, because of his proximity with Blanchot on the central issue of alterity or exteriority. But despite this proximity, Levinas remains a philosopher. Blanchot's distance from Levinas is therefore pivotal to understanding his refusal of philosophy.

My intentions here are, first, to retrace the foundational moves in the development of Blanchot's position in order to clarify his refusal of philosophy: what is this refusal, and what motivates it? Especially important here are Blanchot's readings of Heidegger and Hegel, which form the cornerstone of his view of poetry in its primordial anarchy and impossibility. Second, I will examine Blanchot's parting of ways with Levinas, as this bears on the issue of Blanchot's "great refusal." According to Bruns, the decision to embrace or refuse philosophy rests with how exteriority is understood. But my retracing of this story is biased, or at least selective--though not, I think, inaccurate--since I recount it with the purpose of raising a question for Professor Bruns. My discussion will remain, for the most part, immanent to Bruns's presentation of Blanchot. In other words, I am not primarily concerned with whether Bruns has "gotten Blanchot right," or with what his commentary adds to other recent commentaries. Rather, I wish to raise a question about what follows from this reading of Blanchot, where it leaves us with respect to philosophy and exteriority. The possibility I want to raise could be stated provisionally by altering a well-known phrase from Thoreau: "In Wildness is the Refusal of the World." More precisely, my question concerns the exteriority of nature: Is the possibility of reading nature among that "family of unclarifiable concepts" (191) by which Blanchot names the Unnameable inscribed in the margins of Bruns's own presentation of Blanchot's refusal? Can an interpretation of Blanchot be carried forward in this fashion, although it certainly goes beyond what Bruns or Blanchot have themselves said, or is the word "nature" one word too many?

I. An-archy of the *Il y a*

The key term for Blanchot's refusal in his early writings is "poetry." Bruns makes the compelling case that Blanchot's later conceptions and terms can be related back to this beginning. Crucial for Blanchot's development are his readings of Heidegger and Hegel: From Heidegger, Blanchot takes the notion of earth, and from Hegel the conception of negation as the motor of dialectical progression. Looking first at

Heidegger, we find that the "'foundational' contradiction" (12-13) at the heart of Blanchot's conception of poetry is drawn from the world-disclosive function of the artwork. While opening the world, the artwork remains on the hither side of this opening, outside of the possibility which the opening conditions. As external to possibility, the work's "ontological" role is literally im-possible. Only to the extent that the opened region is both earth and world can the work be included therein, since earth is "that which closes itself up as the limit or finitude of the world" (13). The limit of the world lies at the *es gibt* which refuses disclosure within the world, making the world possible while turning the world, and subjectivity with it, "inside out" (15). As density, *Dichtung*, the earth lies outside of culture, outside of aesthetics, outside of truth or falsity, outside of the division of subjective and objective, exposing the world and its internal structures (including its uses of language) to an an-archic origin--an anarchy on the hither side of the segregation of order from chaos. It is this reading of the *es gibt*, interpreting Heidegger through a Mallarméan lens--insisting, that is, on the exteriority of the artwork with respect to the world it opens--that undergirds Blanchot's "refusal." Bruns returns to Heidegger's notion of earth repeatedly to make sense of the work as an "event" (57), a "limit-experience" (84), a non-identity (95) and an impossibility (128).

From this ontological (or, perhaps, proto-ontological) beginning, it follows that Blanchot's "philosophical anarchism" is not a matter of subjective will. The writer is not oriented toward writing outside of possibility, writing with nothing to say, as toward a goal: "it stands apart from all investigation; it cannot be taken as an end" ([20] FP 11/GO 5).¹ At the same time, such ontological errancy entails a politically-charged refusal of speech, where "speaking"—either resisting or collaborating with "the total fabric that constitutes the conditions of possibility of speech"—entails complicity with a "transcendental" violence (22-23).² The refusal of subordination which marks Blanchot's anarchism is equally the refusal of traditional

1. Citations will use Bruns's abbreviations, where applicable. When quoting a passage cited by Bruns, I will first give Bruns's page number in brackets, followed by the citation of the quotation.

2. If Blanchot, during his brush with fascism, could have been considered a "propagandist for terrorism," the question, Bruns suggests, is whether such "violence and terror are not in some sense transcendental" (28).

political binaries, e.g., passive vs. active, politics vs. aesthetics, violence vs. non-violence, Marxism vs. capitalism (29). As a refusal outside of binary, or dialectical, oppositions—a refusal, that is, of complicity with the sovereignty of a system within which either collaboration or resistance serve as justification—Blanchot's refusal is neither the simple rejection of law for chaos, nor a passivity opposed to willful action, but the revolutionary event which interrupts the dialectic's sovereignty. The name for this "monkey-wrenching" of philosophy is poetry, or later, writing (*écriture*).

From Kojève's reading of Hegel, Blanchot learns the name of totality's operative mechanism: negation. The key to language's power lies in its potential to obliterate the being named. The word requires the absence of the being, therefore naming is (the possibility of) death. From this angle, the common bond between Hegel and Sade is their parallel pursuit, through the force of reason, of a total and sovereign negation. But while reason is left holding the empty concept, poetry struggles to speak the name of what is excluded: the murdered being, the materiality of existence itself prior to its negation. At the heart of poetry hides an essential contradiction made necessary by the negative power of language: Poetry strives to say everything by means of language, while language can function only through the murder of what it seeks to name (43). Like Eurydice, the existence prior to being slips away. But poetry, playing the role of Orpheus, must continually turn its gaze backward into the night preceding the world's disclosure. Poetry refuses to collaborate with the negation language entails, preferring the impossible task already laid out by Heidegger: it wishes to "take the side of things" (46). "It wants the cat as it exists, the pebble *taking the side of things*, not man, but the pebble, and in this pebble what man rejects by saying it" ([47] PF 316/GO 46). The poem renounces possession of the world in favor of an im-possible return to materiality, existence before or without being.

Language thereby divides itself into two aspects or slopes. The first is the language of negation, of the proposition or of philosophy. But the second is the language of poetry, language which pursues its impossible dream of merging with the materiality of the thing. Janus-faced at the opening of the world, one

slope of language constructs a totalizing system of representations, while the other slope--poetry or literature--sides with the materiality of things by means of its own materiality. Just as Thomas experiences language as a permeation of his body by words (37), the materiality of the word, "the fact that words are things too, are a kind of nature" ([49] PF 316/GO 46) grounds literature's "concern for the reality of things, for their unknown, free, and silent existence" ([49] PF 319/GO 49). Like a "strange insectlike buzzing in the margins" ([50] PF 321/GO 52), poetry is an "anonymous and incessant rustling of discourse just this side of earshot" (50).

The anonymous rustling is, of course, the rustling of the *Il y a*, an appropriately modified translation of Heidegger's *es gibt*³ equivalent to "existence without being," the "Outside," and the "Neutral:" if anything is the key to Blanchot's entire *œuvre*, Bruns proclaims, the *Il y a* is it (52). Blanchot's refusal of philosophy could arguably be construed, then, as a persistent effort to out-Heidegger Heidegger, to think what he left unthought in situating the artwork outside of the world it discloses (cf. 52, 85). As an event of the *Il y a*, poetry or literature is neither an autonomous entity nor a subjective creation; it has neither a narrative form nor the temporality of worldly events. Rather, the interruptive moment which hovers on the margin of the world is anonymous, between time, neither self nor other, non-self-identical, neither in nor outside of space.

Three moments of the "experience" of the *Il y a*, if "experience" is the word,⁴ must be clarified at this juncture: First, the *Il y a* is not accessed through perception or sensation, at least as these are traditionally understood. The *Il y a* transports us to a time "without project" and an "experience without intentionality" (127).⁵ In the night of the *il y a*, the dialectical opposition between visible and invisible is effaced (73). This

3. See Levinas's discussion of the translation of *il y a* in *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. by Richard Cohen (Duquesne, 1985), pp. 47-52. Bruns refers to Levinas's comments at 57-8, 291n6, 292n11.

4. It may well be that we may use this word only in Bataille's sense, e.g., as "the exposure or expenditure of the subject in communication, where communication is a species of contagion" (53). Or, as Blanchot puts it, "there is experience in the strict sense only where something radically *other* is in play" (128, citing EI 66/IC 46).

5. "A time without event, without project, without possibility..." (EI 62/IC 44).

breakdown of sensible intentionality appears, for instance in Levinas's discussion of fascination: "[w]hat happens is not an active contact, not the initiative and action which there still is in real touching" ([60] EL 28-9/SL 32). Blanchot agrees that "the immediate excludes everything immediate: this means all direct relation, all mystical fusion, and all sensible contact" ([125] EI 53/IC 38). Sensibility is a power, an activity of a subject within the world, while the *Il y a* is, as we have seen, a site of impossibility.

But, secondly, the experience of the *Il y a* involves an immediacy of materiality. This materiality is a "reversal" of touching, and an "original experience" (62, 86). It is this materiality which Levinas describes, in the case of cubist art, as a "paroxysm of materiality" ([60] DEE 91/EE 56-7). Bear in mind that writing, as a "pure" striving for the absolute, seeks an immediate contact with the "materiality of being." But writing also entails "the recognition that this passion cannot be satisfied within the world" (83). The impossible experience which writing strives to name, therefore, is the opaque density of the earth. Perhaps, Bruns suggests, one could go so far as to say that the *Il y a* is itself "made of words" (75)—but only insofar as these words "belong to the region of the singular or of things that have not been turned into phenomena or concepts" (125). The experience of the *Il y a* in its materiality would belong, then, to someone who "cannot see through things. Someone on this side, on the skin or fleshy side, of discourse, where language is still visible, or where it can be felt like a breath" (88). Bruns makes use of phrases borrowed from Celan:⁶ The exposed surface of the skin (147), the "skin of the earth" (101), the "breath or flesh" of language (xvi, 88, 90, 95, 101, 147, 157, 159), the night's breathing (134). What is evoked by such phrases is the earthen roots of a discourse outside the systematic totality of language, a literally impossible discourse. It should be noted that this discourse is "a conversation with things as well as with people, a neutral as well as ethical conversation" (97).

The third moment of the *Il y a*, and the refusal it occasions, is its exigency. For Blanchot, as for Heidegger, poetry takes the side of things by demanding their freedom from instrumental rationality and

6. Language as "flesh or breath" is quoted from Celan (GW 3:188/CP 39) on 159.

insisting on preserving the "undisclosable, self-secluding earth" from any "technical-scientific objectification of nature" (84-5). The limit-experience of the *Il y a* is an experience of anarchy (84), wild freedom (94, 88-9), responsibility (96, 129, 210 f.), and revolt (242); it is an ontological demand for *Gelassenheit* (89). On Bruns's reading, the *Il y a* demands "a responsiveness that is no less ethical for being a *Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*: a releasement turned toward things and not just toward other people" (93). This emphasis on the letting-be or releasement of things comes out clearly in Blanchot's discussion of the role Nietzsche's eternal recurrence plays in short-circuiting the will-to-power: the "weakness of the negative, and the way in which nothingness unmask itself in the being that cannot be negated, lays waste at one stroke to our attempts to dominate the earth and to free ourselves from nature by giving it a meaning--that is, by denaturing it" ([139, 192] EI 224/IC 149).

The *Il y a* issues a demand, the command to which the writer responds, but it must also be remembered that this demand is impossible to meet. Quoting Schlegel, Blanchot writes: "To have a system, this is what is fatal for the mind; not to have one, this too is fatal. Whence the necessity to observe, while abandoning, the two requirements at once" (WD 61). The *Il y a*, as the Neutral, insists on two temporalities: one of day, the other of night (192); two deaths: one a possibility of action, the other beyond all possible relation (202); dual exigencies: one dialectical, the other not (211), one on the side of being and nothingness, the other radically exterior even to these putatively fundamental ontological poles. From another time, outside all relation and power of the subject, outside being itself, the impossible demand of the *Il y a* comes.

II. Speaking of Sticks and Stones

From Levinas's perspective, Blanchot's description of an exigency or a responsibility emerging from the *Il y a* is impossible.⁷ "The nocturnal prolongation of the element is the reign of mythical gods," Levinas argues in *Totality and Infinity*. Against "the very strangeness of the earth," Enjoyment "has the recourse of labor and possession" (TI/142). Such labor "cannot be called violence: it is applied to what is faceless, to the resistance of nothingness. . . . It attacks only the facelessness of the pagan gods whose nothingness is henceforth exposed" (TI 160). On Bruns's interpretation, Levinas and Blanchot divide precisely here, "with Levinas attempting to escape the anonymity or non-sense (or poetry) of the *il y a* . . . while Blanchot remains behind, on the hither side of Being. This breaking free from poetry is the first moment of philosophy" (61). Levinas struggles to break free from the *Il y a*, and thereby takes the step into philosophy. Blanchot, by contrast, lingers on the hither side of intelligibility. Blanchot's refusal of philosophy, and Levinas's decision to embrace it, turn on their stance toward the *Il y a* and the nature of responsibility to alterity. The question, in Simon Critchley's words, comes down to this: "Does the word 'Other' translate the impersonal *autre* or the personal *autrui*?"⁸

For clarification of Blanchot's position, Bruns returns to Heidegger's remark in "The Nature of Language": "We tend to think of the face-to-face exclusively as a relation between human being. . . . Yet being face-to-face with another has a more distant origin where earth and sky, god and man reach one another. Goethe, and Mörike too, like to use the phrase 'face-to-face with one another' not only with respect to human beings but also with respect to things of the world" ([104] US 211/OWL 104). One cannot help but think of Sisyphus face-to-face with his rock in what Blanchot calls "a beautiful image of the 'elementary'

7. The existence of an exteriority does not entail responsibility or ethics for Levinas, as the case of the *Il y a* demonstrates (though, of course, Levinas would deny that exteriority truly exists in this case). In this sense, Levinas is in a strange agreement with Michel Haar's question to Simon Critchley. See "*Il y a*--Holding Levinas's Hand to Blanchot's Fire," in *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, edited by Carolyn Gill (Routledge, 1996), 108-122, especially 121, note 27.

8. Critchley, "*Il y a*," 111. Bruns's book can perhaps be read as satisfying Critchley's call for "a reading of Blanchot's *réécits* in terms of the absolute relation to the *autrui*." See "*Il y a*," 117. It is worth noting that Bruns commented on the presentation version of Critchley's essay (see 188n1).

that is within him and outside him" ([130] EI 262/IC 175). In taking the side of things, poetry places us face to face with things and with the earth, now stripped of our worldly designs.

But Levinas rejects the "impersonal neutrality" of the *Il y a* as a possible basis for responsibility, since "it is only man who can be absolutely foreign to me" ([106] Tel 71/TI 73). While Blanchot, following Celan, may listen for the language "of stones and stars" (159),⁹ to the ears of Levinas "[t]he sounds and noise of nature are failed words. To really hear a sound we need to hear a word. Pure sound is the word" ([107] HS 219/LR 148). In an essay on the narrative voice, Blanchot counters that "The other speaks. But when the other is speaking, no one speaks because the other (*l'autre*), which we must refrain from honoring with a capital letter that would determine it by way of a majestic substantive, as though it had some substantial or even unique presence, is precisely never simply the other. The other is neither the one nor the other. . . ." ([170] EI 64-5/IC 385). Bruns illustrates the point with reference to Celan's "Psalm," in which "as the conversation develops the speech of the sticks and stones merges with the talk of the *ich*" (171). For Blanchot, the other is the Neutral: neither one nor the other. The Neutral other of the *Il y a* is "neither in nature nor in culture" ([143] EI 386/IC 258), but rather "where man is the other but the other is no longer human" (133). In Bruns's words, Blanchot insists that "[W]e are to imagine the other not as magisterial but as monstrous," inhuman, inhabiting a "wilderness of the excluded" (118).

These differences concerning the characterization of exteriority find their basis in different views of language. Language remains central to the experience of the face throughout Levinas's itinerary, from the "discourse" of *Totality and Infinity* to the "Saying" of *Otherwise than Being*. But neither view of language can be confused with Blanchot's poetry. In *Totality and Infinity*, the objectivity of objects and our possessive grasp of the world is restored through the word of the Other, "the Master who by his word gives meaning to phenomena and permits them to be thematized" ([112] TeI 102/TI 100). Nature does not speak, but is rather a theme of speech: discourse "permits me to render the things offerable" to the Other (TI 109). As Levinas

9. Citing Adorno on Celan, AeT 477/ AT 444.

later writes, poetry is a "proximity of things" which must be mediated through the "approach of a neighbor" (DHH 228/ CPP 118-9). Finally, in *Otherwise than Being*, the Saying can and must be thematized in a philosophy that "makes this astonishing adventure . . . intelligible" ([115] AE 75/OTB 44). Here we find Levinas's characteristic hierarchization of ethical (i.e., human) language over the language of things, as well as the inevitable turn toward the intelligible, i.e., philosophy. Unsettled by the sound of the *Il y a*, Levinas "cannot abandon philosophy, that is, cannot give up the discourse of concepts and definitions" (114).

Blanchot's "great refusal" turns on a different view of language, which leads him to pose the following question to Levinas: "if the ethical relation is a relation of language, a relation in which the other speaks to me, does this not introduce into this relation 'certain exigencies that might reverse or overturn speech itself?'" ([111] NCC 82-83/ OCC 45). These exigencies are the rumblings of the *Il y a*. The Neutral *Il y a*, Bruns explains, is an "interruption not just of ontology but even of ethics as first philosophy." If Blanchot's claims about language are correct, this might explain why the *Il y a* "stubbornly refuses to disappear" from Levinas's analyses, why it "keeps on returning like the proverbial repressed, relentlessly disturbing the linearity of the exposition."¹⁰ As Levinas himself admits, the *Il y a* continues to haunt interiority like a satirical doubt, an "evil genius," the "laughter that destroys language" ([110] TeI 91-92/TI 91-2). Given that Blanchot's first essay on *Totality and Infinity* begins with Bataille's definition of the philosopher as "someone who is afraid" ([118] EI 70/IC 49), we might ask why Levinas fears the *Il y a*. In any case, it is to this neutral and anonymous other, rather than the magisterial *Autrui*, that Blanchot seeks to respond, leading him to appropriate *le Dire* as neutral rather than ethical in his later texts. As Bruns explains, this appropriation is "not so much a dispute with Levinas as a tacit rewriting of ethics as a poetics of the Outside" (111).

III. Wildness as Refusal of the World

10. Critchley, "*Il y a*," 112.

Given that the exchange with Levinas concerns the scope of alterity, or at least the scope of ethics, Blanchot might be interpreted as "extend[ing] the question of alterity beyond the limits of ethical theory" (299n16).¹¹ If what is encountered in the Outside is "neither human nor inhuman," but makes possible a "conversation with things as well as people" (97), perhaps we may read Blanchot as offering a radical critique of anthropocentrism. If the anarchy revealed by poetry is precisely a revolt against the Philosopher-King on behalf of everything exiled from the Republic, an exigency for, in Nancy's word, "wild freedom" and an impossible demand to converse with sticks and stones, we seem to have here a defense of Nature in Thoreau's sense: "absolute freedom and wildness."¹² Of course Thoreau is a far cry from Blanchot: for him, the "wild" in literature and the poet who "nail[s] words to their primitive senses" in order to "transplant them to his page with earth adhering to their roots" remain in the service of *preserving* the (natural) world. Here Wildness is nature opposed by culture, worldly nature, and Thoreau calls for a conservation operating within the dialectical structure our logic imposes. But perhaps a radicalized Thoreau would not be so far from Blanchot, if he might pursue the impossible project of speaking on behalf of a wildness that *refuses* the world.

Blanchot's poetry is the resistance which Aristotle's *poesie* cannot tame. Is there not also a wildness which resists *physis* and Aristotle's logical taxonomy? If it is true, as Bruns's reading of Blanchot compellingly argues, that philosophy has always entailed the subjugation of poetry, it is no less true that philosophy has always been a conquest of nature (Heidegger's warnings on this point are clear). "I'm a lover of learning," Socrates says in the *Phaedrus*, "and trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town do."¹³ Poetry is exiled from the Republic, but nature has always already been so exiled

11. Bruns's remark here actually concerns Derrida's reading of Celan, but the remark sets the stage for Blanchot's break from Levinas.

12. Thoreau, "Walking," *The Portable Thoreau* (Viking, 1964), 598.

13. *Phaedrus* 230d. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Pantheon, 1961), 479. This passage was brought to my attention by David Abram, who provides a provocative reading of the *Phaedrus* in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Vintage, 1997), especially 113-118.

One shouldn't forget Bruns's passing remark that Blanchot represents "perhaps everything" that Plato warned us against (41).

through the very division of polis from wilderness. Perhaps art and nature have something deeper in common, something not lost on a philosophy which has always treated them as imitations of each other, from the Scholastic "argument from design" to Kant's curiously circular attempt to distinguish natural objects from works of art in his *Critique of Judgement*.¹⁴ If the artist's task may be construed as speaking (with) nature on the hither side of man, or as taking the side of things, perhaps this is because art and nature are on the same "side:" the lost space excluded from the rational world.

Wildness or nature in this sense must be sharply distinguished from that nature opposed to culture of which philosophy has always spoken. The earth of the artwork is not earth as the "original arche" which Husserl finds to be the constitutive origin of bodily spatiality;¹⁵ nor is Nature the "place of all possibles" within which Dufrenne would confine the work of art.¹⁶ Blanchot takes care to reject any equation of exteriority with such a conception of nature. He denies any possible mediation between man and man by way of a "subsistence of nature" ([120] EI 97/IC 68). Perception, for instance, is not a means of access to the outside, since it is "a wisdom rooted in the ground and standing fixed in the direction of the opening; it is of the land, in the proper sense of the term," even "planted in the earth" ([124] EI 40/IC 28). Blanchot's later figure of the Outside, the Jewish exile, is a stranger to nature (164). By contrast, the pagan, like the Greek, is a figure of the Same: "to be pagan is to be fixed, to plant oneself in the earth, as it were, to establish oneself through a pact with permanence that authorizes sojourn and is certified by certainty in the land" ([217] EI 183/IC 125). Being planted on the earth, planting in the earth, requires having a horizon cleared;

14. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, translated by W. S. Pluhar (Hackett, 1987), pp. 170-176. For an interesting commentary on Kant's dilemma in distinguishing art from nature within the context of an examination of Blanchot's theory of the work of art, see Paul Davies, "The Work and the Absence of the Work," in *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, *op. cit.*, 99-101.

15. Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature," in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, edited by Peter McCormick and Frederick Elliston (Notre Dame, 1981), 222-233.

16. Dufrenne, "Literary Criticism and Phenomenology," in *In the Presence of the Sensuous: Essays in Aesthetics*, edited by Mark S. Roberts and Dennis Gallagher (Humanities, 1987), 168-9. Note that Dufrenne introduces this conception of Nature to refute Blanchot's "aesthetic nihilism" (167).

it requires an open space of possible action over which one's powers can range.¹⁷ But there is another nature in Blanchot, in the poem that takes the side of things, in the humming of insects, the voice of the pebble on the hither side of man's world, the night, the wilderness as the space of the exile, the prophet (and perhaps the savage?). How, then, can Blanchot continue to speak only in terms of *human* community; and if *Autru* must be read as essentially neutral, why must *man* be the "name for the nameless" (117)?¹⁸

Perhaps naming the other "nature" is saying too much, since, strictly speaking, the other is unnameable--and perhaps, as Celan points out, even naming it the unnameable is saying too much (95). To be sure, the Neutral cannot be directly interrogated since it is "preeminently the thought that will not allow itself to be thought" (197). And if the Neutral stands outside of nature and culture, certainly it would be misleading to associate it with either of the two. But, on the other hand, we are compelled to name the outside, and in so doing, to interrupt the philosophical totality. "Whenever we speak with things this way [i.e., poetically]," Celan says, "we also dwell on the question of their where-from and where-to, an 'open' question 'without resolution.' . . . we have ventured far outside" ([98] GW 3:199/CP 50). Remember that the poem is the search for totality *par excellence*, but with this difference from philosophy: "the impossibility of being accomplished is included in its condition, so that if it ever happens to be accomplished, it is only as something not possible" ([153] PF 109/WF 105). The thought of the outside is a thinking which will not let itself be thought--but only in so doing can it "succeed," only thus can it challenge the closure of the Same. While it is certainly true that we cannot think nature as the pure outside, that we cannot cast off our cultural goggles for a glimpse at Eurydice, are we not still compelled to do just that? The danger of naming, as Blanchot tells us, is not a rejection of naming so much as the non-identity or anonymity of the name (187).

17. Note that these pagans are in the service of subduing the earth, building homesteads; if they are worshiping the elemental's faceless gods, they do so from the security of the hearth.

18. The point I wish to make against Blanchot is roughly parallel to Critchley's point against Levinas: to associate the Neutral with man is "to smuggle a metaphysical presupposition into a quasi-phenomenological description." See "*Il y a*," 116 and *passim*.

The ambiguity of "*il*," between "he" and "it" in the phantom subject of the *Il y a*, is perhaps our clue to carrying this anonymity forward.

Perhaps it is not so surprising, then, to find that "wandering in the Wilderness" is Kafka's watchword (63), or for Bataille to write that "supreme knowledge leaves one as night leaves a child, naked in the depths of the woods" ([137] ExI 88/IE 54). It seems fitting, somehow, for Blanchot to call the neutral relation of love a "return to the wilderness" ([157] CI 168/UC 40), and for Bruns to speak of a "wilderness of the excluded" (118). We do not need an explanation of why wilderness, rather than, say, a garden or a potted plant, can name the unnameable. Our "family of unclarifiable concepts" must maintain some link to experience, even if this is an "impossible experience," or better, a limit-experience—even, that is, if we must adopt Bataille's definition of experience as expenditure or as the explosion of self-identity, rather than the "experience" of phenomenology or existentialism. Our words for exteriority are, in any case, inherently linked with nature and materiality—this is obviously so with "exteriority" and "Outside" themselves, but also wilderness, skin, breath, flesh, the sky's rumbling, the murmur of insects, the speech of stones and stars (as well as Sisyphus face-to-face with his rock).

Blanchot warns against an "insidious" return to Nature, by way of the body for instance, which gives the "illusory impression of being outside of meaning already" (WD 45). An insidious return to the immediate which reinscribes the dialectic it dreams of having avoided is certainly a dead-end. Perhaps our task is rather a return to flesh and breath as the site of the anonymous, as the one and not-one. In the neutral *Il y a*, the distinction between things and humans breaks down, but a bond of materiality is also forged. This "impossible" materiality may be our only "relation" with the flesh of the world, though it is admittedly a "relation of the third kind." As a return to the flesh of the *il y a*, perhaps the problem of nature (and the body) is parallel to that of skepticism: the resistance of nature's materiality "is the return of the refuted, that which erupts anarchically, capriciously, and irregularly each time" ([231] ED 123/WD 76). In such wildness is the refusal of the world, and the refusal of philosophy. Such is Blanchot's gift to us.