

## Big crunch singularity: Quantization of alterity and transcendence in the light of quantum entanglement or non-locality in Maurice Blanchot's *Thomas the Obscure*, and *When the Time Comes*

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is to quantize Emmanuel Levinas' manifestations of alterity and transcendence in the light of the big crunch singularity theorization, applied to the fictionality of Maurice Blanchot at a juxtaposition with the idea of the quantum entanglement or non-locality. By building its methodological foundations on the overlapping concepts of origin, image, absence, and the Other in the astrophysical and literary realms, this analytical study is to discuss how irreducible alterity of the spacetime dimensions is sustained in Blanchotian temporality of writing so as to enunciate a moment of fascination in relation with the Other and its mystery. This is where Levinas's formulation for the corrolation of time with the Other converges and anastomoses astrophysical phenomenon of quantum entanglement. How Blanchot's temporalization of writing subsists on a narrative temporality of everyday on the one hand and how it is simultaneously entangled with a diachronous extraordinary exteriority delineates where fascination reigns for Blanchot at a big crunch singularity of ethics. What Blanchot is to bring to the fore is to quantize in the space of literature such that our everyday experience of life and spacetime is definitely entangled with another unexperienced and singular spacetime whose effects on us and vice versa are not deniable.*

**Keywords:** *big crunch singularity, Maurice Blanchot, quantum entanglement, space of literature, the Other, transcendence*

### INTRODUCTION

*Yes, Yes, Yes burning around a cold core. Had I plunged? But as I woke upon this life, perhaps I awoke this life with me, and perhaps this jubilation signified some prodigious and terrifying motion, in which two elements soared to meet one another, a frozen day and a burning day, or I who eternally preceded the origin and I who eternally radiated the end. (Blanchot 1985, 55)*

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" (Thompson 1). It is claimed that we are living in a multiple-cycle universe experiencing a succession of crunches and 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" (55). We can detect allusions and evasions to a cosmological model of the creation as such in the Blanchotian *Space of Literature* that is "to start over and over again" infinitely:

*Almost always, it is the origin which is anterior to any beginning, the image or echo of beginning, that immense fund of impotence, the infinitely futile wherewithal to start over and over again. Literature's space, in other words the void which literature introduces in place of the place it takes is analogous to the 'other time' in the time measured by achievements: sterile, inert time, 'the time of distress. (Blanchot 1982, 27)*

Blanchot's concerns with the 'image or echo of beginning' and the 'other time' or 'the time of distress' also do disturb the astrophysical scientists' minds in respect of the origin and fate of the universe with the same sensibility and delicacy as Blanchot does. Both literary and physical realms hold on to a distance between our physicality and a mysterious non-locality. 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" (133). So, it is the mysterious distance of absence or the moment of fascination that is responsible for entangling two particles or persons with one another. It is a supreme moment of chaos according to Blanchot that imposes a dreadful alternation to life and brings about an infinite collapse in space and time while surpassing all other instants:

*No doubt this could not be relived, the moment of collapse, the dreadful alternation of life, unable to control itself, was a blow to memory - and afterwards? afterwards, chaos and yet I swear the last instant infinitely surpassed all the others, because it was on me that this dream body had decomposed, I had held it in my arms, I had experienced its strength, the strength of a dream, of a desperate gentleness, defeated and still persevering, such as only a creature with avid eyes could communicate it to me. (Blanchot 1985, 59)*

While according to Gregg Jaeger, "Einstein in physical theory sought both realism and locality, it was radical non-locality that most bothered him, even more than its probabilistic element" (58). Non-locality as Bokulich pictures it can occur between two or more quantum systems, and the most interesting case is when these correlations occur between systems that are space-like separated, that is; changes made to one system are immediately correlated with changes in a distant system even though there is no time for a signal to travel between them. In this case one says that quantum entanglement leads to non-local correlations or non-locality (xiii). Hence, non-locality or entanglement as coined by Erwin Schrödinger in 1935 is the idea in which small bits of matter and light are influenced by each other without any means, in a milieu faster than the speed of light. This was what Einstein mockingly termed "spooky action-at-a-distance" (Gilder 15). To Louisa Gilder, the entanglement or the quantum state that "the particles find themselves in, is indefinite, neither here nor there, neither this nor that, neither yea nor nay; but if one is measured and found to be yea, the other is nay" (Ibid 64). In the *Beyond Spacetime*, Nick Huggett et al. write that "given the ubiquity of nonlocality in quantum systems, due to entanglement, it is natural to hypothesize that the hidden variables are relational, in the sense that they describe shared properties of pairs of quantum systems" (156). Gilder relates this state of shared properties to "the existence of a mystery in the quantum theory" (20).

It is evident that turning around a shared axis as such in both quantum and literary domains does entail existence of an infinitely mysterious relation with the Other which affects and perfects our being and existence. The unravelled mystery and infinity behind the nonlocality of quantum state have been abundantly echoed in different manifestations in the philosophical and literary territories. The *being* is entangled with a transcendent Being or alterity in Emmanuel Levinas' words. By introducing his notion of alterity or 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" (Levinas 1969, 304). Legitimation of spacetime and actualization of its true and authentic transcendence, for Levinas, 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" (Blanchot 1985, 55) as Maurice Blanchot illustrates it. Since entanglement or non-locality take metaphysical matters into account as its fundamental premises, Gregg Jaeger contends that "metaphysics plays an important role in the interpretation of any fundamental physical theory. It is, therefore, perilous not to engage in it" (106). This is why this article is to apply the concept of big crunch singularity to the selected works of Maurice Blanchot so as to unfold the role of quantum entanglement as a non-physical phenomenon that is to explain our relation to mysteries and experiences beyond our physical apprehension. This is all supported by the philosophical ideas of Emmanuel Levinas through which according to Gregg "any attempt to reject a priori all kinds of

philosophical criteria is untenable when interpreting quantum mechanics or indeed any physical theory, because that is internally inconsistent. Interpretation explicitly involves the consideration of issues beyond the bounds of physics proper; epistemology and metaphysics are not subsumed by physics" (103). Accordingly, quantum theories as such with their prodigious and enigmatic nature, endorse and attest to the existence of an alterity and transcendence that is validated and authenticated through ethical relations with the Other which is not necessarily representative of mere moralities. According to Levinas, "our relationship with the metaphysical is an ethical behavior and not theology" (Levinas 1969, 78). What Blanchot is to bring to the fore is to quantize in the space of literature such that our everyday experience of life and spacetime is definitely entangled with another unexperienced and singular spacetime whose effects on us and vice versa are not deniable.

## **IRREDUCIBLE ALTERITY AND TRANSCENDENCE: UNGRASPABLE BEAUTIFUL INSTANTS**

*I found myself on the same level as this beautiful instant, but could I grasp it? Will anyone have trouble understanding that with its wild strength, the shiver was already dragging me farther along? And what maddened my impatience was that the beautiful instant wanted to be kept, eternalized, it was a cheerful instant that did not know or only suspected that by lingering near me, it was condemning itself to become a beautiful apparition, a return that would be forever beautiful, but separated from itself and from me by the greatest cruelty. (Blanchot 1985, 46)*

Entanglement still represents one of the most mysterious and substantial phenomena in all modern physics in which we can "imagine an exchange of information between different organisms by unconventional means, through that mysterious dimension that is nonlocality" (Del Medico 253). "Entanglement and nonlocality tell us that some measurements performed in space-like separated regions may have perfectly correlated outcomes, as if each of them would be knowing what is happening in the other region" (Brugués 2), while they are hovering in a quantum state that "involves irreducible randomness" (Bokulich xxiii). Exner, in the world of quantum theory postulated that irreducible randomness along with probability theory in the quantum mechanics are at the heart of all sciences which are "very different from the *in principle knowable unknowns* grounded in epistemology alone" (qtd. in Khrennikov & Svozil 1). Irreducibility, especially that of the transcendent space-time and alterity of the Other, is also dominant in the realms of philosophy and literature where there has been always debates over the ontological and epistemological issues. That is a matter that even obsesses Thomas' mind in the *Thomas the Obscure*:

*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. Such unbearable waiting and anguish that they separated him from himself. A sort of Thomas left his body and went before the lurking threat. 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. (Blanchot 1973, 27)*

Here, 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' that is in concordance 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. 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" (qtd. in Achtenberg 110). Blanchot like Levinas is certain of an infinite separation and 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" (Blanchot 1982, 48). This point is in proximity with the Other that is singular compared to the big crunch singularity and cannot be conceptualized. Levinas according to Achtenberg, speaks of "singularities, irreducible to the concepts they constitute in communicating their world" (qtd. in Achtenberg 66). 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" (Ibid 109). Aligned with the theory of the spacetime singularities according to which isotropic conception of space and time is collapsing in favor of an infinite anisotropic and diachronic conception in any cosmological singularity like that in the big crunch, Thomas felt himself entangled with such extraordinary moment wherein "he heard the core of an infinity where he was bound by the very absence of limits (Blanchot 1973, 37) which is also accentuated elsewhere in the same novel when Thomas pronounces that "with me the laws gravitate outside the laws" (Blanchot 1973, 107). This is the most down-to-the-earth characteristic of any cosmological singularity renouncing from conformity to any rules or laws. Thomas is entangled with an "instant full of beauty" and "magnificent festivals" (Blanchot 1973, 94) where "the laws were dying" (Blanchot 1973, 85) whereas "the beautiful instant wanted to be kept, eternalized" (Blanchot 1985, 46).

Thomas reveals to be entangled with an alterity and being 'pressing against him in space' while 'existing outside time' and remaining 'infinitely distant.' In as much as he dares leaving this spatiality of corporeality behind, Thomas's 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.' Although the duration Thomas is outlining here is somehow reminiscent of Henry Bergson's definition of *la durée* (duration) which stays aloof from any extensity connotation and import, nonetheless, Blanchot's duration goes beyond Bergsonian *la durée* as experienced and real time and demarcates on the contrary, Thomas' sense of non-locality and belonging to another inexperienced spacetime and "the alterity of the transcendent thing," that Levinas believes, "although already irreducible, is such only by means of the indefinite incompleteness of original perceptions. Thus, it is incomparable to the alterity of Others, which is also irreducible, and adds to the dimension of incompleteness (the body of the Other in space, the history of our relations, etc.) a more profound dimension of non-originality, the radical impossibility of going around to see things from the other side" (Treanor 142). The avatar of entanglement with an irreducible alterity and transcendence is embedded in the assertion of Jeff Fort, translator of Blanchot's *Aminadab*, as a "movement" that "is an exit into an outside that can never be inhabited and in which things are seen from across an irreducible distance even as they threaten to suffocate with too great a proximity" (Blanchot 2002, 24).

Blanchot is drawing our attention towards "the echo of a presentiment so distant that it seemed to come" to him in the *When the Time Comes*, "across the interstices of time" (Blanchot 1985, 51). An absence and irreducibility ascribable to the alterity which bridges between appearance and withdrawal, proximity and distance, knowability and unknowability, possibility and impossibility, and between finite and infinite. A bond that according to Levinas is both "extraordinary and everyday" (qtd. in Treanor 13). What bestows viability to the bond between 'extraordinary and everyday' or in Jeff Fort's words, the 'movement' oscillating between an irreducible exteriority and 'too great a proximity', is the exigency of an ethical and responsible entanglement with the alterity which is not merely interpreted as pure morality, but as Levinas asserts is "a calling into question of the same-which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same-is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge. As a critique precedes dogmatism, metaphysics precedes ontology" (Levinas 1969, 43).

As far as Levinasian metaphysical ethics is concerned, Blanchot illustrates it subtly in the *When the Time Comes* as the irreducibility of the Other to the same and emphasizes the same's rapport with the physical and metaphysical Other:

*At night, in the South, when I get up, I know that it isn't a question of proximity, or of distance, or of an event belonging to me, or of truth capable of speaking, this is not a scene, or the beginning of something. An image, but a futile one, an instant, but a sterile one, someone for whom I am nothing and who is nothing to me – without bonds, without beginning, without end – a point, and outside this point, nothing, in the world, that is not foreign to me. A face? But one deprived of a name, without a biography, one that is rejected by memory, that does not want to be recounted, that does not want to survive; present, but she is not there; absent, and yet in no way elsewhere, here; true? Altogether outside of what is true. If someone says, she is bound to the night, I deny it; the night doesn't know her. If someone asks me, but what are you talking about? I answer, well, there is no one to ask me that. And the day? The day asks nothing of her, it is not involved with her, it owes her neither loyalty nor belief. (Blanchot 1985, 67)*

Big crunch singularity in the astrophysical terms is postulated as an instant at which the end of the universe is certain. However, based on Roger Penrose's hypotheses of the *conformal cyclic cosmology* and *aeons*, "the universe cycles from one aeon to the next, which each aeon involves a big bang followed by an infinite future expansion that eventually results in the big bang of the next aeon (Loke 197). So, the end of universe at the distant of a big crunch singularity is proposed by Penrose to be lingered and withdrawn to successor cycles of aeons ad infinitum. Thus, Due to the nonlocality phenomenon, Blanchot's relation with a proximity and presence of an instant or point is obviously pronounced in the passage above, while on the other hand his obsession with a distance and absence this beautiful instant is insinuating is perceptibly noticeable in virtue of the cycles of the aeons of ingraspability and unknowability that loom over him.

Hence, the metaphysical ethics as Levinas defines is plainly analogous to the cosmological ethics casting light on the whole universe in the sense of the relation of the unfolded and unveiled mysteries which that ethics has to all living things. Cosmological ethics as such which evokes Plutarch's ideas in this respect is not simply a cosmic religion. For Plutarch, "studying the cosmos is a necessary condition for achieving happiness" (Demulder 235). An irreducible macrocosmic relation to a moment of happiness which is analogous to a microcosmic relation to the other in the *When the Time Comes* in search of "the most beautiful hours in the world, hours in which anyone would cheerfully tolerate living an endless life" (Blanchot 1985, 22).



Blanchot is not merely concerned with opposites like graspability and ingraspability, proximity and distance, presence and absence or day and night. His binary oppositions are of the genus of Heraclitus's opposites and *logos* which is entangled with discontinuity, constant 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" (Blanchot 1993, 45). An echo of Blanchot's dictum as such is reverberated in the *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. (Blanchot 1973, 106)*

## INFINITY: PROMISE OF THE FACE

*A unique moment, marvellously agreeable and important, that made me feel that all of space, from the remotest point to the nearest, was entirely occupied by the living reality of one face and opened the world for me to the immense measure of that face. (Blanchot 1985, 26)*

As far as alterity and transcendence as two interconnected concepts in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas are concerned, for Levinas, "the encounter with the face is one that reveals an absolute alterity that produces the infinite" (qtd. in Treanor 139). According to Levinas, "it is of importance to emphasize that the transcendence of the infinite with respect to the I which is separated from it and which it thinks measures (so to speak) its very infinitude. The distance that separates the ideatum and idea here constitutes the content of the ideatum itself. Infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely other" (qtd. in Dudiak 77).

Levinas's philosophical notion as such is aligned with the entanglement theory indicating that "the particles would remain entangled while infinitely separate" (Gilder 223). Entangled with the face of the Other designates a meaning that imposes itself upon the same non-ontologically and non-locally. It is not a meaning that would be the



product of a knower-known relation requiring the intuition or the anticipation of a manifestation, but one that according to Levinas "brings to us a notion of meaning prior to my Sinngebung" (qtd. in Simmons & Benson 13) which is unanticipated and teaches its novelty, and thus dominates the same to which it comes. 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 of the whole thought of Levinas (114) and Blanchot. The milieu of the *Thomas the Obscure* attests to such subtly articulated a transcendent correlation. 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. (Blanchot 1973, 96)*

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. According to Einstein space and time are unified and interwoven entities without any relevance to the metaphysical or transcendent realms, just contrary to the alleged 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. Nathalie's Rotunda 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" (qtd. in Khatab, et al. 173) pursuing their existence in an exterior context. 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. The same mechanism for Thomas's discontentment with the spatiality of corporeality and his insistence in proving connectivity and entanglement of our corporeal experience with an incorporeal,

authentic, and nonlocal exteriority and face is discernibly demonstrable in the case of Anne:

*If he came straight up to her, brutally, to surprise her, she always presented him a face. She changed without ceasing to be Anne. She was Anne, having no longer the slightest resemblance to Anne. In her face and in all her features, while she was completely identical to another, she remained the same, Anne, Anne complete and undeniable. (Blanchot 1973, 43)*

Blanchot, distancing himself from the lived experience of the spacetime continuum, visualizes himself as entangled with spacetime singularities at the instant of a big crunch of infinity in the space of literature wherein our ordinary conception of space and time collapses.

*But this face did not concern itself with memory, it was fixed but unstable. Had it happened once? A first time and yet not the first. It had the strangest relations with time, and this was uplifting too: it did not belong to the past, a face and the promise of that face. In some way it had looked at itself and seized itself in one single instant, after which this terrifying contact had occurred, this mad catastrophe, which could certainly be considered its fall into time, but that fall had also crossed time and carved out an immense emptiness, and this pit appeared to be the jubilant celebration of the future: a future that would never again be new, just as the past refuse to have taken place once. (Blanchot 1985, 59-60)*

Retreating from time as "homogeneous duration" and space as a hinderance to our authentic understanding of pure time as Henry Bergson contends (128), Blanchot expresses his futural delight and jubilation by evoking a face through a time not of the present, but through an "irreducible diachrony" of time as Levinas terms it "which is not a lived temporality, but rather is marked as a lapse or absence of time" (Katz 62). This absence of time is described by Blanchot as a "critical moment" and the "absurd" that "indefinitely add absence to absence and to the absence of absence and to the absence of the absence of absence and, thus, with this vacuum machine, desperately create the void. At this instant the real fall begins, the one which abolishes itself, nothingness incessantly devoured by a purer nothingness (Blanchot 1973, 63). Also, this diachronous time is "understood as a relationship to the other" (Levinas 2000, 106) according to Levinas that "emphasizes powerlessness of memory over the diachrony of time" (Ibid 111). This is a "time" that on the other hand "must be understood in its duration and its diachrony as deference to the unknown" (Ibid 38).

Detachment from lived temporality and reality and attachment to the metaphysical unknown and inexperienced oddities and impossibilities is common not only in the philosophical and literary realms, but also, we can trace it in the modern physics. The many-worlds interpretation proposed in the quantum theory is among those oddities that relates physical world to the metaphysical worlds beyond. Although many scientists reject the many-world interpretation, however, possibility of the existence of other worlds cannot be ruled out. "If other worlds" according to Taha Sochi "do exist, then they should be metaphysical and they should not be linked physically in this many-worlds fashion" (199) which augment and strengthen believability of the nonlocality or entanglement theories. Transcendent and infinite appeals for Blanchot are not merely founded on metaphysics qua metaphysics distanced from the Other. His formulation for the infinity implies that nonlocality and transcendence do not subsist on their own bereft of any responsible and ethical relation with the others. There is at work a relationality between the 'extraordinary and everyday' simultaneously as Levinas' first philosophy is to convey. "The natural completion of metaphysics" according to Levinas "is ethics, since only in the ethical relation is the Other presented to consciousness in all its irreducible otherness (Levinas 2004, 300). In the *When the Time Comes*, it reads:

*Even when I went back over it to "think" about it – and it required that: an intense meditation – it didn't take me anywhere; Face to face we held each other, not at a distance, but in the intimacy of a mysterious familiarity, because she was "you" for me, and I was "me" for her. (Blanchot 1985, 59)*

Transcendence towards the Other in both Levinas and Blanchot is attainable only by overcoming ontology of solipsism and sameness towards the infinity of the Other in light of the metaphysical ethics. It shows according to Bram Demulder that "how empirical evidence from our environment confirms the metaphysical theory of love" (296) or according to Thomas, "to separate us there is nothing more than that which would have united us, friendship, love" (Blanchot 1973, 102). 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" (Levinas 1969, 291). 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" (Blanchot 1973, 100).

## **BIG CRUNCH SINGULARITY: MOMENT OF FASCINATION**

*What fascinates us robs us of our power to give sense. It abandons its sensory nature, abandons the world, draws back from the world, and*

*draws us along. It no longer reveals itself to us, and yet it affirms itself in a presence foreign to the temporal present and presence in space. Separation, which was the possibility of seeing, coagulates at the very centre of the gaze into impossibility. (Blanchot 1982, 32)*

Definition of the big crunch singularity that amounts to Blanchot's definition for the space of literature as the "indeterminate milieu of fascination", is a milieu of absoluteness. A milieu from which distance is not excluded but is immeasurable. "Distance here is the limitless depth behind the image, a lifeless profundity, unmanipulable, absolutely present although not given, where objects sink away when they depart from their sense, when they collapse into their image" (Blanchot 1982, 322).

Singularity phenomenon in its astrophysical sense is an instant or moment in the universe when the spacetime collapses into its densest extent through a point called ring singularity. Ring singularities attributed to such extraordinary cosmological moments as the big bang, black holes and the big crunch are assumed to connect our universe to other parallel universes through worm-like canals called wormholes. In moving through the ring singularity, you enter an antigravity universe and a place where gravity pushes things up. According to Einstein's equations, "the singularity is not a point, but rather a ring-shaped entrance that may lead to other universes" (qtd. in Rosenthal 29). This is astonishingly noticeable how Blanchot's visualisation of a drop of water plays the role of a ring singularity for him which is entangled with another infinite region or universe. It is a labyrinth through which Thomas is withdrawn and concealed to the origin:

*The temptation took on an entirely bizarre character when he sought to slip from the drop of water into a region which was vague and yet infinitely precise, a sort of holy place, so perfectly suited to him that it was enough for him to be there, to be; it was like an imaginary hollow which he entered because, before he was there, his imprint was there already. And so, he made a last effort to fit completely inside. It was easy; he encountered no obstacles; he re-joined himself; he blended with himself, entering into this place which no one else could penetrate (Blanchot 1973, 8).*

Embodiment of big crunch singularity in the Blanchotian space of literature is the point and the moment of fascination which connects for instance Thomas to "the core of an infinity where he was bound by the very absence of limits" (Blanchot 1973, 37), and it is where Anne "recognized herself passionately in search of the absence of Anne, of the most absolute nothingness of Anne" (Blanchot 1973, 62). Blanchot is groping for another universe with another spacetime which is guaranteed by its impossibility and ingraspability. Blanchot writes in *the Great Refusal* "we are delivered over to another

time-to time as other, as absence and neutrality; precisely to a time that can no longer redeem us.... A time without event, without project, without possibility... an unstable perpetuity ... in which we are arrested and incapable of permanence, a time neither abiding nor granting the simplicity of a dwelling place"(Blanchot 2003,45). This time as other and absence is also a time without possibility with which Thomas's mind is obsessed when he expresses "I go on the margins of the universe, boldly walking elsewhere than where I can be, and a little outside of my steps.... The possible outside the possible." (Blanchot 1973, 107).

While for Blanchot conceptualization of traversing and going on the margin of the universe signifies entangling with other transcendent and ungraspable projects in terms of spacetime singularities, however, actualization for such project and moment of transcendent fascination is in complete conformity with Levinas's formulation for the metaphysical ethics which is viable through our responsible relation with the others:

*Who would require a look to cross the universe? What is strange about not seeing something distant when nearby things are still invisible? Yes, what is inexplicable is not my ignorance but the fact that my ignorance gave in. I would find it unfair, though in keeping with the laws, not to have been able to shatter infinity, nor draw from all the hazards the only one that could be called chance (Blanchot 1985, 7).*

Relation with the Other that is time in Levinasian point of view is conjured up in the passage above echoing his famous watchword for this relationality which is 'extraordinary and everyday'. Relation with the Other for example, in the *When the Time comes* is referred to as "preoccupations that paralyzed time" (Blanchot 1985, 11). It is what that in the *Thomas the Obscure* makes Anne "no longer arguing with" Thomas "with words and thoughts, but with the very time she was espousing" (Blanchot 1973, 61). As time for Levinas conveys primacy of ethics by breaking from the self for the other, transcendence opens the time of the Other for the ethical relationship. Sam B. Girgus, quoting from Levinas asserts that "there is no model of transcendence outside of ethics" and concludes that "Levinas resists obeisance to a linear time that reduces the other to the same and entraps the self and the other in a temporality of fixed beginnings, middles, and endings. For Levinas, diachronic time by which he means a time of disruption, counters the synchronic simultaneity of abstract clock time to place ethical responsibility for the other in an ethical dimension of a pre-originary time with an infinite future" (4). These ethical responsibility for the other and the infinite future delineated "a game" for Blanchot in the *When the Time Comes* "in which time was being put at stake (Blanchot 1985, 36). "Time" in this sense according to Levinas "is not an achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but that it is the very relationship of the subject with Other" (Levinas 1987, 39).

Moment of fascination as Blanchot attempts to circumscribe is just the same as the moment of spacetime's collapse into a singularity where space and time lose their functionality, while their subsistence according to Blanchot is dependent on a "fascination" that "is fundamentally linked to neutral, impersonal presence, to the indeterminate They, the immense, faceless Someone. Fascination is the relation the gaze entertains—a relation which is itself neutral and impersonal—with sightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees because it is blinding" (Blanchot 1982, 33). For Blanchot, the "Someone is the faceless third person, the They of which everybody and anybody is part." He continues in the *Space of Literature* that the "They belongs to a region which cannot be brought to light, not because it is radically obscure, but because it transforms everything which has access to it, even light, into anonymous, impersonal being, the Nontrue, the Nonreal yet always there. The They is, in this respect, what appears up very close when someone dies" (Blanchot 1982, 31). Therefore, the moment of fascination accomplished through our encounter with the faceless Someone that makes the They is a vehement spacetime singularity in Blanchot's view that travels even faster than light as is explicitly foregrounded according to Stephen Hawking in the general theory of relativity:

*There was a young lady of Wight  
Who travelled much faster than light.  
She departed one day,  
In a relative way,  
And arrived on the previous night.  
(Hawking 2015, 144)*

The point is that although to Hawking the theory of relativity holds that there is no unique measure of time that all observers can agree on, however, each observer has his or her own measure of time. It is only at a spacetime singularity and nonlocal milieu that everyone is agreeing on a common and shared measure. It is a singularity and non-locality 'the They of which everybody and anybody is part.' A singularity that to Tanja Staehler does justice to Levinas' fascination with the idea of the infinite stemming from the fact that philosophy opens up to something beyond our grasp, something that exceeds our power" (122).

Narrative in Maurice Blanchot's fictionality coceals to a milieu that is not according to Levinas an effect of space nor is it manifestable through spatial exteriority. Anne in the *Thomas the Obscure* is entangled with a nonlocal and sovereign time which is referred to as a "time out of joint" by Polansky that "contests and breaches the continuity of linear time" (126). Blanchot is distancing himself from time as continuous and encumbered by physical space. He is attached to and entangled with an infinite and fascinating moment whose "space fled before" him and "had bound" himself "furiously to the infinite" (Blanchot 1985, 65). Apex of this infinite and fascinating moment is encounter with alterity of the Other, transcendence, or the face:

*A unique moment, marvelously agreeable and important, that made me feel that all of space, from the remotest point to the nearest, was entirely occupied by the living reality of one face and open the world for me to the immense measure of that face. (Blanchot 1985, 26)*

This fascinating moment is rightly likable to the moment of big crunch singularity in the cosmological terms after that according to Vlad Van Rosenthal "there would be no time and no space, as it was before the moment of the big bang. At the instant of the big crunch, the temperatures of the universe will rise to infinity, and all matter and energy in the universe will concentrate into a single fire ball" (194). It is entanglement of 'a free image soaring from a point' with 'another point' pursuing 'a real meaning' and 'cheerfulness' through 'the echo of a supreme event reverberating through the infinite lightness of time'. "It is" according to Blanchot "intimacy with the outside which has no location and affords no rest" (Blanchot 1982, 31).

*Each day, or at least certain days, but also each period of time and each movement of the day shows me, through the radiant space, the flight of a free image soaring from a point that I can't see toward another point that I can't see, and for me both no doubt merge.... to follow the image instant by instant, an image myself, projected into the fire of appearances, as if, in excessing ourselves through each other, both of us were pursuing the possibility of giving an empty point the luster and the living value of a real meaning.... Someone is there who is not speaking, who is not looking at me, yet who is capable of an entrancing life and cheerfulness, though that cheerfulness is also the echo of a supreme event reverberating through the infinite lightness of time, where it cannot settle. (Blanchot 1985, 73)*

## CONCLUSION

*When I am alone, the light of day is only the loss of a dwelling place. It is intimacy with the outside which has no location and affords no rest. Coming here makes the one who comes belong to dispersal, to the fissure where the exterior is the intrusion that stifles, but is also nakedness, the chill of the enclosure that leaves one utterly exposed. Here the only space is its vertiginous separation. Here fascination reigns. (Blanchot 1982, 31)*

It is clearly conspicuous that concept of *the same* receives a secondary importance than that of the Other in Maurice Blanchot's attitude towards a transcendent ecstasy or fascination. Blanchot considers this ecstasy "from the standpoint of things in their freedom from subjectivity" (Critchley & Bernosconi 222) which leads to their clinging



to relations with one another and the Other beyond. Based on Blanchotian philosophy, we are always entangled with a transcendent and mysterious spacetime whose actualization involves our responsible relation with other persons and the mysterious Other concurrently. In as far as thinkers like Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger according to Benjamin Hutchens had held the misbelief that historical consciousness is formed by the autonomous self's consciousness of time, Emmanuel Levinas reiterates that time is the work of a face-to-face relation with the other and not the labour of an isolated and self-sufficient self. To Levinas' innovative thesis, "the way we experience the world of objects and events shape our perception of time, and privileged among these experiences is the basic social engagement of the face-to-face relationship" (qtd. in Hutchens 67). This perception of time is for Blanchot experienceable in the everyday experiences of our face-to-face relation with others that bestows credit to our perception of time in its transcendental and metaphysical senses.

Maurice Blanchot in his search for the ideas of alterity and transcendence and juxtaposing them with the concepts of absence and origin, is exactly echoing theories of big crunch singularity and the quantum entanglement. Just matched with the scenarios of entanglement and mono-locality that strive to connect the self's subjectivity, concreteness, interiority, consciousness, presence, and possibility of impossibility to the Other's far-fetched objectivity, abstractness, exteriority, absence, and impossibility of possibility; Blanchot is following Emmanuel Levinas' footprints in implying that the Other's alterity or "exteriority" is "not simply an effect of space, which keeps separate what conceptually is identical; nor is there some which would manifest itself through spatial exteriority. It is precisely in as much as it is irreducible to these two notions of exteriority" (Levinas 1978, 95). Accordingly, aligned with the theory of big crunch singularity and the concepts of absence and infinity ascribed to it, to Blanchot "this absence makes it impossible ever to declare the work finished or unfinished" (Blanchot 1982, 22). In this sense, according to Maria Laura Arce "absence signifies the limitless nature of the work of literature since, once it is finished, it is started over or destroyed entering in and infinite movement of creation" (39), just as we are told of the successory cycles of the aeons in an astrophysical point of view. It is also in Diane Perpich's words, an alterity that "remains subordinated to the problematic of escape" (36).

What Blanchot is pursuing in his fictionality is a sort of irreducible transcendence that Thomas is specifically entangled with nonlocally as "a horrifying being which was already pressing against him in space and, existing outside time, remained infinitely distant" (Blanchot 1973, 27). Jeff Fort states that Blanchot in his novelistic trend has been always portraying "the drifting and wandering search for the distant, the unknown, the inaccessible, and the otherwise enigmatic" (Blanchot 2002, x).

This 'otherwise enigmatic' representing as "another cosmological horizon" and "another infinity" (Hawking 1993, 134) for Stephen Hawking in his discussions of the

spacetime singularities is all consistent with Levinas' concepts of infinity and mystery of the Other wherein "everything is distinct, everything is melted together" (Blanchot 1973, 106) and where "we are united by the mutual check in which we hold each other" (Blanchot 1973, 107) according to Blanchot. "By grounding metaphysics" according to Edith Wyschogrod "in ethics rather than in constructing an ethic upon preestablished metaphysical foundations, Levinas argues that traditional Western Philosophy sustains a distinction between one and the other" (xxx). Transcendent point or instance in the sense of its ethical relation with the Other for Levinas is "a gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the Other" (Levinas 1969, 24) which is signifying for Blanchot as "a point not foreign to time, but representing as well the pure passion of time" (Blanchot 1985, 64), and "the point at which it keeps returning to the present, at which I can no longer either forget or remember, at which human events around a centre as unstable and immobile as myself, indefinitely construct their return" (Blanchot 1985, 73) and that "united them in a single beam" (Blanchot 1973, 99).

This unifying point of ecstasy and fascination rectifies one's solipsistic attitude towards the other and annexes ethical relation with the other as a third coordinate to the fabric of spacetime additional to its spatial and temporal coordinates. For Levinas and Blanchot authenticity of true time is extremely dependent on our ethical and responsible relation with the Other. "Ethics" for Levinas as Marinos Diamantides quotes "is not a moment of being; it is otherwise and better than being, the very possibility of the beyond" (184). This is to say that essence of time for Levinas and Blanchot is sugar-coated by an 'ethical meaning' or 'ethical experience' which is 'outlined by the paradox of an infinite' entangled with 'the finite', that goes 'beyond experience', 'out of responsibility for the other', out of the-one-for-the-other':

*"That the way the Infinite passes the finite and passes itself has an ethical meaning is not something that results from a project to construct the "transcendental foundation" of "ethical experience." The ethical is the field outlined by the paradox of an Infinite in relationship with the finite without being belied in this relationship. Ethics is the breakup of the originary unity of transcendental apperception, that is, it is the beyond of experience. Witnessed, and not thematized, in the sign given to the other, the Infinite signifies out of responsibility for the other, out of the-one-for-the-other, a subject supporting everything, subject to everything, that is, suffering for everyone, but charged with everything, without having had to decide for this taking charge, which is gloriously amplified in the measure that it is imposed. Obedience precedes any hearing of the command. The possibility of finding, anachronously, the order in the obedience itself, and of receiving the order out of oneself, this reverting of heteronomy into autonomy, is the very way the Infinite passes itself" (Levinas 1998, 148).*

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