

Ethical-Reparative Reconfigurations of the Literary Today

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Abstract: This essay aims to debate the evidence of an ethical-reparative function for literature and literary studies today. Therefore, it is divided into two fundamental moments, two argumentative channels that, without a totalizing intention, point out the general perspective of the current, changing, situation. On the one hand, the literature of the 20th century is presented through the image of a supposed negativity or radical intransitivity, capable of "undoing the work" in its "aesthetics of suppression." On the other hand, from an introductory debate around some of the places of transitivity envisioned for literature at the beginning of the 21st century, the literary is now conceived as an ethical-reparative field, responsible, among others, for "giving visibility," "remembering," "repairing damage," "comforting," etc. This transition results in a notion of growing discomfort in relation to social artifacts that, even in the artistic field, cannot be reconciled with a utilitarianism that cannot preserve anything intact, not even literature.

André CECHINEL,

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Introduction

A critical device repeatedly used in the last century—and even before that—the announcement of the end or crisis of literature constitutes, as we know, one of the most important discursive resources both for literary criticism and for the activity of the writers themselves. This is so true that the confirmation of the partiality of this announcement, seen as excessive and apocalyptic, proves, in turn, to be no less constant and present than the phenomenon to be refuted. In other words, if, on the one hand, the end of literature or literary reading is problematized, envisioned or prophesied by critics like George Steiner, Alfonso Berardinelli, Tzvetan Todorov, Antoine Compagnon, among others, no less numerous are those who, on the other hand, set out to declare that the diagnosis of the end or crisis is not only long familiar, but also serves to feed or revive the movements of literature that ensure an apparently perennial survival. In Brazil, as an example of the theoretical debate that understands “end” and “crisis” as creative strategies for the literary space, one should mention the recent studies by Marcos Siscar.

In any case, if we think in terms of a continuum, in which the unlikely decline or disappearance of literature occupies one of the extremes, it is certain that the frequent announcement of its death is located at a less peripheral point, and refers, above all, to the perception that something has changed, that a particular form or register, previously taken for granted, no longer accurately reflects the fundamental operations of an object that remains, however, without an essence, informed retrospectively by its later and uncertain course. Instead of “end,” “death,” “decline” or “disappearance,” then, we should refer to “mutation indices” (Perrone-Moisés), signs of the crossing from one literary regime to another, the loss of contemporaneity of a certain definition, or the passage of an appreciation or social function to a new phase, role or situation that significantly updates the conceptual framework. Leyla Perrone-Moisés’ book, *Mutations of Literature in the 21st Century*, deals precisely with this theme, that is to say, removing the idea of “death” or “end” of literature from its apocalyptic-decadentist sphere, that of the extreme point of the continuum, but, at the same time, signaling a moment of “mutations,” transformations - technological, economic, cultural, institutional, etc.—that change its “nature.”

This essay indicates one of these possible “mutation indices,” which could be formulated, in general, in terms of a gradual discredit or disuse of the idea of “intransitivity,” “uselessness” or “negativity” of literature—traits often understood as radical and political throughout the 20th century—in the name of a growing “ethical-reparative” pragmatism according to which literary artifacts should directly affect reality, drawing us closer to “other” beings (humans, animals, nature, etc.), teaching us to live better and to have self-confidence, presenting us with the past silenced by the winners of official history, in short, “doing what is good.” In the book *Réparer le Monde*, Alexandre Gefen (17) sums it up as follows: “in the beginning of the 21st century, literature is no longer an end in itself, but rather a powerful social or symbolic device that operates on consciences and hearts.” What Gefen calls a “therapeutic” turn, therefore, concerns a desire for transitivity, the task of removing literature from the domain reserved for the supposed aristocracy of “the elect”—an expression repeated at various points in his book—in order to restore it to the use of common individuals: “literature [...] today, then, becomes a medicine for the soul” (16).

In order to introduce the argument concerning this transition of literature from intransitive to an “ethical” and “repairing” impulse, capable of healing hearts, souls, biographies and stories, this essay is divided into two moments. First, from the reconstitution of decisive aspects of the architecture of destruction or fictional exhaustion presented by Dominique Rabaté, and characteristic of 20th century literature, the purpose is to expose an image of the literary as subtractive, corrosive, and negative writing, capable of erasing, suppressing, making disappear, and, fundamentally, violating the literary work and its traditional categories. Then, visiting different phenomena associated with the “therapeutic turn”—such as the empire of autofictions, autobiographies, biographies, and other ways of writing and revealing oneself; the significant presence and circulation of volumes with declared political and interventional purposes, which aim to “give visibility,” “remember,” “do justice,” “repair damages,” “comfort” etc.; the growth of “memory studies” (Durão and Tinti), and the “ethical turn” in literary studies; and, finally, the logic of means and ends that instrumentalizes and “therapeutizes” the teaching of literature in the new Brazilian National Common Core (BNCC)—the intention is to point out the ethical-reparative reconfigurations of the literary today. As a conclusion, one can notice an alignment between literature—or literary studies—and the need to justify transitively, pragmatically, and utilitarianly the ethical-political and institutional place of its objects. Likewise, the so-called narcissistic and autophagic society—society of competition, depression and “self-exhaustion”—unable to directly oppose the

violence of contemporary spectacle, acts in order to convert artistic objects and other residues of intransitivity into positive therapy as a reintegrating element.

As in the case of other goods, the tendencies that regulate not only the modes of theorization, but also the production of cultural artifacts tend to migrate from the international metropolises—in this case, mainly France and the United States—to the periphery of the globe, often with a certain time delay and revealing adaptive corruptions. Thus, the second section of this essay, which seeks to investigate the increasingly present idea of “utility” and “applicability” in the field of literature and literary studies, often resorts to examples taken from the Brazilian theoretical-literary context, a country where certain general formulations assume specific developments capable of indicating important distortions, eventually nonexistent or difficult to be identified in other contexts.

Undoing the Notion of Literary “Work”

In his book *Vers une Littérature de L'Épuisement*, D. Rabaté defends the thesis that the 20th century literature is marked by the recurrent appearance of works—such as those by Kafka, Beckett, Blanchot, Camus—that envision a poetics of exhaustion, disappearance, rarefaction, and, ultimately, death itself. These are narratives that, in the face of the catastrophes of the 20th century and the apparent explanatory insufficiency of the mythical, religious, philosophical, and scientific discourses of modernity, turn to the staging of a profound metaphysical, linguistic, and existential abandonment, now converted into an aesthetic procedure. Orphaned characters, without a name, or whose name is just an acronym, without biography, without history, without past; plots without beginning, without linear development, with no evident outcome; spaces without identity, without landscape, undifferentiated, without memory, without location; a diffuse time, eternally present, without descriptive and enlightening projections or setbacks; a groping language, whose unstable referents are limited to referring to new signifiers, in an agonizing slide and with no promise of redemption, canceling authorship, properties, origins and destinations. All of this is part of the 20th century literary scene, not exclusively, of course, but at least in a constant or even dominant way, as summarized by Rabaté:

Exhaustion is the aesthetic program of a certain period of literature to which we may no longer belong. [...] The novelist's imagination seems to be mobilized in a different way, less in the sense of visualizing places or characters, according to their customs or physical traits, and more of discovering the unique trait of this disincarnated discourse. The fiction effort lies in this discourse, which, in turn, demands a lot from us. (Rabaté, *Vers* 11, 18).

This “disincarnated discourse” is, strictly speaking, both an expression of the exhaustion of the stable scheme of genres and forms dictated by the representative regimes that have regulated literature until then, and a corrosive, marginal, unforeseen, disidentifying aesthetic-literary program, which not only demands that each work build internally its own rules, the rules of its language, but also presents identities in crisis, incapable of relating to others, to the world, to language, to space, to history. In this process of defamiliarization, the subject does not recognize itself as coinciding with whom it appears to be, with whom it thinks it is, with the words it uses, and its interpretative universe, as well as the meanings it seeks to build, begins to collapse. To read oneself is to recognize oneself as “anyone,” to discover the precariousness upon which language and personal identity are structured; in short, it is to assume the existential contingency, the ambivalence of signs, and the risk of losing oneself in the world. That this “losing oneself in the world” ends up being converted into different aesthetic possibilities, that the literature of the 20th century, in its various traditions, made very clear.

After all, is it not the dissolution of the self-centered subject and a writing that presents itself as a question and deconstructive force that we constantly see in this literature of suppression? Examples abound. In *The Castle* (1922): “And they were indeed walking on, but K. didn't know where they were going; he could make out nothing, [...]. The difficulty he had in simply walking meant that he could not command his thoughts” (Kafka 28); in *The Magic Mountain* (1924): “They make pretty free with a human being's idea of time, up here. You wouldn't believe it. Three weeks are just like a day to them. You'll learn all about it [...]. One's ideas get changed” (Mann 41); in *The Unnamable* (1953): “Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses (call them that). Keep going, going on (call that going, call that on)” (Beckett 29); in *Pedro Paramo* (1955): “I came to Comala because I was told that my father, a man called Pedro Paramo, was living there. It was what my mother had told me, and I promised I would go and see him after she died. I assured her I would do that” (Rulfo 25); in *Água Viva* (1973): “And I roll myself and as I roll on the floor I add myself in leaves, I, anonymous work of an anonymous reality only justified while my life lasts” (Lispector 22). The questions, doubts, and anxieties strike the characters and the narrative forms, make it difficult to

access the meanings of the work, disconnect the path from words to identities and, therefore, demand from the reader a critical, creative attitude, which should be "authorial" of the object as well.

The "disincarnated" language is a language that, by suspending the peaceful path towards permanent identities and identifications, and contesting the effects of voices on the familiar presence of the facts, emancipates and migrates towards itself, or rather, demonstrates that literature can only act in the world - transgress, denounce, reveal, inspire, etc. —through direct and inventive contact with a language that resists, interrupts, and—according to the most recurrent formulations of a certain critic, sometimes repeated like a mantra—disappears and dies before our eyes. "The word gives me the being, but it gives it to me deprived of being. [...] Therefore it is accurate to say that when I speak, death speaks in me. My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address" (Blanchot 323-324). The literary word corresponds to the awareness of an absent presence, to the attempt to fill a gap that, however, in the impossibility of becoming something concrete, carries with it the phantasmatic character of signs. Orphic experience, literature, in short, evokes the real at the very moment it moves us away from it.

Celebrating the link between writing and disappearance, between the productive work of fabricating language and the "negative" exercise of living with loss, means, of course, a challenge to thinking, now freed from any rigid origin or point of final and repairing convergence—author, context, reception—for the unpredictable adventure of an "endless conversation." Literature performs the task of neutralizing and refusing the supposed explanatory function, for example, of the author, a figure driven to death as soon as the "here" and "now" of scripture is admitted: for "the modern *scriptor* [...], his hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin—or at least with no origin but language itself, i.e., the very thing which ceaselessly calls any notion of origin into question" (Barthes 52). If it is true that this continuous celebration of multiplicity as something "good in itself" also contributes significantly to the scenario of dismantling the notion of artifact or work in literary studies—a fact that, in turn, has a direct participation in the developments that lead to a therapeutic idea of literature and to a sliding notion of text, which assumes any friction or obstruction as an imposing gesture against the free flow, "consumption" and "pleasure" of reading—the "death of the Author" in fact breaks with the tradition, consolidated in several literature manuals, of accessing the literary work through elements such as birth and death dates, or an a priori aesthetic grammar, glued in an informative way to objects.

The "pleasure" or "bliss" of reading is still, at this moment, not the moral positivity of a restorative writing that does justice to the world, that brings us closer to others, that makes us better than those removed from the sacredness of the literary, or which allows us to have access to a revealing self-knowledge, but a "restrictive" pleasure, linked, above all, to the operations of a language that can only "unveil" the world by turning to itself and its particular constructions. The duty of "performing the negative," a fundamental aesthetic program of the 20th century announced by Kafka, finds resonance in several other artists and theorists of negation: "Through the power with which Kafka commands interpretation, he collapses aesthetic distance. He demands a desperate effort of the allegedly 'disinterested' observer of an earlier time, overwhelms him, suggesting that far more than his intellectual equilibrium depends on whether he truly understands; life and death are at stake" (Adorno 245). Like sleep (see Crary) and other creative and "unproductive" dimensions of human life, which cannot be capitalized as commodities and placed in the flow of consumption, literature and the completeness of the artistic artifact place a challenge to the reader's attention and the need for total surrender, without, however, promising later reconciliation. The literary negativity reveals itself as an enigma and a permanent requirement for re-reading: "What is enclosed in Kafka's glass ball is even more monotonous, more coherent and hence more horrible than the system outside [...]. Inwardness, revolving in itself and devoid of all resistance, is denied all those things which might put a stop to its interminable movement and which thus take on an aura of mystery" (Adorno 260-261).

The poetics of exhaustion and denial, far from acting under the principle of indistinct accumulation, of continuous self-promotion in the fields of visibility, sometimes flirts dangerously with the extreme of its own annihilation: starving artist, unable to find the food that would make him stuffed like everyone else, Kafka asks his friend Max Brod to burn his writings after his death. Juan Rulfo, after the success of *Pedro Paramo*, indefinitely postpones the publication of his second novel, always under unconvincing pretexts: the death of his storytelling uncle, the excess of books in circulation. The literary burning devised by Kafka was not unfamiliar to Rulfo: after receiving no response from the publishers, he decided to eliminate his novel entitled *The Son of Despondency*, giving signs of the same refusal that would later make him known. Robert Walser always considered himself a minor subject and also indulged in a long silence, amidst endless and aimless walks, biographically incorporating the negative trajectory of his characters: "Today, we will have to settle for absolutely nothing, shall we? Nothing is the fastest thing

to prepare and, in any case, it does not cause indigestion. Exceptionally, they [...] had absolutely nothing to eat, and the husband [...] was not angry either, no way" (Walser 72). Vladimir Maiakovski, Horacio Quiroga, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Stefan Zweig, José María Arguedas, Primo Levi, Sylvia Plath, Paul Celan, David Foster Wallace, Ana Cristina César, Torquato Neto—suicidal writers whose lives - not always exemplary of a reparative ethics, it is worth remembering—are closer to expenditure, loss, unproductivity, sacrifice, passion than to the preservative character of utility: "Every time the meaning of a discussion depends on the fundamental value of the word *useful*—in other words, every time the essential question touching on the lives of human societies is raised, no matter who intervenes and what opinions are expressed—it is possible to affirm that the debate is necessarily warped and that the fundamental question is eluded" (Bataille 116).

In any case, literature as negativity or expenditure seems to be linked to an era "to which we may no longer belong," or, in terms of our continuum, an era with which writers and their literary projects no longer coincide. If "performing the negative" corresponded to the fundamental task of the 20th century, today the legacy of the aesthetics of suppression, of the gesture of "undoing" the work, increasingly points in the opposite direction: "The climate [...] clearly turns to the positivity of the literary fact, which is located in the antipodes of the passion for the impossible that had animated literature in the past. Programmatic positivity [...], in a climate of cultural competition in which the place of literature as a sacred institution is compromised" (Rabaté, *La Passion* 235). The work without "work," that is, the textualization of artistic artifacts, now devoid of their opposing and tensioning dimension, anticipates the scenario of a reception that, instead of being challenged or deconstructed, animates the request for transitivity to objects: there is no time to lose, it is necessary to remedy the world. "Defining the work in relation to the world, and not to literature, inscribing it in the logic of one's own work and that of the other, requiring it to provide substantial forms of historical or political knowledge [...] are quite evident literary options" (Gefen 24). Without a totalizing purpose—and assuming that the scenario here described is far from constituting a total or exclusive image of literature today—the next section focuses on the analysis of some scenes or instances of the "therapeutic turn" here in question.

The Notion of Literary "Work" Undone

As previously mentioned, the study of specific cases drawn from the Brazilian context can be quite revealing of the unfolding of this scenario in countries whose theoretical formulations tend to follow, with singular local developments, the academic trends from the north of the globe. The transition from the theoretical problems that historically defined the area of literature in Brazil as an academic discipline to the recent attempts to give an ethical-restorative use to literary studies can be perceived through an analysis of Brazilian post-graduate studies in the field of literature and its most recurring and recent conceptual updates. More specifically, organized in lines of research that indicate the theoretical perspectives of the professors and, consequently, of each post-graduate program, the landscape of post graduate studies in the area of literature has undergone significant conceptual adjustments in the last decades, pointing to the scenario here under discussion.

In the text entitled "Discussing the academic machine," for example, Fabio Durão and Tauan Tinti expose a conceptual tendency, within the scope of the research lines that integrate brazilian post-graduate studies in the field of literature, symptomatic of the phenomenon here observed, that is, the growing intention to use literary works in an ethical-reparative sense. In a selection of 105 Programs, after the most evident occurrences of terms such as "literature" (88 Programs), and "culture" (55 Programs), "memory" appears as the fourth most frequent term in the research lines (28 Programs), with only 3 occurrences less than the previous term, "history," whose connection with literature structures the area. Memory surpasses, according to the authors' calculation, "the link traditionally established between literature and society (23 occurrences) [...], the sum of lines aimed at modernity (11 occurrences) and contemporaneity (13 occurrences) [...], and even the area of comparative literature (16 occurrences) as a whole" (Durão and Tinti 98). The significant and growing appearance of the concept in the lines linked to literature points to the harmony between the theoretical directions of the area and a certain "fashion effect," which tends to occur, as in the case of goods, in the center-periphery sense.

Memory studies, in their most frequent formulations, aim to investigate "subject and body [...] in biographical and autobiographical writings," "the articulations between lived experience, fiction and social organization," among others.¹ In the effective contact with literary artifacts, these lines are

¹ Formulations extracted from two important graduate programs in the Brazilian context: the Graduate Program in Literature at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) and the Graduate Program in Literary Studies at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG).

roughly divided into two general trends. On the one hand, they are associated with trauma studies and its categories—testimony, representation, violence, ruins—which attempt to examine different narratives and documents linked to historical catastrophes, generally those of the 20th century (the Holocaust and military dictatorships are the most frequent objects), and to the linguistic and testimonial aporias that constitute them—references to Giorgio Agamben are frequent here. On the other hand, they appear linked to the writing of biographies, autobiographies, autofictions and the operations of a creative work that takes place at the “boundaries between the real and the fictional, placing at the center of the discussions the possibility of the author’s return again” (Azevedo 31). The author reappears, not as a regulating instance of the meanings of the text or the work, but as a problem around the limits between the real and the fictional, which contributes to the reflection on what it means to “unveil oneself,” “to write about one’s own life.” (Social media—twitter, facebook, instagram, whatsapp, blogs, online forums and the like—appear as constant tools for the new literature and objects of critical research, since they invite the author to function as a hybrid of reality and invention). In any case, what is worth noting, in both trends, is the ethical-repairing effect that hovers over several of their formulations:

How does the subject respond to radical loss? How does the process of mourning and melancholy work, economically? What are the implications of the idea that the subject, *in loss*, becomes an archive of *loss*, a site where the memory of loss and trauma is maintained in a kind of crypt? What would this archive look like? (Boulter 3)

Autofiction is a project of self-exploration and self-experimentation on the part of the author. This in turn is partly because many works of autofiction have been written in the aftermath of some kind of traumatic experience—real or imagined—so that the process of writing in response to trauma can be seen as a means of situating the self in a new context [...]. (Dix 4)

Literature would belong to a more or less voluntary psychotherapy, both for the author and the reader, who can relive and repeat the emotions of the text internally. Illness in the romantic era, literature has become a treatment, and the literary value is measured as to its therapeutic effectiveness, not only for those who cure their traumas by verbalizing them, but also for the reader, who finds an appeasement in the book. (Gefen 98)

A Brazilian novel that crystallizes many of these trends—melancholy, private trauma, mourning, and reparatory writing—is Cristóvão Tezza's award-winning *The Eternal Son* (2007). Since the initial epigraphs, the volume announces the crossing and cancellation of the boundaries between fact and creative construction—“We want to tell the truth, and yet we don’t tell the truth. We describe something seeking fidelity to the truth, and yet what is described is something other than the truth (Thomas Bernhard)” —as well as the private, intimate, confessional or therapeutic impulse that produces an effect of settling accounts with one’s life, reconciling with oneself and the world—“A son is like a mirror in which the father beholds himself, and for the son, the father is too a mirror in which he beholds himself in the time to come (Søren Kierkegaard)” —both characteristic features of the so-called autofiction. The novel narrates the difficult journey of a teacher/writer father towards the acceptance of his son, Felipe, with Down Syndrome, and his particular way of seeing the world. Although narrated in third person and written in a dry language, which objectifies, at times to the extreme of coldness, the episodes and subjects it deals with, Tezza’s book focuses on many of the experiences of the relationship between the author himself and his son, also called Felipe and also with Down Syndrome.

If this fictionalized biography presents itself as the will to declare the truth and the impossibility of simply doing it or of remaining in it for a long time, in a game of revelation and concealment, as formulated by the first of Tezza's epigraphs, it is certain that media coverage of the book did not fail to use the idea of a confession without concessions from the author as a marketing strategy for the circulation of the book. In the front flap of its first edition, we read that, “In a courageous book, Cristóvão Tezza exposes the difficulties [...] of raising a child with Down syndrome. The author takes advantage of the questions that appeared throughout the last 26 years to reorder his own life.” What we have here, less than a characterization of the novel's autofictional uniqueness, is only the promise of revealing the author's personal life and how he overcame his personal problems by means of a “life reordering” writing. Despite the sophistication of theoretical assertions according to which autofiction plays with the suspension of the limits between referentiality and creative exercise, in the curiosity of the public and in market strategies, what often prevails is the biographical desire and the voyeuristic access to the private, plus socialization of the healing power of self-writing. Likewise, despite the autofictional strategies inscribed and aestheticized in the novel, what animates several of the questions asked to the author in interviews is, not infrequently, a certain biographical-authorial intrusion:

[...] I was touching a hornet's nest when writing about it [a father with a special child]. At the same time, it is a very personal book, in which I expose, or even open up my own life and feelings to readers; [...] [Question] Because of all the academic production that exists on the work and the fact that the character in the book is also called Felipe, how does your son Felipe feel? [Answer] He doesn't have the cognitive, psychological perception to understand the complexity that is in the book. What he understands is that the book is about him and, for him, this is wonderful in itself. (Tezza, *Interview* 237)

Although sometimes problematized (Damasceno), the mantra of confessional courage was incorporated by criticism itself, which instead of focusing on the materiality and the specific work of (auto)fictional writing, insists on the complexity of the theme and its delicate relationship with the author's biography as vestiges of an a-priori and, therefore, inevitable quality of the work. "Courage," "sensitivity," "sincerity," "cruelty," "truth," "shame," among others, make up a critical and conceptual framework that, in fact, is very close to the romantic-confessional vocabulary or to the reading of biographies. The important question is the following: to what extent do the procedures announced by the rich theoretical debate about autofiction actually migrate to a public reading of the genre as a set of creative devices or fictional strategies (Damasceno)? Or do we remain here fundamentally in the domain of the confessional, generating reading protocols that, instead of the concreteness of the artistic artifact and its functioning, insert the biographical space as a catalyst for literary experience and a "restorative" writing capable of arousing the reader's curiosity?

In addition to the fictionalization of the self and the game of referential suspension, the so-called self-fiction boom also seems to bring us to the heart of these issues, to that moment when literature and literary criticism flirt closely with a therapeutic and healing language. Side by side with the artistic-literary "function" or the condition of aesthetic artifact of objects, it is also necessary to attest or verify an ethical-reparative project: being a hybrid exercise of canceling the boundaries between fact and fiction, autofiction allows dealing with loss, healing personal wounds, purging trauma, filling in gaps, generating empathy, giving visibility, undoing injustices, etc. If it is true that the constant reiteration of the difficulty of establishing clear boundaries for the roles of author/narrator/character or for the relationship between memory/truth/creation does not guarantee a critical and productive encounter with the works themselves, the final validation for the analysis in many cases is decided by the ethical-political dimension of their themes, or rather, by the possibility of, once again, revisiting the past, opening space for alternative memories or reconciling with the world.

As a final decisive vector of this phenomenon, it is worth pointing out the current alignment between autofictional literature and fictionalized exhibition of oneself, with literary intentions, that occurs on social media. On places such as twitter, Facebook, Instagram, among others, creative impulses are aligned with the immediacy of a reception that "likes," "dislikes," "follows" or "unfollows" according to the stimulus criterion. Logically, this dynamic tends to place the intention of satisfying the reader in the foreground, which ends up leading, once again, to therapeutic or, in this particular case, to self-help discourse. The opening lines of a recent article in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* on the new "Instagram writers" summarize the issue as follows: "Just as a cell phone is no longer made just for calls, short stories and poems are no longer written just to be read. The reader needs to be pleased, to make comments, to mark friends, to follow the author, and to watch his/her recommendations" (Molinero). The same is true from the point of view of those who write: "[...] writers, of course, [...] said goodbye to the world in which the only creative concern is the blank sheet - now it is necessary to analyze metrics online, calculate reach, and study how to generate engagement and increase followers" (Molinero). Unlike the productivity of critical discourse on autofiction and its most rigorous artifacts, the confessed pragmatism stands out here, that is, the immediate continuity between writing, profession, utility, and the economic sphere: "Success in social networks, in which they mobilize hundreds of thousands of fans with weak, almost always sentimental and motivational texts, Instagram authors increasingly make publishers' eyes shine—and their pockets salivate" (Molinero).

Given the dynamics of conciseness and the intention of immediate effect characteristic of social media, literature here moves towards compression and to increasingly shorter genres. The so-called "twitterature," for obvious reasons, restricts literary texts to the limit of 280 characters, which does not necessarily mean "direct treatment" of the object or an "aesthetics of compression," according to the terms of an imagism that preaches economy and precision. Associated with the recent explosion of short forms—micro-fiction, nano-fiction, micro-poems, flash-fiction, aphorisms, haiku—but without necessarily maintaining the rigor of many of these, "twitterature," among its formal peculiarities, emerges with date of birth, time of posting, number of likes, retweets, etc. Thus, stuck in time and with an "expiration date," it constitutes a "literature of everyday facts," which meets the needs and

interventions of the reader and then disappears. In the usual descriptions of the phenomenon, we read the purpose of constantly "teaching" the reader, "learning" with the reader and, more importantly, stimulating a network of followers, using, if necessary, market strategies: "as a marketing vehicle, twitterature can raise established authors to new heights [...]. Ephemeral or not, tweets 'teach,' informing both new and old authors about how to reach and attract readers" (Rudin).

But the fictionalized construction of the authorial identity and the subsequent games of presence/absence, truth/construction, exposure/concealment is just one of the different portraits assumed by ethical-reparative production today. It is worth observing the theoretical scope of this trend as crystallized by the so-called "ethical turn" in literary studies. Now, if the link between ethics and literature is historical and also constitutive of the field, as the famous book X of the *Republic* of Plato reminds us, the "ethical turn" is often confused today with the totality of literary criticism, mainly through the mediating mechanism of *studies*: "animal studies," "queer studies," "post-human studies," "visual studies," "adaptation studies," etc. The fundamental premise, which may unite the different developments and particularities of these different *studies*, is that literature is a privileged place for discussions on ethical decisions regarding different forms of hierarchies and exclusions that take place in our society (Culler). In a book on this theme, editors Todd Davis and Kenneth Womack present the "ethical turn" in the following terms:

Part of being human involves the daily struggle with the meanings and consequences of our actions, a struggle most often understood in narrative structures as we tell others and ourselves about what has transpired or what we fear will transpire in the future. As creatures driven by story; we find ourselves immersed in narrative in almost every aspect of our lives. [...] In the end, if there is any single defining characteristic in the ethical turn that marks contemporary literary studies, it resides in the fact that few critics wish to return to a dogmatically prescriptive or doctrinaire form of reading. (Davis and Womack ix-x).

The brief preface to the book, however, admits that the "ethical turn" constitutes less a consistent set of theoretical-critical positions towards the literary than a desire to refuse "dogmatically prescriptive or doctrinaire forms of reading" through the encounter or confrontation with controversial issues and the power of narratives of "changing our lives" (Davis and Womack x). In other words, the opening offered by the "ethical turn" occurs mainly in the thematic field, and this is where the device of *studies* is inserted in a scheme capable of being updated *ad nauseam*, under the risk of working in service of a similar "fashion effect": themes emerge, inform the artifacts, form an area ("x" studies), and then fall into disuse. From the point of view of criticism and the encounter with works, on the one hand, in their most effective analytical procedure, the *studies* are also affected by the objects they encounter, in an unpredictable and mutually contagious exercise, which does not silence the immanence or singularity of the literary. On the other hand, in the worst scenario, we notice what Fabio Durão observes in the essay entitled "Brazilian Academic-Literary Stupidity": "Articles written in order to mobilize certain fashionable terms" [...]; theories applied to the most diverse (and disparate) objects" (Durão, *Burrice* 31). In the latter case, reading becomes a mechanical and predictable exercise, without much dialogue with the possibly disconcerting knowledge of the specificity that each artifact brings with it.

In any case, what calls attention in the "ethical turn" is the frequent announcement and celebration of the "curative," "beneficial," "political" and "enlightening" power of literature, a thesis whose circularity and reiteration—for example, in the aforementioned volume (Davis and Womack)—denote anguish in the face of a possible "emptiness" or expenditure in literary reading, or else of its possible uselessness, which seems to hover over the ethical-reparative argument as a constant threat. It is as if the promise of learning from literature occupied a foreground in relation to the practice of criticism and texts that in fact may or may not—it is only possible to affirm it after the reading test—"teach" something through its particular operations and its specific constitution. Bringing animals and humans closer together, raising awareness of the otherness of nature, reliving traumas and remembering the past from another perspective, recognizing and accepting differences, questioning binary oppositions, reconstructing oneself fictionally, in short, repairing the world: the ethical machinery readjusts and expands its reach to the extent that human conflicts are confirmed and modified, in order to pragmatically and politically justify the relevance of literature and literary studies. It is precisely as a therapeutic space and repository of alterities that Todorov reiterates the privileged place of a creative activity now "in danger": "Literature can do a lot. It can reach out to us when we are deeply depressed, bring us even closer to other human beings around us, make us better understand the world, and help us live. Not that it is, above all, a soul care technique; however, a revelation of the world, it can also, in its course, transform each of us from within" (76).

Where these ethical-reparative positions are mostly present—emptied, however, of the complexity of the theoretical debate—is, in fact, in Basic Education and in the official documents that define the place for teaching literature in school curricula. In the final version of the Brazilian National Common Core, dated 2018, individual improvement, self-expression, recognition of otherness, and “protagonism and authorship in personal and collective life” (Brazil 9) are mixed in a confused whole which, in the end, only dissolves any solidity linked to the literary in the name of the same discourse of formative flexibility that dominates the other lines of the document. In order to fill the empty space left by the crisis of previous principles that until recently organized the teaching of literature, and due to the alleged elitism, partiality and arrogance of the western canon - operators that until recently justified the presence of literature in schools - the BNCC makes use of an ethical assumption not at all dissimilar from that previously seen. The literary image, however, is stretched to the point of fitting any narrative form and textual genre, now accompanied by a parade of technologies and social media. Moreover, it is worth highlighting the appearance of creative writing as a skill to be developed for the promotion of self-knowledge: “At this stage [High School], a more systematic work with literary writing is also at stake, the poetic writing, whose work is slow and demands selections and experiments with content and varied linguistic resources, in view of an interlocutor. Thus, such choices can function as a process of self-knowledge, by mobilizing ideas, feelings and emotions” (Brazil 523-524).

[Skill] Produce appreciative and critical presentations and comments on books, films, records, songs, theater and dance shows, exhibitions, etc. (literary and artistic reviews, vlogs and podcasts, commented playlists, fanzines, e-zines etc.). (Brazil 526)

[Skill] Create authorial works, in different genres and media - through the selection and appropriation of textual and expressive resources from the artistic repertoire -, and/or derived productions (parodies, stylizations, fanfics, fanclips, etc.), as a way to dialogue critically and/or subjectively with the literary text. (526)

The technological novelties that accompany and justify the literary in the BNCC only reveal an uncomfortable or unwanted opposite element, that is, the insufficiency or even disposability of the area if taken as an end in itself, if dissociated from a scheme of means and ends that provide it with a regulatory ethical-formative sense. Although such a sense is, after all, desirable, here it is constituted against the grain or “on the back” of objects and forms historically associated with literature, dissolving or evaporating them amid a profusion of genres and technologies that, strictly speaking, have a very unstable life. What we see in the new BNCC is an expanded concept of literature that flirts dangerously with its own dissolution and disposal, which, in this case, has an immediate and evident consequence: literary studies become a pre-theoretical mix of creative writing, “media studies” and “discourse genres,” a hybrid devoid of any trace of its past and memory, but which insists on dragging with it a name that no longer seems to fit.

Final Remarks

The desire to “repair the world”—to recall the title of Alexandre Gefen's book one last time—gives literature an objective and noble purpose that, strictly speaking, contrasts considerably both with the recurrent diagnosis of its eventual end, and with the tradition of literary exhaustion and suppression throughout the 20th century. In any case, at a time clearly defined by the deep dispute or competition between different textualities, media and genres in the field of visibility of culture, literature is obliged, on the one hand, to broaden its concept to include all this as proto-literary expressions or current reconfigurations of its field, and, on the other, to enter the positive space of contemporary pragmatism, under the threat of disappearing as a form from institutional spaces. In this sense, understanding the work of literature as that of remedying, restoring, giving visibility, doing justice, remembering, etc. is something that gives the area, of course, an air of profound revitalization, assuring it some unforeseen prominence.

What is worth considering—and that was the main purpose of this essay—is that the ethical-reparative principle of use corresponds in part to the neutralization of another possible “use” for the literary, that is to say, its politics of denial and intransitivity, which, interestingly, would have a no less important role to play at the present moment. In other words, understanding that literature and its teaching are intransitive (Durão, “Da Intransitividade”), that there is nothing that literature directly instrumentalizes as an effect of its operations or (de)constructive conduct, does not imply that it has no relevance or no ethical-formative dimension. Now, if it is true that contemporaneity is marked by the sign of competition, the culture of the self, the incessant search for stimuli, the politics of effect, transparency, and fake news, etc., the “unproductiveness” of literature could be linked to introspection,

silence, slowness, and other negative forms whose "uselessness" today takes on dramatic and radical contours. However, following Debord's diagnosis (16-17) of the democratic language of the spectacle - "what appears is good, what is good appears"—one question remains important: amid so much noise, how to point out the relevance and defend the fundamental place of that which moves silently, almost unseen, towards its own disappearance?

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