

Filosofija ir menas

THE FUSION OF PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE IN NIHILIST THOUGHT*

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In this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate that post-metaphysical philosophy should cease its attempts to imitate the formal rules of science and rather intensify its dialogue with art, especially literature. I will draw on the philosophy of Gianni Vattimo, according to whom we should accept nihilism and admit that no theoretical narrative is true in the sense of corresponding to reality. Acceptance of nihilism amounts to the acceptance of radical contingency, where no line of argument is everlasting. As philosophical thinking is weakened in this manner, and as it lets go of the presumption of its own validity, a new era will arrive in the dialogue between philosophy and literature by their fusion.

Keywords: nihilism, hermeneutics, literature, nothingness, postmodern.

At least ever since Plato, there has been a pointed debate about the relationship between philosophy and literature. Over the course of the 20th century, questions concerning this relationship have become even more trenchant as a consequence of the blurring of boundaries and definitions that are described with phrases such as “the end

of philosophy”, “the death of the author”, “postmodernity” etc. On the one hand, this process of blurring tightens literature into a more philosophical one, and on the other weakens philosophy into an increasingly literary one. Although some thinkers (e.g. Rorty 1989, 1991; Habermas 1996) have cast light on the substantial similarities between philosophy and literature, it is a topic that is nevertheless accompanied by a certain hesitation, an apprehension. It is as if philosophy wants to avoid fusion with literature at all costs. This apprehension may be justifiable by institutional considera-

* For the critical comments I would like to thank the following people: Marc Hight, Roomet Jakapi, Tõnu Viik, Ülo Matjus, Siobhan Kattago, Mats Volberg.

The support of the Tallinn University Estonian Institute of Humanities Science Fund is gratefully acknowledged for financing the translation of the article. Article is translated by Silver Rattasepp.

tions, but in what follows I will attempt to demonstrate that not by substantial ones.

This paper is an attempt to sketch one possible direction for post-metaphysical thought. It is divided into three parts. In the first part, titled ‘Nihilism and the end of philosophy’ I will first argue, with support from Nietzsche and Heidegger, that nihilism is the logical outcome of the end of Western metaphysics. I will treat nihilism as a historical reality, not as a subjective attitude. Next, I will argue, drawing on Gianni Vattimo, that nihilism cannot be overcome and that the only possibility is to accept it. I will clarify the meaning of the concept of truth in nihilist thought and then demonstrate why, in this nihilist condition, it is more fruitful to enter into a dialogue with literature rather than science. I will discuss the basis on which the difference between philosophy and literature is said to rest and will argue, by further developing Vattimo’s ideas that this distinction is gradually disappearing.

In the second part of the paper, titled ‘The Fable’, I will proceed from the assumption of the fusion of philosophy and literature and will analyse the relationship between fiction and reality in nihilist thinking. With recourse to Vattimo’s ontology of decline, I will come to the conclusion that one direction for nihilist thought leads to a total fabulation, marked by an absence of any criteria for distinguishing reality from fiction. In addition to Vattimo, this part of the paper draws on Heidegger’s treatment of the work of art as setting up a world, on Barthes’s concept of the pleasure of the text, and on Derrida. I will provide examples of theories drawn from 20th century

philosophy that are related to my position, and of practical phenomena that confirm it. Lastly, I will tie the fable with madness and suggest that the acceptance nihilism is accompanied by a weakening of subjectivity, by existence conceived of as a game of switching masks.

In the third part, entitled ‘Naming the nothing’, I will survey the more radical direction in nihilist thought that proceeds by an insatiable desire to articulate the nothing. I will associate this line of thought with Lyotard’s concept of the sublime, Blanchot’s treatment of the space of literature and Barthes’s pleasure of the text. Finally, I will introduce, by way of Heidegger and Blanchot, the subject-matters of anxiety and boredom.

Even though the present paper leans heavily on the theoretical side and does not deal with in-depth analyses of literary texts, its purpose is to aid in further literary interpretations. Since one of the primary arguments of this paper is the invalidity of strong arguments in the age of nihilism, this work is bound to remain a hazy oxymoron and cannot provide the reader with clear lines of proof.

Nihilism and the end of philosophy

I am of the opinion that the main current of Western thought in the 20th (and 21st) century can be subsumed under the expression “the end of philosophy”. As Heidegger writes, philosophy as metaphysics has been completely overcome (Heidegger 1988: 63). To clarify: metaphysics here refers to so-called speculative metaphysics – thinking of the sort that attempts to consider the

entirety of being as a single system, from a single foundation, and deems it possible to provide an answer to the question *what is being as a whole?* (cf. Boeder 1980: 39ff). Since Nietzsche, this kind of thinking no longer holds a firm grip and metaphysics has been cast off from the throne of the “science of sciences”. Today, inquiring into being as a whole sounds positively archaic.

In his writings, Nietzsche diagnoses and provides a prognosis of the decline of metaphysics, noting as a relevant fact the identical nature of metaphysical and monotheist pathos (later on, Heidegger (1990) coins for metaphysics the concept of ‘onto-theology’). The death of God implicit in the general process of secularisation (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 3: 480–482) is simultaneously the downfall of metaphysics. Nietzsche subsumes this under the concept of *nihilism*: “What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves.* The aim is lacking; “why?” finds no answer” (Nietzsche 1968: 9).

Nihilism, this *most homeless of all visitors* (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 12: 125), has troubled an entire army of 20th century thinkers. To this day, it is not alien to thought to try and overcome nihilism, which may take the form of an attempted reanimation of the deceased God or of an attempt to find a new claimant to the empty throne of foundational values. This hustling and bustling about was foreseen by Nietzsche, who called them the incomplete forms of nihilism (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 12: 476). I consider Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s common position – that nihilism is not an accidental weakness but stems from the internal logic of Western culture itself – to be of high importance. According to Nietzsche, the

Christian-metaphysical comprehension of the world is itself nihilistic, i.e. life-denying, as it places values not into life but into the hereafter, into nothingness. In Nietzsche’s opinion, a culture based on this kind of retrograde thinking is beyond redemption, that extreme positions can be replaced only with equally extreme, albeit reverse ones – thus everything is futile (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 12: 212).

Heidegger introduces an ontological layer into his approach to nihilism, considers nihilism from an ontological difference, diagnoses the entire metaphysics as a forgetfulness of Being, a story where Being is called off, is reduced into mere beings. For Heidegger, metaphysics is the historical foundation of world history determined by the West, and thus world history is nihilistic (Heidegger 1980: 260). The forgetfulness of Being culminates at the end of metaphysics with a frenzied demand for the enframing (*Ge-stell*) of modern technology, where man itself is in danger of turning into mere standing reserve (Heidegger 1991: 26). I am aware that Heidegger is dubiously pretentious, that his treatment of the philosophical history of metaphysics as nihilism veers towards determinism and excludes from observation several strands of Western thought. For present purposes, however, it will suffice if we acknowledge nihilism as a primary current in Western culture, including the gradual disappearance of value attributed to the supra-sensuous (Nietzsche’s death of God, the reduction of permanent value into exchange value), and a heightened interest towards the negative (nothingness as the problem of the radical *other*, as initiated by Heidegger).

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger stress the impossibility of volitionally overcoming nihilism and the need to embrace it, to live it (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 13: 190; Heidegger 1978: 383). In my assessment, this is fundamentally true. It would be a mistake to regard Heidegger's treatment of nihilism as apocalyptic; the nihilistic forgetfulness of Being is not a humane mistake, but rather, when considered as the history of Being, the epoch of Being's self-giving, the story of the refusal of Being. Heidegger equates Being as anything that exists in relation to the *other* nothingness; it is thus impossible to separate refusal, the not (*Nicht*) from Being.

We have traversed, with Heidegger's aid, a path from nihilism as a cultural phenomenon to nihilism's "nature", of Being-nothingness refused in the abandonment of Being – a radical otherness. How should nihilist thought proceed? Heidegger's latter, allusional thinking provides several lines of interpretation.

1. The eschatological interpretation: nihilism cannot be overcome, but it can be gotten over (*verwinden*), if the gentle thinker bears Being in mind and remains open to things where one can appropriate (*ereignen*) the fourfold world: the heaven and the earth, mortals and gods (cf. Heidegger 2000b: 165–188). The openness cannot be held philosophically-methodically; in Heidegger's latter thinking it appears in a dialogue between poetry and thinking.

2. The apocalyptic interpretation that draws support from both Heidegger and Nietzsche (the desert grows!): nihilism remains impossible to overcome, and we can but fade away in heroism and nostal-

gia, decline before the face of the absent God (Heidegger 2000a: 671). The basic presumption of this interpretation leads to the possibility of going along with the destruction, in a creative conflagration of negation, headed for nothingness. In principle, this interpretation can be reduced to Nietzsche's distinction between passive and active nihilism (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 12: 350–351). These attitudes do not solely or even primarily belong to philosophy, but also characterize modern poetry (e.g. Thomas Stearns Eliot's *The Waste Land*).

3. Conciliation with nihilism. This interpretation, which I also share, has been put forward by Gianni Vattimo. It is an interpretation that places an emphasis on treating Nietzsche as a hermeneutic thinker, considers it possible to accept nihilism without the apocalyptic consequences. Vattimo suggests that we must learn from Nietzsche his good temperament and treat as positive the condition where all values have been lost and we drift from the centre towards x (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 12: 127). Vattimo interprets Heidegger also as a nihilist (Vattimo 1989), whose diagnosis of nihilism, "there is nothing with Being" (Heidegger 1999: 206), should be accepted without eschatological expectations about the appropriation (*ereignen*) of Being. Being is nothing forever, it appears only by its withdrawal in metaphysics and modern technology, and our relationship with Being can only ever be but the remembrance (*Andenken*) of this withdrawal. Vattimo calls his thinking *the ontology of decline*, or weak thought (Vattimo 1986a: 65–93).

Vattimo thus proposes to learn from Nietzsche his good temperament in a situation

where there is nothing with Being, and to simply go on, as it were, with one's life in this world of nihilism. During the past couple of decades, Vattimo has put considerable energy into contemplating the possibility of living in a nihilistic world, further developing the ethical, political (Vattimo 2004) and even religious (Vattimo 1999) implications of weak thinking. Certainly, Vattimo is not the only one trying to render sense to living in a post-metaphysical world (cf. e.g. Rorty 1989). The ontological depth of Being-nothingness is not well treated by Vattimo, however; I will make an attempt to reach this depth here.

Acknowledging the end of metaphysics and reconciling it with nihilism faces us with a terminological difficulty. Should abandoning metaphysical pretensions be marked with a consistent application of concepts, by giving up the concept of *philosophy*? This is the route taken by the later Heidegger, who discusses *other thinking* (Heidegger 2000a: 674); unfortunately, such a firm resolution will, in my assessment, give undue support to the eschatological interpretation, as if there was a secret, yet to be revealed positivity hiding in this *other thinking*. Vattimo, however, retains the use of the concepts 'philosophy' and 'ontology', even though he, too, places himself in the post-metaphysical situation. I deem such an employment of concepts to be valid, as this reminds us that metaphysics cannot be wilfully overcome; even while we keep a critical distance from it, it will nevertheless have an impact through our language that has been inherited from metaphysics, as Jacques Derrida (1981: 12) emphasizes. I agree with Vattimo that authentic relation-

ship to metaphysics is remembrance (*Andenken*, Vattimo 1994: 173–175), including strands of acceptance, since metaphysics was inevitable as the historic epoch of Being's withdrawal. Philosophy ought not to be overcome; rather, it should be gotten over (*verwinden*), as weak thinking is not an abrupt transfer into a new paradigm (as may be implied by Heidegger's metaphor about the leap from the ground to the abyss (*Ab-grund*, Heidegger 1997: 77–79), but rather a process of weakening. The fusion of philosophy with literature is one, although not the only possible direction in this process.

I would call the discourse that has accepted this fusion, in which philosophy and literature are altered to a considerable extent, nihilist thought or the poetry of nihilism. In these expressions, ambiguity operates as the genitive, loved both by Heidegger and Vattimo. The thought/poetry of nihilism amounts to thinking/writing poetry *about nihilism* and simultaneously *in nihilism*.

Truth in nihilist thought

I will briefly linger on the concept of truth in order to clarify the topic of the next part of this paper – why nihilist thought cannot have a fruitful dialogue with the natural sciences. We will try to see in what sense Vattimo can unite the concept of truth with the perspective of nihilism.

Vattimo represents a hermeneutic view on truth, a continuation of Heidegger's thought. Heidegger abandons the correspondence theory of truth and discusses truth as the unhiddenness of Being, by interpreting the etymology of the Greek word

aletheia. In Heidegger's considerations of truth there is an aspect on which Vattimo later places a major emphasis: the essential connection between the unhidden-hidden (i.e. truth-untruth, Heidegger 1980: 40). This sort of a dual connection is derived from Heidegger's identification of Being with nothingness, although mainstream heideggerians keep focussing on Being alone.

The mainstay of hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, takes over from Heidegger the concept of truth's unhiddenness, but discusses truth as the unhiddenness of the historical tradition, rather than as the unhiddenness of Being (Gadamer 1990). There are no eternal truths, but there remains truth as the unhiddenness of the horizon of understanding of a particular historic community.

In his thought, Vattimo amplifies the fact that for unhiddenness-truth, the position of universal truthfulness is unattainable – as long as we look at truth from a so-called external perspective. Vattimo discusses truth as the unhiddenness to untruth, and frequently emphasizes the need to develop and accept the nihilist implications of hermeneutics (cf. Vattimo 1997: 1–14).

Focusing on the narrower context, on the internal perspective of unhiddenness, Vattimo agrees that there is a truth operating whose limits of validity coincide with the contingent limits of the communication of a particular community (a position similar to that of later Wittgenstein and pragmatism). Vattimo emphasizes the fact that persons do not passively belong to a community; rather, being in truth is an interpretive activity (Vattimo 1997: 82). Since language always

enmeshes human beings into a collective web of living-in-tradition (Vattimo 1994: 133), truth will not remain untouched by the general art of interpretation that Gadamer calls 'rhetoric' (ibid: 135). The nature of truth, for Vattimo, is rhetorical.

In several places, Vattimo singles out a fragment from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* about "How the "True World" Finally Became a Fable" (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 6: 80–81). By further developing the rhetorical nature of truth and the absence of metaphysical foundations, Vattimo comes to the conclusion that we do not participate passively in reality but rather create it through our interpretations in language. Weak thinking is accompanied by a weakened sense of reality, its fabulation, and narrativity (cf. Vattimo 1992: 61). This topic will be more closely discussed in the second part of this paper, entitled "The Fable". The third part of this paper, "Naming the nothing", will discuss an extreme form of nihilism by heading towards truthless thinking.

Abandoning the scientific

Vattimo's hermeneutic grounding-ungrounding style of thinking and the interpretation of reality as a fable indicate a central role for literature in nihilist thought. In his paper titled 'Aesthetics and the End of Epistemology' Vattimo indeed argues that philosophy should open up a dialogue with art rather than with science (Vattimo 1985: 291). Although the author does not clarify it in this paper, here and in what follows we should, being aware of Vattimo's basic positions, have in mind the post-metaphysical, nihilist philosophy when discussing the relations between philosophy and litera-

ture. With reference to Gadamer, Vattimo repeats that philosophy must abandon the “scientific” concept of truth, i.e. the correspondence theory (ibid: 289) and instead accept truth as unhiddenness, an experience available in poetry (ibid: 291).

How does Vattimo justify his preference? Referring to Wilhelm Dilthey’s ‘On the Essence of Philosophy’, Vattimo argues that the metaphysical dream, the dream of objectivity is over (ibid: 291). It was already Dilthey who noticed that for poet-philosophers, the methodological ambitions toward universal validity and substantiation have been weakened, leading interpretation to extract increasingly freer forms from life’s experience (ibid: 290). In principle, Vattimo argues using the description of the end of metaphysics. To briefly recall Nietzsche, we can see that he, too, described the veneration of science as an incomplete form of nihilism that struggles to salvage basic values (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 12: 126–127). One of philosophy’s responses to the crisis of metaphysics in late 19th century was indeed a close co-operation with special sciences, conducted in the hopes that science can rise to the level of evidence that had become lost in metaphysics. But this hope, still struggling on in a weakened form in scientific realism, is baseless.

Vattimo stresses that philosophy cannot co-operate with science until the “aesthetic” nature of the sciences has been completely revealed (Vattimo 1985: 292), failing which philosophy and science remain incommensurable. Vattimo observes – and I concur – that the interpretive nature of science, its loss of straightforward clarity has already been revealed in the works of Thomas Kuhn

and Paul Feyerabend (ibid: 292). This does not mean, of course, that this is a shift in interpreting science that has been widely accepted in Western societies; certainly the scientific propaganda fighting for priority over funding will continue to take care that the general public will think of science as the authority on discovering the objective truth. I reckon that toppling science from the throne of the “king of truth” will be a laborious process.

Even if we were to admit that science’s self-understanding has gone through a certain weakening (e.g. non-representational realism, Chalmers 1999: 243ff), the difference between scientific pathos and nihilist thought remains too wide for conducting a fruitful dialogue. For this reason, philosophy’s dialogue with literature – whose truth cannot be put into the form of a proposition – is bound to be more fruitful (Vattimo 1985: 293).

Certainly this criticism does not cast doubt on the capability of science in generating coherent explanations about phenomena and to assist in the general increase of comfort by developing new technological solutions. It cannot be denied, either, that several analytic strands in contemporary philosophy are conducting a fruitful cooperation with the sciences. What is criticised here is scientific realism as the dominant world-view that has a tendency to aggressively smother other possible world-views. Vattimo’s train of thought could be clarified thus: philosophy as nihilist thought abandons scientificity and inclines towards literature. The most relevant aspect of abandoning the scientific lies not in railing against specialised sciences, but is

reflexive – nihilist thought does not pursue certainty and logical rigour, but is instead open to the ambiguous and the paradoxical. In this thinking, poetic intuitions are brought to the foreground at the expense of more naturalistic ones.

What is the basis for distinguishing philosophy and literature?

To summarise the positions presented above: with the exhaustion of metaphysical philosophy and the acceptance of the rhetoric nature of truth, a warranted question is raised: is there any basis left for distinguishing philosophy from literature? In the subsequent sections of this paper I will attempt to demonstrate that in nihilist thought this distinction wanes. But currently let us ask, what is the distinction between philosophy and literature based on?

I presume that it is mostly based on a common-sense, petrified pattern of thinking that persists stubbornly. We ought to be reminded of Nietzsche's saying that we are bound to be battling God's shadow for centuries after His demise (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 3: 467). Just like the pathos of scientific objectivity, the pathos of philosophical objectivity refuses to fade away easily.

As an extreme caricature, the distinction between philosophy and literature can be described in this manner: philosophy is a rigorous and methodical, analytic way of thinking that produces true statements (in the sense of the correspondence theory of truth). In literature, however, the world is either merely described (*mimesis*), and imaginary situations and characters are come up with (fictionality), or emotions and a sense of life is expressed (it is in this

way that Rudolf Carnap, himself standing on a firm logical ground, describes earlier metaphysics as literature, Carnap 1931: 240–241).

Although some of the sharper edges have been filed off from this opposition by the trendy current of postmodernity, there are nevertheless only few authors who proclaim to formulate the fusion of philosophy and literature. Even Heidegger, whose thought moves from the ground to the abyss, and who was, from the 1930s on, in a constant dialogue with poetry, leaves a „small but certain difference“ (Herrmann 1999) between thinking and poetry. The poet does indeed name the world, names the connection of mortals with the godlike, but only the thinker thinks Being. Vattimo accuses Heidegger of harbouring to metaphysical rudiments, since Heidegger refuses to accept the nihilist nature of post-metaphysical thought (Vattimo 1989). I would supplement this accusation: Heidegger lacks the willingness to let thinking fade into poetry.

Institutional considerations certainly play an important role in retaining the traditional, “strong” concept of philosophy. Since in Western societies science holds primacy over funding, it is frequently economically viable for philosophers to be associated with scientific institutions, for which reason it is necessary for them to go along with the pathos of scientific objectivity and productivity. Certainly the situation is somewhat different in different countries, but as a general rule one could say that philosophy, as a practice that earns the philosophers their living, only manages to attain epigonal renaissances and variations thereof (Heidegger 1988: 63).

It is certainly true that there are, to this day, plenty of philosophers who, in complete sincerity, strive to reach objectively true results in a particular domain and who would disagree with these Vattimo-esque starting points. In most instances, the starting points and basic intuitions of such philosophies differ from hermeneutic thinking to such an extent that fruitful dialogue turns out to be impossible. It is for this reason that I will now critically survey a continuing attempt at keeping philosophy and literature apart that places itself into the neighbourhood of the way of thinking suggested here – that is, phenomenology. I have in mind Adriaan Peperzak's paper 'Phänomenologische Notizen zum Unterschied zwischen Literatur und Philosophie' (1982).

The author proceeds from a distinction: philosophy seeks truth while literature seeks beauty (Peperzak 1982: 100), soon followed by a clarification that literature can also represent ugliness. The author then distinguishes it from philosophy by arguing that the significance of a literary work of art is located in itself (ibid: 100), the meaning of literature cannot be reformulated without loss (ibid: 101), and that a literary text remains novel and presents its secrets time and again (ibid: 102). Argumentation, in fact, destroys the literary work (ibid: 101).

Philosophy, however, or so the author claims, always strives towards a purpose for which the text is but a means (ibid: 108). Philosophizing understands itself as progressing. This ambition is, according to the author, intact in the post-metaphysical philosophy of phenomenology: a phenomenological description is but the first step towards understanding what is actu-

ally important (ibid: 110). The purpose of philosophy – to discover the truth about what really exists – is the incentive to begin philosophizing in the first place (ibid: 111); thus philosophy is not synonymous with purely descriptive phenomenology. This assertion certainly has its merits, and in my opinion this is true even of the latter Heidegger's interpretations of poetry, where the dialogue with poetry is always conducted *for Being*.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the continued distinction between philosophy and literature, Peperzak does not take an absolutist position and proposes essays as one possible case where the two intermingle (ibid: 99) and admits that a union in the future is not an impossibility (ibid: 118). Indeed, the author hypothetically proposes one possible case for such a union:

If philosophy limits itself to the reconstruction and exegesis of past philosophy and identifies itself completely with hermeneutics, then philosophy and literature are indistinguishable (ibid: 113–114).

Peperzak warns that in this case philosophy as a search for truth would deteriorate (ibid: 115), but in my opinion *the above quote precisely describes Vattimo's nihilist hermeneutics*. The acceptance of nihilism is a step towards the literary, a repudiation of the philosophical Eros which, according to Peperzak, prevents thinking from emptying into poetry (ibid: 115). Peperzak remains adamant that the distinction will remain: "The philosopher who acknowledges that his approach is limited, does not merely say, "This text only has a limited purpose", but equally, "This purpose is but partial and still on the road. It must be developed further,

re-written into a better text” (ibid: 116–117). This is certainly applicable to metaphysics, perhaps to Heidegger’s pathos as well, but no longer applicable to post-metaphysical, nihilist thought. I do believe that Vattimo would be willing to say this about his own works, or at least I will say it with him or by myself about this paper: that *this text has but a limited scope*. And will provide no excuses.

A slow fusion

It is apparent from Vattimo’s paper ‘Aesthetics and the End of Epistemology’ that he does not rule out the fusion of philosophy with literature (Vattimo 1985: 294). Even so, philosophy cannot, in Vattimo’s assessment, meld into poetry easily and quickly, since both are still defined and distinguished from one another by terminology inherited from the metaphysical tradition. In such a mesh of concepts, the transformation of philosophy would amount to nothing but its turn-about into its own opposition (a world-view instead of a system) and would not alter its character (ibid.). According to Vattimo, we need time to abate, with the aid of dialogue, the metaphysical distinction between philosophy and literature (ibid.).

From the above it follows that the dialogue between philosophy and literature can, in principle, lead to their fusion. And this contemplation strives to be one step on this road. I will not claim for myself the honour of being a pioneer in this, as the fusion has been progressing for quite some time, to which a quick glance at the ever-growing philosophical literature on this topic would testify. Another indication of this fusion could perhaps be found in the

fact that today, from within nihilism, we lack the capacity to come up with a satisfying definition for both thought (philosophy) and literature. Our thought wanders nomad-like; post-metaphysics, post-modernity leaves no room for metanarratives. In this ongoing fusion of philosophy and literature, Vattimo’s thought is also but one story among many and not a miraculous, firmly grounded methodological weapon. Vattimo is fully aware of this paradox, and repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of working out and accepting the nihilist leanings of hermeneutics; he has also presented the religious implications of his thought (Vattimo 1999). Thought melting together operates within the paradox of relativism.

It seems that Vattimo’s conclusions about the necessity to continuously acquiesce to the distinction of philosophy and literature does not hold to the extent that he presumes; there is already considerable readiness for their fusion. I do not merely have in mind the enormous amount of research on the relationship between philosophy and literature that has been published since 1985, for at least ever since the late 19th century there have been plenty of thinkers/poets who have played an important role in this fusion – Vattimo himself refers back to Dilthey, for example (Vattimo 1985: 289–291). Another indubitable pioneer of the fusion of philosophy and literature is Nietzsche. Vattimo treats Nietzsche as a hermeneutic philosopher (Vattimo 1986b), a predecessor to weak thinking, but in my assessment Nietzsche is not just a philosopher, but rather one of the more radical poet-philosophers (*Nur Narr! Nur Dichter!*, Nietzsche 1988, vol. 6: 377–380), whose work still perplexes those interpreters

who desire to hold fast to a clear distinction between different domains. I am tempted to plunge into heideggerian phenomenology and argue that it is not a coincidence that it is with Nietzsche, the originator of nihilism as a philosophical discourse, that the completion of nihilism – the weakening of philosophy into literature – is also concealed.

In Heidegger's own works, and in that of several of his students (Sartre, Levinas), philosophy and poetry are interwoven. Likewise, in the literary avant-garde of the early 20th century, there is a sharp increase in literature's philosophical self-consciousness and ontological independence. Modern and postmodern literature reaches forms that undermine both everyday understanding of the world and eventually even the meaningfulness of language itself (e.g. in the works of Samuel Beckett; a similar hollowing has been attributed to Nietzsche, cf. Blanchot 1993: 151–170).

The fusion of thought and literature thus does not lead to the occupation of philosophy by the literary – even if we were capable of defining it – but equally to philosophy permeating literature (Lacoue-Labarthe 1985: 45). At least ever since modernism, the literary text has been putting itself into question, has turned in on itself. The question is about the extent of the philosophical Eros present in nihilist thought, about its ever-diminishing amount; it would be naive to seek to be entirely rid of it. Vattimo does not exclude reasoning, but merely specifies that nihilist reasoning is always aware of the limits of its own reason (Vattimo 1997: 93).

Following up the conclusions made so far it would be important to ask how exactly does the fusion of philosophy and literature take place. In my next article I will put forward two possible lines of this fusion in thinking. Looking from the side of literature, this classification is reminiscent of Blanchot's distinction between the two slopes of literature (Blanchot 1999: 384–388). Blanchot emphasizes that the two slopes of literature cannot be separated, that literature will always oscillate between the two (Blanchot 1999: 388). Consequently, we are not dealing with a binary opposition in this and in the following paper.

Although these lines differ from one another considerably, nihilism, oscillating in the opposing play of the meaningful/meaningless, will always include both of these lines to some extent.

Although in my next paper I will make some normative suggestions, it will remain primarily a phenomenological survey of texts and ways of writing. The presumed fusion of philosophy and literature has been presented to us as a historical manifestation. It would be rather interesting to ask whether literature and philosophy, poetry and thought belong together *essentially* and from the get-go (such as in the educational poetry of Parmenides), or whether they are now fusing only for the very first time, but providing an answer to this question presupposes that we understand the "nature" of literature and philosophy, which from the nihilist position is an impossibility.

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FILOSOFIJOS IR LITERATŪROS SUSILIEJIMAS NIHILISTINIAME MĄSTYME

Leo Luks

S a n t r a u k a

Šiuo straipsniu siekiama parodyti, kad postmetafizinė filosofija turėtų liautis mėgdžiojusi formalias mokslo taisykles ir verčiau suintensyvinę dialogą su menu, o ypač – su literatūra. Daugiausia remiamasi Gianni Vattimo, pasak kurio turėtume priimti nihilizmą ir sutikti, kad joks teorinis naratyvas nėra teisingas epistemologine prasme ir negali pretenduoti į atitiktį realybei. Remiantis nihilizmu kaip prielaida, tenka

pripažinti radikalų kontingentiškumą, vadinasi, sutikti, kad jokia samprotavimo linkmė nebus amžina. Taip filosofinis mąstymas tampa silpnuoju, atsisako savo paties validumo pretenzijų, ir prasideda nauja filosofijos ir literatūros dialogo epocha, paženklinta jų susiliejimo žyme.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: nihilizmas, hermeneutika, literatūra, niekis, postmodernus.

Įteikta 2009 07 23