

Quantization of Alterity and Transcendence, A Case Study of Maurice Blanchot's *Thomas the Obscure*: Levinas's Diachronic Temporality vis-à-vis Heidegger's Synchronic Temporalization

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Abstract

In the Heideggerian conception of time, time's reality and authenticity originate from the self or the same and subsists independent of the Other. While *Dasein* and being-in-the-world are not excluded from the Other in Heidegger's perspective, however, he endeavours to keep distance from the Other so as not to be entangled in its whirl and abyss. While Heidegger's synchronic temporality survives on Dasein's understanding of the self and prioritizes its temporalization over that of the Other, Emmanuel Levinas conceives of synchronization as a springboard for his diachronic temporality. Diachrony in Levinas's view elates temporality to an authentic and transcendent moment in relation with the Other and its mystery on an ethical and responsible ground. Reviewing convergent and divergent viewpoints of Heidegger and Levinas in respect of the nature of the authentic time through a case study of the novel *Thomas the Obscure* by Maurice Blanchot, it is to reveal how Blanchot on the one hand, faithful to the Levinasian diachronic time and on the other hand, parallel to Hawking-Penrose spacetime singularities theorem in quantum theory, challenges conceptions such as independence, certainty, possibility, knowability, predictability, and finite time seeking for an authentic and transcendent time by prioritizing diachronic time over the synchronic temporalization. This novel excavates being in absence of being and mystery in absence of mystery under the auspicious of ethical and respectful relation with the Other in search of an authentic and transcendent time.

Keywords: Diachrony, Synchrony, Maurice Blanchot, Authentic Time, the Other, Spacetime Singularities, Transcendent

Introduction

The issue of space-time has not only gained central importance in the scientific and philosophical arenas today, but has also long been manifested among philosophers, scientists, and writers in various ways, such as supernatural revelations or anthropomorphic

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manifestations. Aristotle offers a “conception of time as an infinite series of nows”¹ that is formed in the context of the present with a cosmic origin and without the intervention of a conscious observer, while legitimacy of the past and future depends on it. Also, Henri Bergson with an almost similar view, imagined time as a result of continuity and a series of durations or *durée* that, contrary to Albert Einstein's scientific and physical definition of time, is considered as immeasurable and based on the individual's self-awareness, conscience, and lived experience, a lived experience that is not reflected in the Aristotelian definition, but a sort of duration as Charles M. Sherover postulates which is essentially a continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist.² Other thinkers and philosophers have also provided many definitions regarding time and its connection with cosmic, physical, or metaphysical matters, or its relationship with the subject's consciousness, but they have rarely mentioned the relationship of time with the Other and its objectification through this relationship.

Martin Heidegger's conception of time is entirely synchronic and phenomenological. Synchronic time. While according to Saitya Brata Das, Heidegger thinks for instance of *Dasein's* finitude as possibility of impossibility, his engagement with finitude is already always a synchronic modality³ which limits the scope of one's perception of the world around from an individualistic perspective, presenting a completely limited and linear perception of time. In a revolutionary approach and by introducing a new definition of time, Emmanuel Levinas acknowledged that diachronic time has a nonlinear and infinite nature and is in conflict with the immediate and all-encompassing understanding and perception of all the phenomena around us. Diachrony “as a time outside time” in the Levinasian perspective “is associated with proximity, responsibility, the ethical relation, that must be signaled within the temporalization of time as a lapse of time that does not return, refractory to all recuperation, retention, diachrony.”⁴ From his perspective, self-centered synchronic temporalization keeps one's understanding and cognition limited and closed. As such, the subject must seek its unicity and survival in relation to the Other, a relationship that, on the one hand, implies diachronic time and lays the foundations of ethics in Levinas' philosophy on the other.

Stephen Hawking's novel theories in the field of quantum physics, and especially on spacetime singularities, confirm the existence of uncertainty, entropy, and unpredictability at the specific cosmic moments such as the big bang, black holes, and the big crunch. From Hawking's standpoint, not only quantum entropy and uncertainty do not imply chaos and lawlessness, but it also implies the inextricable connection of all phenomena to each other and the mystery that keeps them suspended indefinitely in the way for discovering and understanding the meaning. As Wade L. Huntley holds, these uncertain and unpredictable quantum theories imply that one can only predict and come close to the approximate proportions among a range of outcomes of multiple measurements, while the specific outcome

¹ Nathan Widder, *Reflections on Time and Politics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), p. 13.

² Charles M. Sherover, *The Human Experience of Time: The Development of its Philosophic Meaning* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1975), p. 222.

³ Saitya Brata Das, *Death, Time and the Other: Ethics at the Limit of Metaphysics* (Cham: Springer, 2020), p. 42.

⁴ Diane Perpich, ‘A Singular Justice: Ethics and Politics between Levinas and Derrida’, in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*, eds. Claire Katz and Lara Trout, vol. iv (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 335.

of any single measurement is totally impossible.⁵ Roger Penrose, the prominent English mathematician and physicist, in his joint theory with Stephen Hawking called the Hawking-Penrose space-time singularities theorems predicting that “under generic conditions of gravitational collapse, a spacetime singularity should always form,”⁶ took great steps in introducing the concept of a singular time believing in an endless destiny for the universe in contrast to our experience of linear, homogeneous time as is introduced in Einstein's definition of the scientific and clock time in the theory of general relativity. By presenting the cosmic censorship hypothesis stating that “any singularities which subsequently develop due to gravitational collapse will be hidden from the view of an observer at infinity by an event horizon,”⁷ he confirms Hawking's claim that an uncertain and unpredictable state prevails in the black holes, and believes in the existence of a relationship between phenomena and a mystery beyond them that is always beyond our comprehension and understanding, while being forever drawn back to its origin.

Maurice Blanchot, as a philosopher and a prominent figure in French literature, had a significant influence on the formation of the intellectual foundation of post-structuralist philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy after him. He has simultaneously achieved such a lofty position in philosophy and literature that few have experienced. In dealing with the issue of space and time, although Blanchot's thought goes in accordance with Einstein's formulation of general relativity “thinking deeply and philosophically about the metaphysical nature of space and time”⁸, nonetheless, he is mainly engaged in Levinas's diachronic time and in line with Hawking-Penrose spacetime singularities theorems.

Almost all of the characteristics of space-time singularities, including the loss of the concept of isotropic space and time and the dominance of an anisotropic environment, the swirling abyss, uncertainty, and dominance of a completely mysterious environment, clearly reveal themselves to the reader in Blanchot's novels. However, the space of Blanchot's literature is filled with an atmosphere of invisibility or emptiness that in his own perspective is pregnant with “other time”,⁹ which is more reminiscent of the concept of space-time from the viewpoints of Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose. Blanchot's other-time structure, like the structure of spacetime singularities, narrates a mysterious entropy and chaos that continues to infinity. By navigating the space of literature with the help of Emmanuel Levinas's ideas about time and the Other, as well as with the help of Stephen Hawking's and Roger Penrose's theories about

⁵ Wade L. Huntley, ‘Thresholds in the Evolution of Social Science’, in *Beyond Boundaries: Disciplines, Paradigms, and Theoretical Integration in International Studies*, eds Rudra Sil and Eileen M. Doherty (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), p. 188.

⁶ Dipanjan Dey and Karim Mosani, ‘Spherical and Aspherical Gravitational Collapse: Locally and Globally Naked Singularities’, in *New Frontiers in Gravitational Collapse and Spacetime Singularities*, eds Daniele Malafarina and Pankaj S. Joshi (Cham: Springer, 2024), p. 277.

⁷ Stephen Hawking, *Hawking on the Big Bang and Black Holes* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 1993), p. 113.

⁸ Claude Panaccio, ‘Medieval Metaphysics II: Things, Non-Things, God and Time’, in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, eds Robin Le Poidevin, Peter Simons, Andrew McGonigal, Ross P. Cameron (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 54.

⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 11.

spacetime singularities, the reader of Blanchot's novels soon realizes that he considers the connection with the Other and its mystery to be the key to the transcendence and the authentic time. It seems that the legitimacy and authenticity of time, to Blanchot and Levinas, depend on the relationship with the Other.

Many studies have been conducted on the works of Maurice Blanchot, especially on how he dealt with the issue of time, death, and mystery of the Other. In a study on Blanchot's dealing with death, Stefan Polatinsky and colleagues write that Blanchot's works "have a unique and singular mystery that cannot be understood through chronological time."¹⁰ In his analysis of the issue of time, Zoltán Popovics claims that the experience of time in Blanchot's works is without the experience of the present and presence in it. Time for Blanchot is without sequence, an irreversible path composed of a series of passing present tenses. Popovics calls this counter-time or dead time and wonders how Blanchot creates literary works in such a space without time.¹¹ Although all literatures available acknowledge nonlinear, deconstructive, and diachronic nature of Blanchot's narrative time, no study was found demonstrating the relationship of Blanchot's diachronic narrative to the Other. Fundamental question of the present study is how Thomas, the protagonist of the story, face to face and in tension with everyday life and people's isolation from each other, strives to achieve a transcendent and infinite time. An attempt has been made to answer this question by presenting simultaneously a Heideggerian and Levinasian reading of *Thomas the Obscure*, and ultimately prove alignment, tendency, and conformity of the protagonist with Levinas' diachronic time and the spacetime singularity in the quantum theory.

Quantum Theory: Spacetime Singularities

While Albert Einstein in 1915 first professed that space and time were not absolute and separate entities but were rather closely interwoven, Herman Minkowski had already declared before Einstein that "space and time disappear as separate concepts."¹² Einstein auspiciously and correctly came across to the idea of spacetime unification and curvature as the outright accomplices to and causality behind the gravity force. Consequently, the theory of general relativity predicted black holes and other spacetime singularities in the universe on its ground possibility of different types of spacetime singularities remains a fantastic area for future research according to Robert M. Wald¹³.

Nevertheless, due to its non-quantum nature it failed, according to Stephen Hawking, to predict the beginning and the end of time in such unique instances as the big bang and the big crunch singularities, where according to Hawking "the laws of science and our ability to

¹⁰ Stefan Polatinsky, 'Dying without Death: Temporality, and Survival in Maurice Blanchot's *The Instant of My Death* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*', *Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol 54, no 2 (2013), p. 125.

¹¹ Zoltán Popovics, 'Counter-time: A Non-dialectical Temporality in the Works of Maurice Blanchot', *Colloquy*, no. 10 (2005), p. 42.

¹² Lisa M. Dolling, Arthur F. Gianelli, and Glenn N. Statile, *The Tests of Time: Readings in the Development of Physical Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. xxvii.

¹³ Robert M. Wald, *Space, Time and Gravity: The Theory of the Big Bang and Black Holes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1977] 1992), p. 56.

predict the future would break down.”¹⁴ Beginning just with the cosmological model of the universe, according to the big bang theory, “the universe was concentrated in a single point which exploded in a big bang event some 15 billion years ago.”¹⁵ It is claimed that we are living in a multiple-cycle universe experiencing a succession of bangs that all recollapse until they meet a big crunch. This means according to Fateh Ullah Khan Gandapur “that the creation of the physical universe with the big bang out of infinite density, or out of nothing, or out of eternity, and the annihilation of the physical universe with the big crunch to infinite density, nothing, or to eternity indicates that nothing or eternity means no space no time or the eternal metaphysical world. Therefore, the eternal metaphysical world is the source of creation of the physical universe. There is therefore strong link between the physical and the metaphysical worlds.”¹⁶

The idea of quantum entanglement or non-locality according to Wegter-McNelly amounts to a nonpersonal instance of mutual and free agreement. This means that correlated behaviour of two entangled particles is not following a common cause, but “each particle is free to behave according to its own nature, and yet its entanglement with another particle allows it to act in concert with its entangled partner in a way that cannot be inferred from the presumption of the full separability of individual states.”¹⁷ It is certain that rotation on such a common axis in the realm of quantum theory as well as in the realm of literature requires the existence of an infinite and mysterious relationship with the Other that affects our existence. The mystery and nature of the infinity prevailing dominantly in the quantum theory are also worth pondering in the realms of literature and philosophy.

By introducing his notions of alterity and unicity, Levinas puts much stress on the irreducibility of time’s dimensions and prioritizes ethics over any epistemological or ontological concern, stating that “morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy.”¹⁸ Legitimation of spacetime and actualization of its true and authentic transcendence, for him, impinges on a face-to-face encounter with the alterity “in which two elements soared to meet one another” through an entanglement that “eternally preceded the origin” and “eternally radiated the end” as Maurice Blanchot illustrates it.¹⁹

Thus, quantum theories, with their mysterious and glorious nature, affirm existence of the alterity, transcendent, and infinity give legitimacy and authenticity to temporality through an ethical relationship with the Other. Ethics does not merely encompass the moral principles governing society, but rather emphasize the existence of a close relationship between all phenomena in the universe. Quantum Theories according to Léna Soler “force us to abandon the dream of a universal science capable of embracing all aspects of reality within a single

¹⁴ Alan Woods and Ted Grant, *Reason in Revolt: Marxist Philosophy and Modern Science* (London: Wellread Publications, 2015), p. 42.

¹⁵ J.M.T. Thompson, *Visions of the Future: Astronomy and Earth Science* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁶ Fateh Ullah Khan Gandapur, *God Created the Universe with the Purpose to Serve Humankind* (Pakistan: Khyber Mail Printers and Publishers, 2009), p. 55.

¹⁷ Kirk Wegter-McNelly, *The Entangled God: Divine Relationality and Quantum Physics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 133.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Tran. Alphonso Lingis (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 304.

¹⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *When the Time Comes*, trans. Lydia Davis (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1985), p. 55.

description.”²⁰ According to Levinas, “our relation with the metaphysical is an ethical behavior and not theology.”²¹ What Blanchot is trying to portray in the space of literature is that our lived and everyday experience of life and time is absolutely connected to a singular and transcendent space-time, just as the relationship of the transcendent to us is undeniable:

With me the laws gravitate outside the laws. I progress beyond the totality which I nevertheless tightly embrace. I go on the margins of the universe, boldly walking elsewhere than where I can be, and a little outside of my steps.²²

Authentic Time and its Legitimacy in Relation with the Other

Heidegger's profound influence on western philosophy is undeniable. In his book *Being and Time* and a series of critical lectures on Henri Bergson, Heidegger argues that Bergson, despite many efforts, has failed to properly understand authentic time. Heidegger believes that “Bergson’s concept of duration represents an attempt to go beyond the traditional concept of time, going all the way back to Aristotle, to a more primordial time from which that concept is derived.”²³ Heidegger’s interpretation of temporality in *Being and Time* is in this respect an answer to Bergson, “whom he criticizes for relying too heavily on Aristotle’s definition of time, for neglecting the question of being, and for overstating the case against the ordinary concept of time.”²⁴ Heidegger does not deny “the reality of the present now, of the three tenses, of change and movement, or of continuity and duration, but reorients our understanding of these dimensions of experience by pointing to the basic, pervasive and inviolable relation between time and the existence of self and world”²⁵ which is rightly embedded in his concept of Dasein and also “reorients the unity of primordial time in terms of what he now calls its ‘true fourth-dimension’ the nearing of nearness which is essentially the first dimension that gives, determines and enhances all the others.”²⁶ Heidegger in his *The Concept of Time* “interrogates time in connection with the movement not of natural entities, but of Dasein in its being-towards-death, furnishing the basis in *Being and Time* for redefining primordial temporality as the threefold ecstatic stretching of Dasein’s Being.”²⁷ This ecstatic stretching refers to Dasein’s Being as running-ahead-of-itself (future), being-already-in-the-world (past), and being-alongside-other-entities (present). Of course, it is revealed and cannot be denied that this conception of temporality is accompanied by a desire to uncouple time and eternity in the Heideggerian philosophy.²⁸

²⁰ Léna Soler, ‘The Convergence of Transcendental Philosophy and Quantum Physics: Grete Henry-Hermann’s 1935 Pioneering Proposal’, in *Grete Hermann: Between Physics and Philosophy*, eds Elise Crull and Guido Bacciagaluppi (Cham: Springer, 2017), p. 67.

²¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 78.

²² Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, trans. Robert Lamberton (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1973), p. 107.

²³ Heath Massey, *The Origin of Time Heidegger and Bergson* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015), p. 6.

²⁴ Massey, *The Origin of Time Heidegger and Bergson*, p. 6.

²⁵ Steven Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dogen* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), p.4.

²⁶ Heine, *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dogen*, p.122.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 177.

²⁸ Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, p. 177.

Thus, according to Wrathall, “when we understand wholeness and ending in a way appropriate to Dasein, we see that they require and support each other.”²⁹ What is remarkable and mentionable in respect of Dasein is that Heidegger’s analysis of being-towards-death may account for the finite time of individual Dasein, whereas Levinas in his analysis of fecundity does inaugurate an infinite dimension within time through which infinity is understood not as an eternal circle but as the discontinuous renewal of the finite self.³⁰ Heidegger speaks of being-towards-death as a possibility and authentic future, whereas for Levinas it is to do with impossibility and infinity. Another outstanding idiosyncrasy attributable to Heidegger is that he is after meaning and authenticity in Being or Dasein that is in-the-worldly searched for. Although Heidegger cares for the others as other Daseins in any social context, nonetheless, ultimate and futural authenticity is possible through transcendence of Dasein where “transcendence of being needs to be interpreted as the transcendence of Dasein’s Being,”³¹ while in Levinasian mannerism, transcendence of the Other is prioritized over transcendence of the self which is missed in Heidegger’s philosophy.

Andrew Shepherd writes that Levinas not only does offer a metaphysic that gives preeminence to the ‘lived experience’, but he gives great importance to the ethical encounter with the Other. Shepherd believes that “While initially Levinas embraced the thinking of his earlier teacher Heidegger in seeking a philosophy that gave priority to questions of embodied ‘lived experience’ and existence, he soon turned away from and became critical of Heideggerian thought due to the way in which Heidegger’s thought became an all-encompassing strategy for grasping life in understanding. While for Heidegger the horizon by which all things are judged is ‘being’, for Levinas the horizon is the Other.”³² Emmanuel Levinas in his philosophy is to change the Western philosophical tradition. He believes that the Western philosophical tradition has been obsessed with ontological questions since the time of Plato. As such, to Levinas, “this has resulted in philosophies in which the ethical relations between particular beings are subservient to universal mediators such as the form/eidos in Plato, spirit in Hegel or being/Dasein in Heidegger.”³³ Levinas contends that these philosophers have failed to give an account of the relationship between ethical beings. While on the one hand Levinas elicits the influence of Husserl and Heidegger on himself and the bulk of philosophy, on the other hand he rejects philosophy’s traditional preoccupation with metaphysical questions about being and epistemological concerns; while he tries to give instead priority to the ethics. According to Andrew Shepherd it was in Strasbourg that Levinas met and began a lifelong friendship with Maurice Blanchot. He also met and sat under the teaching of Martin Heidegger just in the year that Heidegger’s work *Sein und Zeit* (‘Being and Time’) (1927) had recently been published.³⁴ Travis Tenney Anderson argues that while Levinas seems disinterested in the work of phenomenology as a science of being, he instead shows his interest in the concept of

²⁹ Mark A. Wrathall, *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 26.

³⁰ Lisa Guenther, *Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), p. 80.

³¹ Erik Kuravsky, *Transcendence in Heidegger's Early Thought: Toward Being as Event* (Cham: Springer, 2023), p. 54.

³² Andrew Shepherd, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas, Derrida, and the Theology of Hospitality* (London: James Clarke & Co, 2014), p. 92.

³³ Shepherd, *The Gift of the Other*, p. 18.

³⁴ Shepherd, *The Gift of the Other*, p. 17.

time through which a redemptive escape from the finitude of being is achieved, and since then we are encountered with a radical rethinking of phenomenology by Levinas.³⁵

Like Heidegger, he sees the trace of an essential discontinuity in existence embedded in time, but unlike Heidegger, he endeavours and finds a way to account for that trace. Ethical relation or the transcendent relationship with the personal Other is the source of temporal discontinuity or diachrony. For him this relation is essentially different from all ontic, ontological, categorical, and even phenomenological relations understood as Dasein, “or as what Alphonso Lingis has appropriately called deathbound subjectivity.”³⁶

In as much as time and the Other are two fundamental and indispensable components towards infinity and transcendent of the Other in Levinasian philosophy, in *Time and the Other* Levinas argues that: “*Time and the Other* is a study of the relationship with the Other insofar as its element is time; as if time were transcendence, the opening par excellence onto the Other. This thesis on transcendence, thought as diachrony, where the Same is non-in-different to the Other without investing it in any way-not even by the most formal coincidence with it in a simple simultaneity-where the strangeness of the future is not described right away in its reference to the present, where it would be to-come and where it was already anticipated in a protention, this thesis (which preoccupies me much today) was, thirty years ago, only glimpsed. In *Time and the Other* it was treated starting from a series of more immediate evidences, which prepared some elements of the problem, such as I see it now.”³⁷ As it is obvious and explicitly implied in this excerpt, relation with the Other and the element of time are of centrality for Levinas so as to come to the transcendence of the Other. Levinas believes strongly that it is the ethical and responsible relation with the prioritized Other over the self that makes our time and therefore, transcendent time is dependent on the transcendence of the Other because “for Levinas encounter with one's fellow human opens up what he calls transcendence.”³⁸ According to Levinas in his *Existence and Existents*: “The dialectic of time is the very dialectic of the relationship with the Other, that is, a dialogue which in turn has to be studied in terms other than those of the dialectic of the solitary subject. The dialectic of the social relationship will furnish us with a set of concepts of a new kind. And the nothingness necessary to time, which the subject cannot produce, comes from the social relationship.”³⁹ This is to mention that whatsoever Levinas means by relation to the Other, not only does refer to other persons in a socially established context, but also the Other as a vast and inclusive area of manifestations that are all subservient to ethicality and the authentic time it is to promise.

The Other as transcendence, infinity, death and its mystery, and metaphysics –but not that metaphysics delineated in the Western philosophical tradition- are among coral and pivotal conceptions that are all treated as the Other in the Levinasian philosophy. For instance, in

³⁵ Travis Tenney Anderson, *Heidegger and Levinas and the Crisis of Phenomenology: Thinking the Propriety and a-Propriety of Time* (PhD, Chicago, Loyola University, 1992), p. 73.

³⁶ Thomas G. Casey, 'Levinas' Idea of the Infinite and the Priority of the Other', *Gregorianum*, vol. 84, no. 2 (2003), p. 287.

³⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, Tran. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 31.

³⁸ Mara H. Benjamin, *The Obligated Self: Maternal Subjectivity and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), p. 123.

³⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, Tran., Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1978), p. 93.

respect with death as the Other Cheryl L. Hughes accentuates that whereas Heidegger analyses Dasein's concern about the nothingness of death, Levinas on the contrary believes that we know nothing about this nothingness; in the proximity of death what is remarkable is this situation where we are absolutely faced with the appearance of something unknowable, something that is foreign to all light, something that can never be present. Death is thus a unique relationship with the future that its mysteriousness lingers infinitely.⁴⁰ Death for Levinas is the impossibility of having a project or finitude, the impossibility of grasping or have a grip of finality. Levinas' approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something that is absolutely other and something that is an unknowable mystery. Contrary to Heidegger, Levinas implicitly says, "My solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken by it."⁴¹ According to Levinas: "Anticipation of the future and projection of the future, sanctioned as essential to time by all theories from Bergson to Sartre, are but the present of the future and not the authentic future; the future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us. The Other is the future. The very relationship with the Other is the relationship with the future. It seems to me impossible to speak of time in a subject alone, or to speak of a purely personal duration."⁴² In this regard, here there is an excerpt from Levinas quoted by Hughes: "My relation to death is not the springboard for a more authentic relation to myself in the present; the future is not simply the working out of my projected possibilities. Rather my relation to death is a relation to alterity, to something I cannot grasp; the future is absolutely surprising."⁴³

What is most important in Levinas's philosophy is his emphasis on the existence of a relationship between alterity and time, which, of course, from his perspective is diachronic and infinite. Because of this diachronic temporality as Rozemund Uljee believes, obligation to the Other seems endless and infinity of the Other is beyond any possibility of recollection and cannot be assembled which is radically opposed to Heidegger's temporality of nearness.⁴⁴ Levinas not only explains the relationship between time and the Other, but also considers the conceptualization and validity of time to be dependent on that relationship and its mystery. According to him "that we are in relation with something that is absolutely other, something bearing alterity, not as a provisional determination ... but as something whose very existence is made of alterity."⁴⁵ Encountering this singular time as Levinas delineates is "a time whose diachrony is thus lived as a privation of immobile eternity, and expressed by the metaphor of flux, as if time were a being, comparable to a flowing liquid."⁴⁶

The same idea about the inseparability of temporal elements in the case of Dasein is also tractable in the Heideggerian notion of *Ereignis* "by which thins come to presence, by

⁴⁰ Cheryl L. Hughes, *Heidegger and Levinas: The Problem of Ethics* (PhD, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2014), p. 110.

⁴¹ Thomas Tjaya, *Totality, the Other, the Infinite: The Relation between Ethics and Religion in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (PhD, Boston College, 2010), p. 41.

⁴² Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 32.

⁴³ Hughes, *Heidegger and Levinas*, p. 111.

⁴⁴ Rozemund Uljee, *Thinking Difference with Heidegger and Levinas: Truth and Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), p. 227.

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 229.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), p. 124.

which they come to be”⁴⁷ which is to be experienced through an ecstatic milieu together with the Other, but with this difference that Martin Heidegger’s conceptualization of the Other is to meet its possibility sooner or later in the future through being-towards-death:

Dasein has in itself the possibility of meeting with its death as the most extreme possibility of itself. This most extreme possibility of Being has the character of a standing-before in certainty, and this certainty for its part is characterized by an utter indeterminacy.⁴⁸

While in Levinas’s view, there’s postulated no end and finitude for the Other and the authentic time. The diachronic time lingers for infinity.

Singular, Authentic, and Transcendent Time in *Thomas the Obscure*

Maurice Blanchot’s artistic confrontation with diachronic time and a singular space and time is well reflected in *Thomas the Obscure* where the protagonist makes the reader faced with mystery of the Other. An encounter that, by going beyond Heidegger’s concept of “ecstatic temporalization of Dasein,”⁴⁹ finds itself facing Levinas’s embodiment of a diachronic time. Here, as Anderson believes Levinas’s concept of the impossibility of possibility challenges Heidegger’s concept of the possibility of impossibility.⁵⁰ In the novel we read:

He felt ever closer to an ever more monstrous absence which took an infinite time to meet. He felt it closer to him every instant and kept ahead of it by an infinitely small but irreducible splinter of duration. He saw it, a horrifying being which was already pressing against him in space and, existing outside time, remained infinitely distant.⁵¹

Blanchot’s passion for an irreducible and infinitely distant time confirms the entanglement of Bergson’s concept of duration with Levinas’s diachronic time. It is quite evident that in their theories, instead of negating Bergson and although “the diachronic term” according to Jacob Jewusiak serves as a synonym for duration”⁵² in Bergson’s philosophy, Levinas and Blanchot have only extended and postponed Bergson’s concept of duration to the infinity.

Spacetime singularities as points “in which gravity is infinitely strong and spacetime extremely curved,”⁵³ come to terms with Blanchotian neuter in the space of literature in which definition of space and time as synchronic and linear breaks down. Instead, in Blanchot we are encountered with a time subsisting on Levinas’s definition that is diachronically experienced and stays aloof from Bergson and Heidegger’s chronologicity and linearity of time that are

⁴⁷ Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), p. 216.

⁴⁸ Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, p. 11.

⁴⁹ Timothy Rayner, *Foucault’s Heidegger: Philosophy and Transformative Experience* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 17.

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Heidegger and Levinas*, p. 73.

⁵¹ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 27.

⁵² Jacob Jewusiak, *Aging, Duration and the English Novel: Growing Old from Dickens to Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 16.

⁵³ Aprilia Zank, *The Word in the Word: Literary Text Reception and Linguistic Relativity* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), p. 54.

mostly phenomenologically understood. Blanchot's space of literature likewise the singular cosmic moments, experiences a unique gravity that is created due to the power of words in relation to the others. So, any word in the realm of literature for Blanchot, does not necessarily refer to any ultimate meaning or referent, "but the absence that is at the heart of language."⁵⁴ In the above excerpt, it is clear that Thomas is looking for the moment of encounter with the Other or the alterity. A moment that is respectively devoid of duration and possibility of the impossibility of Bergson and Heidegger revolving only around the lived experience. Thomas is seeking for an infinite time and place that is inexperienceable and that gives authenticity and legitimacy to life and nature.

Blanchot thinks of a singular spacetime that shatters totalitarianism of the subjective time and Dasein, just as the concept of infinity in the quantum theory does. In addition to the irreducibility of the transcendental spacetime and alterity of the Other in the realms of philosophy and literature, which have always challenged ontological and epistemological issues, Thomas is speaking of a "monstrous absence" that although "remained infinitely distant," but "he felt it closer to him every instant and kept ahead of it by an infinitely small but irreducible splinter of duration."⁵⁵ What Thomas depicts is totally in line with the scenario of nonlocality implying that two seemingly separated particles are indeed in a rather close interaction affecting one another no matter how far the distance. At the quantum level, "time does not exist and everything is happening at the exact the same time."⁵⁶ Separation as such for Thomas and in Levinas' lens is a "separation not being reducible to a simple counterpart of relation, the relationship with the Other does not have the same status as the relations given to objectifying thought, where the distinction of terms also reflects their union."⁵⁷ Blanchot like Levinas is certain of an infinite point that is not reducible to time's dimension. Blanchot expresses in the *Space of Literature* that "this point, whence we see them irreducible, puts us at the vanishing point ourselves; it is the point at which here coincides with nowhere. To write is to find this point. No one writes who has not enabled language to maintain or provoke contact with this point."⁵⁸ This point is in proximity with the Other that is singular while comparing it to the big crunch singularity which cannot be conceptualized. Levinas according to Achtenberg, speaks of "singularities, irreducible to the concepts they constitute in communicating their world."⁵⁹ To Levinas, the idea of "infinity designates an interior being that is capable of a relation with the exterior, and does not take its own interiority for the totality of being."⁶⁰

Aligned with the theory of the spacetime singularities according to which "spacetime of a homogeneous and isotropic universe"⁶¹ is collapsing in favour of an anisotropic and diachronic spacetime, Thomas felt himself entangled with such an extraordinary moment

⁵⁴ Ullrich Hasse and William Large, *Maurice Blanchot* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 32.

⁵⁵ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ Gene F. Collins JR., *Cosmopsychology: The Psychology of Humans as Spiritual Beings* (Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2009), p. 409.

⁵⁷ Deborah Achtenberg, *Essential Vulnerabilities Plato and Levinas on Relations to the Other* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), p. 110.

⁵⁸ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p. 48.

⁵⁹ Achtenberg, *Essential Vulnerabilities Plato and Levinas on Relations to the Other*, p. 66.

⁶⁰ Achtenberg, *Essential Vulnerabilities Plato and Levinas on Relations to the Other*, p. 109.

⁶¹ Li Zhi Fang and Remo Ruffini, *Basic Concepts in Relativistic Astrophysics* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 1983), p. 166.

wherein “he heard the core of an infinity where he was bound by the very absence of limits”⁶² which is also accentuated elsewhere in the same novel when Thomas pronounces that “with me the laws gravitate outside the laws.”⁶³ Blanchot's attention is not only focused on the opposites such as graspable-ungraspable, proximity-distance, presence-absence, day-night, and so forth, his occupation with the opposites is of the type of logos and the Heraclitian opposites that import concepts such as discontinuity, flux, and infinity. In the *Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot writes: “Two opposites, because they are simply opposed, are still too close to one another. Contradiction does not represent a decisive separation. Two enemies are already bound in a relation of unity, while the difference between the unknown and the familiar is infinite.”⁶⁴ An echo of Blanchot's dictum as such is reverberated in *Thomas the Obscure* wherein Blanchot considers the distance between the self and the Other as a boon and friendship necessary for one's existence. A separation that entails one's detachment from the self through an infinite entanglement with a mysterious and “supreme point of view” without which the alterity is to meet its finitude and is deprived of its mysteriousness and irreducibility:

Any distance between us is suppressed, but suppressed in order that we may not come closer one to the other. It is a friend to me, a friendship which divides us. It is united with me, a union which distinguishes us. It is myself. I who do not exist for myself in this instant, I have no existence except for it, which exists only for me. My being subsists only from a supreme point of view which is precisely incompatible with my point of view.⁶⁵

Possibility of a meaning other than an ontological one, where the correlation between the knower and the known is not equated with the full measure of being or where according to Dudiak a meaning escapes or transcends this correlation, is a central and persistent tenet in the thoughts of Levinas and Blanchot.⁶⁶ The milieu of *Thomas the Obscure* attests to a subtly articulated transcendent correlation as such. Thomas is faced with a state of vacillation and oscillation between his real existence and imposition of another existence on him implying his nonlocal and entangled intimacy with a transcendent face:

I found myself with two faces, glued one to the other. I was in constant contact with two shores. With one hand showing that I was indeed there, with the other -what am I saying? - without the other, with this body which, imposed on my real body, depended entirely on a negation of the body, I entered into absolute dispute with myself having two eyes, one of which was possessed of extreme visual acuity, it was with the other which was an eye only because of its refusal to see that I saw everything visible. And so on, for all my organs.⁶⁷

⁶² Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 37.

⁶³ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 107.

⁶⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, Tran. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 45

⁶⁵ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 106.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 114.

⁶⁷ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 96.

Elsewhere again, we witness Thomas's alienation and separation from the lived time and her longing for a transcendent and diachronic time:

He saw it, a horrifying being which was already pressing against him in space and, existing outside time, remained infinitely distant ... His eyes tried to look not in space but in duration, and in a point in time which did not yet exist. His hands sought to touch an impalpable and unreal body.⁶⁸

Sense of nonlocality and belonging to another infinite exaltation or big crunch of transcendence is evidently reverberating in the excerpt above. In dealing with Blanchotian transgressive breakthrough in the space of literature, one can detect strands of intimacy of the face and infinite transcendent through Thomas's refusal and negation of the tenets of the four-dimensional spacetime continuum as general theory of relativity depicts. Although H. H. Oliver believes that to Einstein, “the domains of physics and metaphysics were forged into a unity,”⁶⁹ but to him, space and time are unified and interwoven entities without any relevance to the metaphysical or transcendental realms, just contrary to the common postulations in the quantum theory maneuvering on the exigency of a relevance as such through various phenomena such as quantum entanglement or non-locality. Blanchot reveals his opposition to corporeality in its interior sense. Hélène Frichot believes that “in the context of Blanchot's oeuvre, we discover series of thresholds, some material, even architectural in their expression, others that are more like incorporeal events” pursuing their existence in an exterior context.⁷⁰

At first glance and aligned with the Platonic idea of the Forms and his critique of our experiences and conception of the world as representation of representation, Blanchot renounces authenticity of his body as corporeality and disparages the actions pertained to it. Levinas and Blanchot achieve transcendence towards the Other by transcending the self, and they search for the infinity of the Other in the light of metaphysical ethics. It shows according to Bram Demulder that “how empirical evidence from our environment confirms the metaphysical theory of love”⁷¹ or according to Thomas, “to separate us there is nothing more than that which would have united us, friendship, love.”⁷² Emmanuel Levinas asserts that “the face to face is a final and irreducible relation which no concept could cover without the thinker who thinks that concept finding himself forthwith before a new interlocutor; it makes possible the pluralism of society.”⁷³ As far as face of the Other in the Blanchotian philosophy is concerned, he illustrates it as “my face which was practically her face” when “she melted in me and in this intimacy discovered my absence.”⁷⁴ Just as the four-dimensional space and time is trapped in the infinite and mysterious spacetime by crossing the black hole event horizon, Blanchot also crosses threshold and event horizon of the images in the space of literature. This

⁶⁸ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Harold H. Oliver, *A Relational Metaphysics* (New York: Springer [E-book], 2012), p. 60.

⁷⁰ Hélène Frichot, ‘Nathalie’s Rotunda: Breaching the Threshold of Maurice Blanchot’s *L’Arrêt de mort*’, *Colloquy*, vol. 10 (2005), p. 173.

⁷¹ Bram Demulder, *Plutarch's Cosmological Ethics* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022), p. 296.

⁷² Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 102.

⁷³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 291.

⁷⁴ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 100.

very event horizon in the Levinasian perspective is “the Other that is time.”⁷⁵ Not only is the structure of the spacetime in Levinas's view disintegrated, but the relationship with the Other is added to that structure as an inseparable part of Levinas's diachronic temporality.

Based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice - one of the most frequently used themes and images in Blanchot's works - Orpheus, having crossed the event horizon of desire and by going into the depths of the world of the Hades, intends to return Eurydice back to the world and daylight. On his return, Orpheus is warned not to turn his head and look at Eurydice. However, he turns her gaze towards Eurydice, and as a result, Eurydice is withdrawn towards the origin. Considering the quantum approach of the present study and by applying the quantum theory of infinity in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in which “we are shown the dependence of one individual upon another,”⁷⁶ it is argued that the Hades does not make the impossible possible for Eurydice and does not determine any finality, but rather Eurydice continues to be withdrawn to her origin, where its mystery and freedom of real life are limitless to the extent that it seduces Orpheus as well. Blanchot believes that the work of art in the guise of Eurydice “is the profoundly obscure point towards which art and desire, death and night, seem to tend. She's the instant when the essence of night approaches as the *other* night.”⁷⁷ The point which its singular relationship with another mystery or origin can never be brought into the light of the day and cannot be limited in the realm of knowledge. Through the relationship with a mysterious origin as such, the elements of space and time collapse in Blanchot's space of literature and as a result, spacetime singularities emerge to show off.

Blanchot, in harmony with the uncertainty principle, contemplates the dominance of a spacetime in the realm of literature in which there is no certainty and where the elements of space and time are mysteriously connected to a transcendent horizon as an escape implying a radical self-exit in the direction of a face-to-face encounter with the Other. An encounter that, in Levinas's belief is representing a dimension of transcendence that leads us to a relationship that is completely different from our experience in the sensible world.⁷⁸ This is Orpheus' ordeal in search of Eurydice when he falls into the black hole/neuter of literature that leads to a literary spacetime singularity. In *Thomas the Obscure*, Thomas as Orpheus slips and metamorphoses from one space to another in demand of Anne as Eurydice (writing), but he returns her gaze and withdraws to an abeyance of non-place and obscurity:

There was in fact no more hope. This moment of supreme distraction, this trap into which those who have nearly vanquished death fall, ultimate return of Eurydice, in looking one last time toward the visible, Anne had just fallen into it as well.⁷⁹

Astrophysically speaking and anatomizing the issue in the language of cosmic censorship

⁷⁵ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Stephanie Nelson, *God and the Land: The Metaphysics of Farming in Hesiod and Vergil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.162.

⁷⁷ Michael Newman, ‘The Trace of Trauma: Blindness, Testimony and the Gaze in Blanchot and Derrida’, in *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1996), p.158.

⁷⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 193.

⁷⁹ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 85.

hypothesis as Roger Penrose paraphrases it as “God abhors a naked singularity,”⁸⁰ singularities occur in places like black holes where they are hidden from outside viewer by the event horizon. Aligned with this scenario, the artist’s (Orpheus) intentional gaze on Eurydice (oeuvre) seems ineluctable in order for art to traverse the infinite course of incompleteness and impossibility. Blanchot avers that a work of art makes a spacetime singularity in the present which hovers and oscillates between the immemorial past and a hidden future that never meets its finitude:

I discover my being in the vertiginous abyss where it is not, an absence, an absence where it sets itself like a god. I am not and I endure. An inexorable future stretches forth infinitely for this suppressed being. Hope turns in fear against time which drags it forward.⁸¹

Levinas believes that “infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely Other” whose ‘mystery’, as John D. Caputo paraphrases it, “corresponds to something that is unknowable and ungraspable in its very essence, something completely other than things we know conceptually. Knowledge will never grasp the mysterious although, approached properly, humbly, and with open hands and hearts, experience will allow us to participate in it.”⁸² However, understanding the authentic and real spacetime and reaching the core and reality of the transcendent mystery, from the perspective of Levinas and Blanchot, is only possible through relation with the Other:

Then, in turn, I looked at her: I brought her the one true story, which consisted of the absence of mystery, and which she could therefore do nothing but search for, eternity.⁸³

Conclusion

This interdisciplinary study was an attempt to explore the issue of the diachronic spacetime and its close relationship with the mystery of the Other in Maurice Blanchot's *Thomas the Obscure*. Delineating correspondence of the narrative framework of Blanchot's novel with the four-dimensional spacetime continuum, or in simpler terms, physical and chronological time on the one hand, and proving the strong tendency of Blanchot's spatiotemporal elements towards the singular structure of the diachronic spacetime, on the other hand has formed the methodological foundation and corpus of the present study. In addition to explaining the coexistence and fluctuation of narrative time in Blanchot's novel between these two synchronic and diachronic spacetime structures, the authors' effort is mainly focused on explaining Blanchot's unique attitude towards the issue of time from a completely different perspective.

For Blanchot, space and time, whether in its synchronic or diachronic senses, are not only continuous and necessary to each other, but their survival depend on the relation with the

⁸⁰ Stephen W. Hawking, *The Illustrated Theory of Everything: The Origin and Fate of the Universe* (Beverly Hills: New Millennium Press, 2003), p.40.

⁸¹ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 104.

⁸² Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 117.

⁸³ Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, p. 101.

Other or a mysterious alterity that bestows credit and legitimacy to the spacetime continuum. Emphasis on legitimacy of time through the relation with the Other –Other whether in the sense of other individuals or in its transcendental sense- and introducing it into the structure of spacetime is one of the central concepts of Emmanuel Levinas. Simon Critchley writes that Levinas's unique and distinctive claim is that the only true way in which time can manifest itself diachronically is through responsible and everyday interactions with the Other.⁸⁴ Therefore, Levinas's singular and diachronically infinite time, which is inevitably connected to a mysterious, unknown, and inaccessible alterity; not only accepts its connection to the linear, finite, and physically experiential time, but also finds validity and legitimacy of both synchronic and diachronic time structures dependent on one another and their reciprocal relation with the Other. Time of the Other as John E. Brabinski postulates, “both locates inside subjectivity and outside its measure and grasp ... The relation to alterity is therefore manifest in ruining or decomposition of what would seek to represent, to catch sight of, and know the Other.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Simon Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas, and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 230.

⁸⁵ John E. Brabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 28-29.