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**Thinking About God After the “Death of God”: An
Interpretation of George Bataille’s Novels**

**Domāt par Dievu pēc “Dieva nāves”: interpretācija par
Žorža Bataja romāniem**

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Anotācija

Ilzes Jansones promocijas darbā „Domāt par Dievu pēc „Dieva nāves”: interpretācija par Žorža Bataja romāniem” autore izseko, kā ideja par „Dieva nāvi” parādās franču rakstnieka Žorža Bataja romānos. Izmantojot hermeneitisko metodi – uzmanīgu lasīšanu un romānu analīzi „Dieva nāves” idejas kontekstā, autore pārbauda darba tēzi – ka Bataja romāni – to vēstījuma notikumi un tajos darbojošies tēli – ietver viņa izpratni par ateoloģiju un „Dieva nāvi”. Darbs iedalīts četrās daļās, vispirms raksturojot Ž. Bataja ateoloģiju uz viņa teorētisko darbu bāzes un apskatot galvenās ietekmes. Darba centrālo daļu veido septiņu romānu analīze, noslēdzošajā daļā izveidojot priekšstatu par Ž. Bataja izpratni par „Dieva nāvi”, kāda tā atklājas viņa romānos.

Atslēgvārdi: Dieva nāve, ateoloģija, erotisms, nāve, iekšējā pieredze, klātneesamība, klātesamība

Summary

In the doctoral thesis *Thinking About God After the “Death of God”: An Interpretation of George Bataille’s Novels* the author Ilze Jansone traces the idea of the death of God in the novels of the French writer Georges Bataille. Using the hermeneutical method – attentive reading and analysis of the novels in the context of the central idea – she examines the thesis of her work: Bataille’s fiction works – their narrative events and protagonists – imply his understanding of atheology and the idea of the “death of God”. The doctoral thesis is divided into four parts. In the first part Bataille’s understanding of atheology in his non-fiction works and some of his most important influences are described. In the central part of the work Bataille’s seven novels are interpreted from the perspective of the death of God. In the last part the results of the interpretations are summarised and some conclusions are drawn.

Keywords: Death of God, atheology, eroticism, death, inner experience, absence, presence

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Introduction

This doctoral thesis is devoted to the idea of the “death of God” as it appears in the fiction works of the French writer Georges Bataille, who, although famous worldwide, is almost unknown in Latvia. My particular interest in Bataille is related to his reflections on the “death of God” both in his non-fictional works as well as in his novels. Being a theologian and a writer myself, I am interested in ways how to speak about theological issues and ideas in fiction, and Bataille has done so superbly. I also find him congenial because some of my personal experiments in literature are devoted to the idea of the “God’s death”. My personal conviction is that one possible way of communication between theologians and lay persons, or those who say that the era of Christianity has already ended, is art in its multiformity. Any form of art, including literature, can serve as a medium for introducing new possibilities of how to think about God. To my opinion as a theologian, we must search for new ways how to speak about God in today’s world, especially in Latvia.

Hence the relevance and novelty of my doctoral thesis for the Latvian situation: firstly, there are no academic studies either on Bataille or on the topic of the “death of God” in Latvia, and, secondly, speaking about the “death of God” through literary narrative is an innovative way of God-talk. Accordingly, this doctoral thesis is devoted to the idea of the “death of God” as I discern it in the novels of the French thinker Georges Bataille.

At the beginning, I should explain what could be understood by the words “God” and “death” in this doctoral thesis. The (dead) God Bataille speaks about is that of the project, which means something *useful*, something one can *use for the sake of something*. This God can be used by an institution (a Christian church) as well as by an individual (a devoted believer, for example). God can be used for various purposes, such as for fulfilment of one’s ambitions, seizing unquestionable authority, etc. Such a God can also be used for political, economical or moral purposes in order to justify one’s attitude towards life, choices to be made etc. The opposite of such a God is the absolute:

It is undeniable that man invented God so that his wretchedness might be forbidden by somebody greater than himself: God is the dialectical opposite of human imperfections. Ideal entities serve as compensations for wretchedness; that is why the qualities ascribed to gods delineate by contradiction the failings and servilities of their creators. The absolute is the sum of the compensations for human wretchedness. To create so perfect a notion, a man has been obliged to renounce his peculiarity and miserable content. The absolute is powerful because perfectly empty: it is thanks to this characteristic that it represents the perfection of truth.

Nothing can be demonstrated by the absolute: the absolute is precisely that supreme truth which remains undemonstrable.¹

In other words, the absolute could also be described as nothingness or emptiness. Such an absolute is unthinkable, indescribable and, yet, for Bataille, can be an opposite of the God of the project. As the dialectical opposite of human imperfections, God must be destroyed violently, and through this process the human may come closer to oneself, closer to what s/he really is.

Another word that has meaning in the context of the doctoral thesis is “death”. Throughout his novels, Bataille demonstrates various aspects of death, but one of them remains unchanged – the deaths he describes are all violent. Violence also characterises human being’s understanding of death – it is inescapable, the only thing that will happen for sure with all of us. A human being craves for being alive as his natural state, and death is a violence that destroys it and reminds one that there is no such thing as immortality. As it turns out in Bataille’s novels, death has a lot to do with sexual intercourse (and orgasm, or the “little death”). This is why it is important to accent that in addition to his work as a philosopher (although he did not like to be considered a philosopher) and anthropologist, Georges Bataille was also a writer, and his favourite genre was pornographic novels. One of his literary methods was – as it was for another French thinker, Marquise de Sade – putting essential subject matters in a powerful narrative to provoke a scandal, controversy, raising a lot of questions. In Bataille’s perspective, an extreme thought, including that of extreme obscenity of his pornographic texts, can be a way to overcome the limits of being. This is also a way how a human being can become free in thinking and at the same time be honest to the experience of one’s own. Also, the extreme thought shows that being an “atheist”, as far as Bataille could be called such, still means to be a religious person in some way and qualification. As an example, I will quote a fragment from Michel Foucault’s article about Bataille and his understanding of the “death of God”:

Bataille was perfectly conscious of the possibilities of thought that could be released by this death, and of the impossibilities in which it entangled thought. What, indeed, is the meaning of the death of God, if not a strange solidarity between the stunning realization of his nonexistence and the act that kills him? But what does it mean to kill God if he does not exist, to kill God *who has never existed*? Perhaps it means to kill God both because he does not exist and to guarantee he will not exist – certainly a cause for laughter: to kill God is to liberate life from this existence that limits it, but also to bring it back to those limits that are annulled by this limitless existence – as a sacrifice; to kill God to return him to this nothingness he is and to manifest his existence in the center of a light that blazes like a presence – for the ecstasy; to kill God in order to lose language in a deafening night and because this wound must make him

¹ Carl Einstein, “Absolute” in Georges Bataille, ed., *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, athemita.files.wordpress.com/2007/04/encyclopaedia-acephalica.pdf, accessed on 22/10/ 2012.

bleed until there springs forth ‘an immense alleluia lost in the interminable silence’ – and this is communication.²

What interested Bataille, according to Foucault, was the impossible. Foucault’s rhetorical question about the meaning of the “death of God” characterises this assertion very well. The strange solidarity Foucault speaks about is something hard to describe because it involves two opposites – to kill somebody who has never existed. The explanation of the paradox is – God is killed because he does not exist for the human, or, rather, the problem is that he exists as a being, as somebody who mirrors the human (and *vice versa*). What the human can never experience is the death of his/her own. Still, the human can be aware of it if life is free from the limits of existence. This is what Bataille would call a sovereign experience. Foucault mentions sacrifice and ecstasy as characteristic of Bataille’s concept of the “death of God”. To my opinion, this is also the case in his novels. This awareness of nothingness, or the sense of the presence of the absent God³, is an intensive experience one can only write about – not directly, not speaking of what God “is”, because language is a project as far as it is useful. Getting rid of language means to be open for the inner experience of one’s own, to know that there is nothing “out there”, ungraspable for the human mind. This is what Bataille tries to say with his atheology (I will explain in detail what atheology is about in the first chapter of my doctoral thesis; in the meantime atheology can be understood in brief as “the science of the death or destruction of God (the science of the thing being destroyed inasmuch as it is a thing).”⁴), and this is why, to my opinion, his is one of the fairest ways of God-talk.

In the course of the doctoral thesis, seven of Bataille’s novels will be analysed in the context of the question: How did Bataille see the death of God, and is there any possibility to speak about Bataille’s “concept of the death of God” as revealed in his novels?

This is why the main aim of the doctoral thesis is to identify and characterise atheology, in particular as it emerges in Georges Bataille’s fiction works, or, in other words, to characterise the “death of God” concept in his novels, treating them as religious narratives, which I believe they are, although not appearing such at first sight (the concept of religious

² Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression” in Michael Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, transl. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 32.

³ The formulation “sense of the presence of the absent God” is applied throughout the interpretations of Bataille’s novels, describing the feeling created by plots and protagonists. The phrase is used by Bataille’s scholar Denis Hollier. See: Denis Hollier, “The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille”, in Allan Stoekl, ed., *Yale French Studies*. No. 78 (Yale: Yale University Press, 1990), 133. However, in this dissertation this understanding of the way how the “dead God” could somehow indirectly be present is arrived at independently from Hollier. That is to say, our understandings coincide here, but his phrase expresses it most fittingly.

⁴ Stuart Kendall, “Editor’s Introduction” in Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. and with an Introduction by Stuart Kendall, transl. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xxxviii.

narrative is shortly characterised in the second chapter, keeping in mind that the concept must be narrowed within the context of my doctoral thesis). Thus, the main thesis of the doctoral dissertation is: Bataille's fiction works – their narrative events and protagonists – imply his understanding of atheology and the idea of the death of God. In order to arrive at the aforementioned aim, two tasks must be completed: (1) to give an explanation of the concept of atheology; and (2) to interpret novels – their narrative events and characters – in the light of Bataille's understanding of the “death of God”. In this doctoral thesis, I will step by step try to reveal Bataille's idea of the “death of God”, which is the aim of this study. To define the subject matter shortly, it is the “death of God” as revealed in the novels of Georges Bataille. Before the analysis, I have read the relevant non-fiction works of Bataille and have sketched the “idea” of the “death of God” in Bataille's thinking. As far as it is seen in his non-fiction works, this idea has something to do with three essential points of Bataille's thinking: (a) the solitude of a human being (when she feels lost and abandoned by God); (b) the awareness of the death of one's self; (c) the inner experience which is felt in this solitude and consists of such emotions as anguish and despair. In his non-fiction works, Bataille refers to nothingness that could also be equated with the concept of God who is dead.

The development of the idea of the “death of God” has a long history, and its beginning in Christianity can even be related to the beginning of its own doctrine of God in Christ having died on the Cross. The Lutheran hymn *O Traurigkeit, O Herzleid*, which was written in 1641 by Johannes Rist, contained the phrase “God himself is dead”, causing some theological controversy in the early 18th century.⁵ After that, debates about the meaning of the idea of the “death of God” and its various interpretations continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

It is not possible to speak about one single and “true” understanding of what the “death of God” means, and this is why I must at first introduce the reader with Georges Bataille as a philosopher. Actually, he did not claim being a philosopher at all, for instance, he wrote that he is neither a mystic, nor a philosopher, leaving a possibility that he could also be called a saint or a fool.⁶ Bataille is known mostly for his connections with Surrealism, although his alliance with the movement was often strained and cannot be valued unequivocally. Also, he has been considered an important forerunner of “postmodernism”.⁷ As far as he was a philosopher, as he himself pointed out, he was doing a philosophy of

⁵ Deland S. Anderson, *Hegel's Speculative Good Friday: The Death of God in Philosophical Perspective* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996), note 1, xix.

⁶ Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate, *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 250.

⁷ “Georges Bataille”, Edward Craig, gen. ed., *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). Available online: <http://www.rep.routledge.com>, accessed on 01/08/2010

laughter, defining it as “a philosophy founded in the experience of laughter [...] that does not concern itself with problems other than that have been given” to him “in this precise experience.”⁸ Experience, and especially the experience of laughter, is of great importance for Bataille, as we will see later. Probably this is so because the human existence contains something comical within it, like the existence of Bataille himself, as

a man is not merely mortal (if he were, his ontology would be less ‘black’, less comical), he is also unlikely. The ‘good fortune’ to exist – in other words his infinitesimal possibility of being what he is rather than someone else – is measured through all the slippages which might have made him another being, or (why not?) left him without a future at all.⁹

The awareness of the death of one’s own is what makes life comical, because the human, being mortal, seeks for immortality and is not ready to face death. This awareness is also a subtle point where Bataille begins to sketch the outline of the “death of God” concept. Throughout the novels, the awareness goes together with sexual excitement. The link between sexuality and Christianity can also be explained historically, as Michel Foucault did in his essay about Georges Bataille:

Never did the sexuality enjoy a more immediately natural understanding and never did it know a greater ‘felicity of expression’ than in the Christian world of fallen bodies and of sin. The proof is the whole tradition of mysticism and spirituality which was incapable of dividing the continuous forms of desire, of rapture, of penetration, of ecstasy, of that outpouring which leaves us spent: all of these experiences seemed to lead, without interruption or limit, right to the heart of a divine love of which they were both the outpouring and the source returning upon itself.¹⁰

Foucault is right. The colourful relationship between sexuality and Christianity is the reason why Bataille uses the former to explain the poverty of thinking of God of the latter. Although the question of how Bataille understands mysticism is left open for a while (until chapter 3.6 below), it is clear that through eroticism in his prose Bataille “seeks to present a coherent whole” and implies that eroticism has significance for humankind that cannot be reached with scientific methods.¹¹ Besides, he points out that eroticism is an aspect of human’s inner life, and as such is subjective.¹² As an essential aspect of human experience, eroticism is closely related to death, because biologically love-making includes the possibility of creation of a new human being who will be definitely condemned to death, as everybody dies. For Bataille – not only the human but also God has to die in order to be revealed as the impossible of inner

⁸ Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 138.

⁹ Michael Surya, *Georges Bataille*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London, New York: Verso, 2002), 3.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression”, op. cit., 29.

¹¹ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Edition, 1986), 7-8.

¹² Ibid.

experience. Bataille's texts operate within the space which is "made and unmade" by the transgression of its own limits – in particular as sexual experience reveals the absence of God. It is a space which is *interior* and *sovereign*, locked by the unspeakable, which exists on its margins, an impossible abyss glimpsed at the moment of transgression.¹³ In the first chapter of the work, the term "atheology" is described; for Bataille, it is a specific discourse behind religion, theism or atheism. The main aim of atheology is to deconstruct God so far as he has been made a "thing of theologians", a project, which has definite functions and which can be "useful" for institutions, such as church. Atheology also includes the impossibility of finding the final answer to the questions the human asks about his being and God. However, the impossibility of finding an answer must not withhold an individual from seeking, as reflection on religious issues may lead towards the impossible. The process of searching and doubting without finding one comfortable and "final" answer can also be called nonknowledge or recognition that humanity cannot know all things. Nonknowledge can be described with the symbol of Acéphale or a headless man. The main conclusion from the concept of atheology might be that a human being cannot grasp what God is, although there is a possibility to understand what God is not. However, unlike negative theology, the "death of God" theology accents that God once was alive, but now is dead – as it appears in Nietzsche's famous proclamation as well as in Bataille's novels, this is so because we (humans) have killed him. The murder of God makes us criminals, and this is also why we are all constrained to live with the awareness of the dead God and guilty conscience. For Bataille, God is dead, killed in our neglect of the sacred, in our devotion to the "project" (which can be religion as well). Still, the opposite of the "project" is the "absolute", which also includes the "death of God". What relates these two in a human being is eroticism, or one's awareness of the death of one's own.

As far as the aim of the doctoral thesis is to elicit interpretations of the "death of God" from Bataille's fiction works, the next chapter is devoted to explaining how the novels of Bataille would be read in my work. The first point is that I treat them as literary-religious texts that speak about the "death of God" and the impossible in a pornographic form. The impossible here also refers to the human being who cannot reach God (because God is dead) as well as to literature as transcript of inner experience, which is also a mystical way how to reflect on the "death of God". According to Bataille, through the inner experience and awareness of the death of one's own, one becomes aware of the "death of God". A schema based on Roman Jakobson's interpretation of narrative is also offered in this chapter. The

¹³ Leslie Anne Boldt, "Translator's Introduction" in Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), ix.

main idea of the schema is that a text is a message which is given to an addressee (a reader) by an author (addresser). For the text to become a message, it needs a context (in which it is given), a code (system of norms that is partly common to the addresser and the addressee) and contact (or, interest, which enables both the addresser and the addressee to remain in communication). It becomes clear that the meaning of the text is independent from the author as well from the reader. The author is “responsible” for the context (the historical and social background when the novel was written), the sign (symbols characteristic to Bataille’s understanding of the “death of God”) and the media (Bataille’s non-fiction works as a lens for interpreting the novels). The text constructs the content, sense (in a dialogue with the reader) and message, i.e. the material for interpretation. The reader’s function in the process of interpretation is to use the context (of the reader), reference (everything the reader knows about the object of interpretation) and representation (what the text represents for the person who concentrates on the concept of the “death of God”). In this chapter I also explain my method of reading the novels: I (the reader) seek the idea of the “death of God” in Bataille’s novels, using narrative composition and my knowledge about Bataille’s atheology and influences on him. In other words, throughout the doctoral thesis I use as the hermeneutical method an attentive reading and analysis of the novels in the context of the “death of God.”

In the next chapter, Bataille’s attitude towards literature is expounded. A few essential points of this chapter are the following: Bataille considered language to be a means not only for literature and narrative but also for one’s religious feelings and experience. His attitude towards text is emotional and involved, and leads towards anguish. Also, the main problem of writing can be formulated in this way: is a person capable of inscribing his/her existence (as inner experience)? One can only be aware of his/her own existence by being aware of his/her death, and this is the violence of literature – it tends to be a transcript of the inner experience which is impossible. For Bataille, it is the violence of literature that relates the “little death” with death as a condition of life. A person is alive so far as he/she is aware of his/her death, and thus also of the “death of God”. As such, literary narrative is a phenomenon of communication, just like ecstasy and eroticism. What it tries to communicate is the impossible. So, literature or writing becomes for Bataille an essential concept of life, no less important than religious issues.

Trying to find out what is the “death of God” for Bataille, in the next chapters I follow the three main influences on Bataille: Hegel, Nietzsche and Marquis de Sade. There are two common points in the understanding of the “death of God” for Bataille and Hegel: first, they both related the “death of God” with human’s awareness of death; second, they both took that human’s thinking of God is an estrangement. Hegel also pointed out that perception of the

“death of God” is conditional on the one who reflects about it (the “reader” in the context of my doctoral thesis): a non-believer will see a great master dying on the Cross, while a devoted believer will see God himself who is dead, the “death of death”, or the overcoming of death. Another thing, common to Bataille and Hegel is to make the reflection on God the essential and never-ending question of philosophy (and theology), to stretch thought endlessly. For both of them, the “death of God” and the death of the human are dialectical. This is why they each use different ways how to say that God is dead and that the way how the human can think about God must be reformulated (Hegel’s way for saying this is speculative thinking, while for Bataille it is literature).

The next chapter is devoted to Nietzsche, probably the most famous philosopher ever who has talked about the “death of God”. For Nietzsche, two “deaths of God” can be distinguished – the first is the “death of God” as a murder, and the second – a “natural death”, where God has died from weakness. For Nietzsche, the existence of God is constructed by verbal agreement; likewise – the “death of God” (*we* have killed him). As Bataille did, Nietzsche also asks an important question: What should a human do in the situation where God is dead? Even more: What can a human do, being God’s murderer? Being aware of himself as God’s murderer, Nietzsche’s Madman talks about the difference between a domestic God, who “belongs” to anyone who proclaims oneself a Christian, and a divinity that is liberated from concepts. The proclamation of the “death of God” gives rise to a perpetual inclination towards the awareness of nothingness which, for Bataille, is also the awareness of the “death of God”. Also, by proclaiming God’s death, Nietzsche protests against moralising the doctrine, against God who is the measure for good and evil. What is important for him, is the affirmation of life, God who is a Dionysian artist, laughs and dances, and a human being who gains full awareness of the self. Another essential aspect of Nietzsche’s thinking is an uncessant searching for the *Ungeheure*, which can also be compared to nothingness Bataille speaks about.

The third influence I have analysed is a literary one, Marquise de Sade. Both Bataille and de Sade share the “concept” of anguish which is caused by the awareness of God’s absence. All of them – Bataille, Nietzsche and de Sade – share a view that communication between beings lies in the “reception of pain – to the point of death.”¹⁴ Taking into account that for Hegel also the awareness of the “death of God” was related to human’s understanding of the death of his/her own, this assertion could be attributed also to his thinking. The cruelty of human’s existence, or life as a wound, is also in the centre for both Bataille and de Sade, and this is also an important way how to speak about the “death of God”. It appears in

¹⁴ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 11.

Bataille's novels as well. Analysing the novels one by one, several features of Bataille's understanding have been clarified, and I will name some of them as they appear in the novels.

The interpretative part of the novels begins with a short biographical note on Bataille that could help understand how to read his works. The first novel analysed, *L'Abbe C.*, has two "concepts" of the "death of God" in it: the first one is the story about an inner murderer. Taking into account that both of the twin brothers and authors of the text, Robert and Charles, are dead, there is a possibility to say that this text is "free from the author", and so is the dead God in it. Using analogy of Barthes' conception of the "death of the author" (proclaimed a few decades later), it can be assumed that, for Bataille, God is dead, while the sense of his absence is what constructs religious experience for a human being. The role of literature is also accentuated in this novel – literature, for Bataille, presents a possibility to be aware of God's absence. Both twin brothers and the editor try to annihilate what the other has written, but eventually they make it more believable. Both brothers mirror each other, and it is hard to distinguish their natures – the priest turns out to be a libertine and *vice versa*. The "death of God" in this novel can be interpreted as a logical turn after being has reached its limits (as it happens with Charles, who commits suicide). Charles tries to annihilate what Robert has written, and, thanks to mirroring, this is also the way how he tries to annihilate himself. In this novel, the murderer of God is also a representative of the sacred. Therefore, the "death of God" that can be seen in this part of interpretation could be characterised as a "concept" of the "inner murderer" or God who kills himself because he hates his reflection in the mirror (probably, made by humans). In this interpretation of the novel, the annihilation of literature gains the meaning of inner experience. Written literature, created by an author, belongs to the world of the project, is active, while its annihilation belongs to the realm of the absolute because it sets literature free from its author. A symbol of this annihilation is Robert's observing how his brother makes love to the woman they both want – Eponine. Both brothers lose their continuity, which becomes discontinuity, marking the end of (individual) history for both of them. It can also be said that the written word, ruled by the author, makes God dead, and, as a result, free literature also symbolises a liberated dead God who is indescribable and far from the author's reach.

The second possibility of interpretation is that of Bataille's High Mass. The happenings in the High Mass resemble Nietzsche's Madman's proclamation of the "death of God" in the marketplace. The fainting of Robert during the Mass symbolises the death of God, who is murdered (by the presence of eroticism, represented by Charles' and Eponine's laughter), and the God who has died from weakness as well. Like the priest in the Mass demands God's death with the consecration formula, so does Charles with his eroticism,

expressed by laughter. In contradiction to Robert, Charles with his laughter is aware of his death in the moment of the Mass. There is also a similarity between the Mass and literature – they are both means of communication, the author and the priest must die in order for the congregation or readers to grasp the death they are witnesses of. It can be said that, for Bataille, the Mass is literature – a site where the “death of God” takes place endlessly.

The next chapter of this part offers an interpretation of the *Story of the Eye*. The eye is a symbol of the circle of knowing and nonknowing. In this novel, the eye can also be viewed as a symbol of mind that becomes what it is (the mind) through action (sexual intercourse, assassination of the priest). Together with their friend, the couple who “wears the eye” kills the priest in the church. What is important here is that there is no congregation – the symbol of God, the priest is left alone. Another protagonist of the novel, Marcelle, and her life and death could be characterised as an absurdity. For Bataille, the divine is divine because of absurdity.

In the interpretation of the novel *The Dead Man*, the key word is the presence of the dead. The dead God here shows in two ways – as a dead lover who cannot be forgotten, and as a libertine who is alive, but so passive that resembles a walking dead man or zombie. The metaphor of a walking dead can be interpreted into Bataille’s assertion that what we call death is in the first place the consciousness that we have of it. As a symbol of the “dead God” who “thinks” that he is present, the libertine can also be a symbol of Nietzsche’s eternal return. In this case, the eternal return can be applied and explained as an ecstatic moment where the “death of God” opens up itself to all its possible identities. Besides, it can be seen as a concept that pushes the human being into solitude, thus destroying life itself – or a human’s life where there is never anything new. In short, the libertine is a symbol of the “death of God” and also of the evil of humanity. The dead lover, in turn, symbolises the necessity to decide between life and death – for a human being as well as for God. The third facet of this interpretation is the body of a dying woman as a symbol of the dead God.

Madame Edwarda reveals the dead God as absolute nothing through the character of a prostitute Edwarda. With her as a symbol of the dead God Bataille introduces the reader with general terror (anguish) caused by human’s awareness of the total absence of God and vain search for the absolute. Also, this is a novel about a human who is tortured by the absolute, because eroticism and the awareness of one’s own death which it brings is too hard to bear with. Edwarda is the absolute a human being cannot reach as she always slips out of the hands of the protagonist. This novel tells about the cynical impossibility of the human existence – the desire to get rid of oneself and to be one with the divine (or, the absolute). The divine love here is replaced by intensive awareness of one’s mortality and personal death. The novel says

that God dies together with the devoted believer – as the latter turns into the machine and follows dogmas and rites without any deeper meaning.

As regards writing, the text in brackets that supplements *Madame Edwarda* seems to convey an insight that writing which is tied to meaning belongs to the world of the project. Still, there is a possibility for the author to escape the book and give the text to live a life of its own – this is the way how the text becomes inner experience. Being a creative and destructive power at once, the text reveals the God-absolute who destroys himself and thus tends to the absolute meaning that can be explained only through silence. Writing is also connected with Bataille's mysticism through the "night of nonknowledge" (which, from the perspective of a human being, in Christianity could be called "the dark night of the soul"). Writing is tied to the history as a project which has meaning, while the self is capable to make the difference between the project and the absolute, because the self fears death. For Bataille, this fear is ceaseless meditation on one's death. It can be said that Bataille's "mystical way" is the experience of one's existence full of despair, torment and fear. Here the concept of inner experience is of great importance. Bataille himself attributed the word "mystical" to inner experience. The inner experience, for him, is a state where experience puts everything in question, as does nonknowledge, where the why-question which cannot be answered is posed and where the awareness of one's own (and God's) death becomes a necessity.

The novel *Blue of Noon* accents the mirror as a medium between the realm of the project and the realm of the absolute. The process of mirroring can thus be described as an awareness of one's death which links the two realms. The protagonist Troppmann is not capable to make love (uncharacteristic to Bataille's men in the novels), and he lives between impotence and panic. The "death of God" in this novel is symbolised by a woman, unreachable to the protagonist. The war, described in the novel, can be interpreted as despair, when the world around you goes crazy and there is no one to hope on. Using the analogy of Abraham's sacrifice, it becomes clear that God has deceived Troppmann by dying and letting him along with other human beings to absolute loneliness. The human has to choose his fate being all alone. In this way, the energy which is produced cannot be used up, only lost without aim, without meaning. Another interpretation of war is that it transposes heterogeneity (everything which results from unproductiveness) into the outer world, or the world one lives in. War changes person's focus from community to impossible individuality, as it is in the war where one is more than anywhere else aware of the possibility of dying at any given moment – precisely as an individual, not some abstract "we" (e.g., nation). While woman in this novel represents the dead God, man is a symbol of humanity. Troppmann reaches for the impossible individuality and becomes a victim of God who tends to commit

suicide. Thus, in this novel, the core of human existence lies in fear to be a victim of God and be dead together with the dead. Being a torturer, God suffers and thus contains the possibility to become “useless” and thus represent the world of the absolute. Still, also in this novel, the decision of dying is up to God himself.

In the interpretation of *My Mother*, God is shown as a cause of fear of “non-being”. The “death of God” accordingly may mean the overcoming of this fear. The “death of God” can also appear as a transgression of sin – the desire is what turns people into the masses because they follow it and do not know what they are following and what they are searching for. The most important message from this novel is that the sin of the mind is more dangerous than that of the body. In addition, this novel shows that the desire that has an object is a false desire, an idol – at least, if analysed from the perspective of atheology. This object may be a corrupted God – the one who is corrupted by theology and religious system. The human is corrupted, and this violence of corruption gives him a momentary access to immanence, i.e. lets the human be “him/herself”, which is hard to bear with because of the awareness of death’s inevitability. This awareness is gained through eroticism, moreover, through its harshest forms. Furthermore, the novel sketches human’s desire to identify with God, which is impossible. The possibility that remains for a human is to live with delirium.

Through the protagonist as an absent self, Bataille’s work *The Impossible* reveals God’s absence as the opening of the infinite which is more divine than God because it is absolute. The existence of the human being here is described as an experience of limits, and death is the point of reference. This work reflects on the “death of God” as a consequence of Christianity, too. The desire here turns up as related with anguish, because the latter presents the craving to go beyond limits, a vain try to reach the impossible. Anguish is what determines the existence of a human being. Writing here is revealed as nakedness and intimacy through the relationship between the author and the text. Nevertheless, writing is violent, because nakedness and intimacy of things is death. As the protagonist tells – it is a way that leads one towards the awareness of one’s death and thus also closer to the awareness of the “death of God”. What the human does in his life is vain searching for the truth that is unreachable. This searching for “is” can be called an affirmation of the human being and death as well as the “death of God”. As such, human existence can be characterised as an overcoming of all borders. Religion is something nobody can grasp, in contrast to the Christian God who is an abstract being. Literature (writing) is a remedy which communicates through the wound, and thus brings one closer to the awareness of the “death of God.” Also, the novel reveals the impossibility, which is the “death of God” and the tragedy of the reason of this death – God’s loss of faith that is also a reason why the human being is capable to

reach for God through eroticism, desire and literature, which, for Bataille, is a mystical way of atheistic Christianity. Yet, a human being can never reach the dead God.

The doctoral thesis is concluded with an explanation of the concept of the “death of God” that can be constructed using the novels of Bataille and their protagonists as a source material, comparing it with the concept of the “death of God” in Bataille’s non-fiction works and also with his atheology.

In my opinion, to understand Bataille’s attitude towards God and religion as it is revealed in his novels is essential for two reasons. Firstly, what he shows in his novels is that one can talk about religious issues using literature as a means of expression. This is important for both theology as well as literary criticism, communication of religious issues through the narrative and protagonists of the novel helps to develop creative thinking and opens new perspectives for reading fiction as well as for talking about God. Secondly, the aspect of violence is also of great importance – the violence demonstrated by the protagonists of the novels can be characterised as anger and desperation. As an aggressive expression of everything that a human being “is”, violence is directed towards the project, towards something people themselves have invented in order to gain an opposite of themselves. This invention, for Bataille, functions as an idol because it contains human expectations and has nothing to do with the empty absolute.

1. Bataille's Atheology

At the outset, I would like to define atheology in Bataille's thinking. This is also the main purpose of this chapter – to characterise atheology as it appears in Bataille's non-fictional works and give a short explanation regarding the use of this term in my thesis.

Atheology, first of all, is not an “objective” science, but the experience of immediacy. Georges Bataille himself defined atheology as “the science of the death or destruction of God (the science of the thing being destroyed inasmuch as it is a thing).”¹⁵ With “the thing” here the “thing of theology” or “craft of theologians” is meant, as I will explain further. To explain it shortly, for Bataille, God becomes a thing when God becomes a project, a system of belief which can be explained by a theologian or church. Also the weakness of language is of great importance here – the word “God” marks a thing because it is human reasoning about what God could be or what one could understand by God. Notably, Bataille never becomes esoteric; he has a concept of nonknowledge, a passive and personal experience of the divine. Also, it does not mean that the object of atheology is the unknown, because “there cannot be science that would offer knowledge of the unknown. Nobody can seek the unknown, it can only be given, in a *passive* experience. The unknown [...] is that which knowledge does not have any meanings of grasping.”¹⁶

As such, atheology is thinking fed by the experience of God even, if in a negative way – exclusively as the experience of God's absence. Bataille himself conceives atheology as a method of search in the vicinity of a refusal to know and the death of God, pointing out that “this search is the same thing as religion, not as philosophy, but it is the ambition of this search to simultaneously suppress religion and philosophy.”¹⁷ To put it simply, refusal to know means to be open for infinite possibilities of answers and refusing from acknowledging some answer as “final”, as well as refusing to stick to various concepts as unchangeable. Refusal to know is also related to Bataille's understanding of inner experience which “has no reference outside itself, either to knowledge or to God.”¹⁸ This is why Bataille writes that philosophy is not a finished house; rather, it is a “construction site”, which is characterised by the impossibility of the final state.¹⁹ Bataille further explains:

This condition of impossibility is not the excuse for undeniable deficiencies; it limits all real philosophy. The scientist is he who *agrees* to wait. The philosopher himself waits, but he cannot do so legitimately. Philosophy responds from the start to an irresolvable exigency. No one can “be” independently of a response to the question that it raises. Thus the philosopher's

¹⁵ Stuart Kendall, “Editor's Introduction”, op. cit., xxxviii.

¹⁶ Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 159.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁸ Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille. A Critical Introduction* (London, Sterling, VA): Pluto Press, 2000), 48.

¹⁹ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, transl. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 11.

response is necessarily given before the elaboration, sometimes even owing to the results obtained, *it cannot justifiably be subordinated to them*. Philosophy's response cannot be an effect of philosophical labors, and while it may not be arbitrary, this assumes, given from the start, a contempt for the individual position and an extreme mobility of thought, open to all previous and subsequent movements; and, linked to the response from the start, or rather, consubstantial with the response, the dissatisfaction and incompleteness of thought.²⁰

The "concept" of "nonknowledge" becomes clearer from this citation. It means that philosophy cannot give the final answer, so it should be protected from becoming dogmatic. Philosophy cannot be finished because thinking as such can never be finished; it can be said that, for Bataille, philosophy can be "meaningless", without any particular aim to achieve. Also, this citation characterises Bataille's attitude towards philosophy – as a way of thinking it is stronger than the individual; philosophy disobeys foregone conclusions.

There are two more concepts essential in Bataille's thinking and related with "nonknowledge" and atheology: laughter and tears. They are opposites to religion and philosophy. Speaking of laughter, he refers to Marcel Pagnol's theory, which claims that knowing of how to make someone laugh and understanding of laughter are two different things. In spite of several theories, "the laughable always remains unknown, a kind of unknown that invades us suddenly, that overturns our habitual course."²¹ Bataille draws a conclusion that the laughable can be the unknowable in a way that the unknown makes us laugh.²²

Furthermore, laughter can be distinguished as 1) communication between two beings (tickling, for instance – the one who is tickled becomes convulsive like in erotic ecstasy) and 2) communication with indefinable reality (the impossible). Laughter includes in itself both knowledge (outer agent of laughter) and nonknowledge – in joking, fall from one system into another takes place; as such joking is also a movement which forms the incompleteness of thought. This fall is frequently a violent act, which embodies intensity of a contact as a function of resistance. Unawareness of laughter can be compared to that of the erotic act.²³

The possibility of talk about laughter is thus restricted by a philosophy of nonknowledge. The only way to talk about nonknowledge is to do it in experience that always has an effect, such as laughter or tears, poetics, anguish, or ecstasy. Notably, nonknowledge leads to *nothing*, through inner experience which is personal and yet can be written down and thus shared. Nonknowledge is the opposite to knowledge. To put it simply, it is searching, doubting and asking without finding a comfortable answer. Another aspect of Bataille's emphasis on laughter is related to religious experience: "I was able to recover in myself all the

²⁰ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, op. cit., 11–12.

²¹ Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 134.

²² *Ibid.*, 135.

²³ Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, eds., *The Bataille Reader*, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 59–62.

movements of the religious experience, and to confound them with the experience of laughter, without feeling this religious experience as impoverished.”²⁴

The experience of laughter, to Bataille, is comparable with mystical theology and negative theology. As Bataille puts it, the difference is that ecstasy, which is the experience beyond laughter, is *totally* negative instead of being partly negative (as mystical and negative theologies are). Bataille continues:

I will willfully give this experience, and the reflection that accompanies it, the name *atheology*, formed with the privitive [*sic*] prefix *a*, and the word *theology*. If you will, this is given in a proposition like the following: *God is the effect of nonknowledge*. Though, as an effect of nonknowledge, God is always knowable, like laughter, like the sacred.²⁵

Thus it can be said that atheology finds its place in Bataille’s conditional “system” of “a” or the negative. The main aim of it is to seek the presence of the impossible or the place of God.²⁶ As such, it is closely related to the broad concept of “inner experience”, and in particular it is laughter (and, as I will show below, tears as well) through which a human being raises above animal nature and human misery as well.²⁷

In his *Summa Atheologica*, which consists of three philosophical works – *Inner Experience* (1943), *Guilty* (1944) and *On Nietzsche* (1945), Bataille is trying to characterise atheology through meditations on experience that has touched on the impossible – not as an object of meditation but as a possibility of experience. As Benjamin Noys puts it, “the ‘a’ added to theology is an attempt to deprive theology of its ‘head’ (God) and to lead to a new post-Nietzschean ‘headless theology’”.²⁸ The symbol of the headless man or *Acéphale* was also chosen for the name of the secret group, founded by Bataille and his co-thinkers in 1936. The word “Acéphale” means to be without head; it is a gnostic symbol, used by the group for two aims: for the denial of such political structures of society as Nazism and Fascism and (this second aim is more relevant to this doctoral thesis) for showing that “humanity and its reason [in this case, head symbolises reason – I. J.] is not a measure for all things.”²⁹ For Bataille, human life is

exhausted from serving the head of, or the reason for, the universe. To the extent that it becomes this head and this reason, to the extent that it becomes necessary to the universe, it accepts servitude. [...] Man has escaped from his head just as the condemned man has escaped from the prison. He has found beyond him not God, who is the prohibition against crime, but a

²⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 137–141.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁶ Stuart Kendall, “Editor’s Introduction” op. cit., xxxviii.

²⁷ Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel from Surrealism to Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 87.

²⁸ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 47–48.

²⁹ Christopher M. Gemerchak, *The Sunday of the Negative. Reading Bataille, Reading Hegel* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 93.

being who is unaware of prohibition. Beyond what I am, I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; this fills me with dead because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of a Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites in the same eruption Birth and Death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not himself, he loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster.³⁰

The destructive negativity of the society was not in service of social and political revolution; rather, it was “operating on the margins of society in brothels and artistic activity.”³¹ As such, it also demanded the revision of morality, because “the acephalic affirmation of (impossible) community emanates from a Nietzschean current of thought in which value is transvalued, overcoming the subordination of the opposition between good and evil.”³² Good and evil must be reconsidered in the light of the opposition of the intensity and survival, while defining the intensity as a value, which is “situated in *beyond Good and Evil*, but in two opposed forms, one connected with the principle of Good, the other with that one of Evil.”³³ Also by reevaluating morality, “the prefix ‘a’ which evacuates theology while retaining something of religious, poetic or mystical experience, denotes the heedlessness of both the summit and the subject of inner experience, and marks the place of loss the enormity of which tears a hole that opens up being to the communication that unites beings”³⁴ Notably, the prefix “a” in French also suggests the state of not being present, and thus the trace of God’s presence (or absence) is evoked by the very title of this corpus.³⁵

There are few interesting traits to note when speaking about *Summa Atheologica*. Firstly, the title may insinuate the *Summa Theologica* written by the Catholic theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). It is quite useful to keep in mind that in his youth, at the age 18 (around 1915), Bataille himself was a Catholic. In five years he discovered Nietzsche, and with this discovery the religious crisis, where Catholicism played part, was ended.³⁶ Secondly, his *magnum opus*, *Summa Atheologica*, was never completed as a philosophical (or theological) system – all three published books consisted mostly of notes, aphorisms, diary entries and quotes. Still, together these works are called *Summa Atheologica*, and their aphoristic nature reminds of Nietzsche’s influence.³⁷

By choosing the title using the prefix “a” Bataille, in fact, takes an opposition to St. Thomas Aquinas. He writes that if someone tells he has seen God, God cannot be

³⁰ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 180–181.

³¹ Christopher M. Gernerchak, op. cit., 94.

³² Fred Botting and Scot Wilson, eds., op. cit., 7.

³³ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, transl. Alastair Hamilton (London, New York: Marion Boyars Publishers, 2006), 74.

³⁴ Fred Botting and Scot Wilson, eds., op. cit., 7.

³⁵ Leslie Anne Boldt, “Translator’s Introduction”, op. cit., ix.

³⁶ Sylvere Lotringer, “Furiously Nietzschean”, in Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, transl. Bruce Boone (New York, London: Continuum, 2004), vii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, viii.

inconceivable or unknown anymore – it becomes a “thing of the theologian,” in fact, a dead subject. Theologian bursts the established framework which is useless, since for experience it is only a presupposition to be rejected.³⁸ When writing his *Summa Atheologica*, Bataille was also greatly influenced by the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), and it can also be seen in the attitude towards theology and theologians. If God becomes an object of study for a theologian, it is useful to recall what Nietzsche has said about theologians. One illustrative example:

Anything a theologian thinks is true *must* be false: this is practically a criterion of truth. His most basic instinct of self-preservation does not allow any scrap of reality to be honored or even expressed. Wherever the influence of theologians is felt, *value judgments* are turned on their heads and the concepts of ‘true’ and ‘false’ are necessarily inverted: whatever hurts life the most is called ‘true’, and whatever improves, increases, affirms, justifies life or makes it triumph is called ‘false.’³⁹

Nietzsche’s role cannot be overestimated when considering *Summa Atheologica*, because of the concepts of the “death of God” and morality (and, perhaps, also writing as a process). Dissection about Nietzsche’s influence on Bataille will be given in the second part of this thesis.

Inner experience, for Bataille, is torn away from religious experience, as far as the latter is linked with the concept of God. This inner experience does not have any knowledge of God, it is centred on and referred only to itself, and thus touches the realm of the impossible.⁴⁰ In *Summa Atheologica*, the most individual level of “inner experience” is taken as a phenomenon *per se*, aiming at transcending the individual without losing its subjectivity. Taking up Nietzsche’s thought, Bataille points out that the subject of experience can be established during this experience (which is that of intense suffering). Pain also functions as a means for transcending one’s subjectivity. Another important characteristic mark is danger included in this experience, which moves towards the “realm” of the sacred and is often followed by death. The function of the sacred is to elevate things above time and its laws of necessity and causality. Even more, the sacred destroys the realm of reason as well, at least temporarily. If such transcendence leaves the realm of necessity altogether, it may result in death. Thus, the moments of sacrifice can be limited, so that “their transcendence *of time* is still caught up *in time*. The first example is the festival; the second is war.”⁴¹ All three works from this “corpus” have been published between 1941 and 1944. War, for Bataille, was boring

³⁸ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, transl. Leslie Anne Boldt (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 4.

³⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of Idols, and Other Writings*, transl. Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Noys, *op. cit.*, 48.

⁴¹ “Georges Bataille”, Edward Craig, gen. ed., *op. cit.*, accessed on 01/08/2010

(as a way of being); still yet, there are references to it in these texts.⁴² The essential thing about war is that it is an important way of “not knowing the future.”⁴³ Everything in these books is described in the present situation; thus, Bataille merges the border between space and time as a link to his own experience as a Surrealist. Consequently, Bataille’s own path that leads him towards atheology can be described as inner experience, which concentrates on the absolute (I will return to this “concept” later) through various human experiences, such as the experience of the (im)possible and, especially, that of solitude. So, in the book *On Nietzsche* Bataille writes:

Nothing human necessitates a community of those desiring humanness. Anything taking us down that road will require combined efforts – or at least continuity from one person to the next – not limiting ourselves to the possibilities of a single person. To cut my ties with what surrounds me makes this solitude of mine a mistake. A life is only a link in a chain. I want other people to continue the experience begun by those before me *and dedicate themselves* like me and the others before me to this – *to go to the furthest reaches of the possible*.⁴⁴

Insinuating that life is like a link in a chain and that one must strive to the “furthest reaches of the possible,” Bataille points out that this solitude of human being must not be “finished”; moreover, it can be explored as a process or a state at the limit where all is interconnected and at the same time separated – only in this way it is possible to reach the state of awareness of the total absence of God. If there is a possibility for a human being to see the universe as a completed whole, then, using this analogy, God is “everything that might happen, taken as a whole.”⁴⁵ A human being cannot see the whole because of the limits of thinking and language. Through this analogy it becomes clear that a human being cannot grasp what God is. However, there is a possibility to find out what God is not.

Furthermore, human solitude cannot be grasped without the presence of eroticism, which transcends the bodily and temporal limits (like the Dionysian festival, referring to the continuity of Nietzsche’s thought). Erotic experience risks absolute annihilation, even if usually ending up “with a return to the everyday (although not the same everyday).”⁴⁶ One must produce the silence of others within oneself in order to become the Crucified (or Dionysus). Yet, one must not forget one’s solitude in order not to lose one’s “otherness.”⁴⁷ The individual existence is not commensurate with the universe with which one seeks identification – the awareness of this inevitability inspires anguish. As Bataille puts it: We kill God in our neglect of the sacred, in our devotion to the “project” (which can be religion as

⁴² Sylvere Lotringer, op. cit., vii.

⁴³ Denis Hollier, “A Tale of Unsatisfied Desire”, in Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, transl. Bruce Boone (Venice CA: The Lapis Press, 1988), viii.

⁴⁴ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, transl. Bruce Boone (New York, London: Continuum, 2004). 7.

⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, transl. Bruce Boone (Venice, California: The Lapis Press, 1988), 31.

⁴⁶ “Georges Bataille”, Edward Craig, gen. ed., op. cit., accessed on 15/09/2010

⁴⁷ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 156.

well); still, we sustain our belief in him in the fear of oblivion.⁴⁸ Yet, God has to be sacrificed, and this is the reason why Bataille can also be characterised as “furiously Christian” – he “ached to be a saint, a renegade, a mystic.”⁴⁹ Noteworthy, even if a human being has fulfilled his/her destiny and the history has come to its end, there is still a question – what should one do with this freedom? The answer from *Guilty* is that “recognition of unused negativity is now precluded – as is satisfaction of a desire for recognition. Thus, the experience of (desire’s) negativity is linked to radical solitude.”⁵⁰

Thus, the “border” between being and non-being, between possible and impossible can be kept, and eroticism can be used as a means for temporary transcendence of oneself, others and also of God. Is there any possibility to keep the common sense in such an intense experience? The answer is no – the atheology of Bataille is “a theology of delirium, a study in effects and affects, a scream at the threshold of madness”.⁵¹ (This is so because delirium – or, in other words, everything including ecstasy, poetics, sex, the absence of consciousness, the death of thought, etc. – is an effect of the impossible. The only priority of atheology is experience. Atheology is linked to the notion of sovereignty.⁵² Sovereignty, for Bataille, is “the opposite of servility”.⁵³ As such, it “represents an existence freed from worry, in which utilitarian principles are considered to be of no account. It also implies being able to recognise one’s own insignificance and laugh at the fact.”⁵⁴

In addition, “positive atheology” includes six domains of delirium – laughter, tears, sexual excitation, poetic emotion, the sentiment of the sacred, and ecstasy.⁵⁵ I will bear these concepts in mind throughout this work, analysing them in various contexts of Bataille’s novels. Thus, the characterisation of his atheology, as it appears in his fiction, will come about gradually.

This is probably the most important difference between Bataille’s philosophical and fiction works. The former are more aphoristic and can thus be interpreted almost endlessly; the “driving force”, i.e. inner experience, is treated like human religious experience (*Inner Experience*), moral experience (*On Nietzsche*) and mystical experience (*Guilty*). Of course, the novel belongs to another genre; it has a narrative and some typical characters, and this is

⁴⁸ Leslie Anne Boldt, “Translator’s Introduction”, op. cit., xi–xii.

⁴⁹ Sylvere Lotringer, op. cit., x.

⁵⁰ Denis Hollier, “A Tale of Unsatisfied Desire,” op. cit., xi.

⁵¹ Stuart Kendall, “Editor’s Introduction”, op. cit., xxxix.

⁵² Ibid., xxxix. See also Denis Hollier, “A Tale of Unsatisfied Desire,” op. cit., xii, and Sylvere Lotringer, op. cit., viii.

⁵³ Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 40–41.

⁵⁵ Lucio Angelo Privitello, op. cit., 171.

why the use of aphoristic sayings or notes from Bataille's *Summa Atheologica* as well as other philosophical works can be of great help in interpreting his novels.

Before finishing this opening chapter on atheology, I must note that Bataille's atheology has sometimes been defined as atheism as well.⁵⁶ The discussion as to the appropriateness of this term in Bataille's case is still open, as atheism can be understood in different ways. I will return to the (possible) differences of Bataille's atheology from atheism in the closure of this work. To my opinion, Bataille's atheology is also strongly related to his definition of narrative. This is the reason why the second part of this work deals with Bataille's narrative.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Michael Richardson, *op. cit.*, 26.

2. Bataille's Narrative. Influences of Bataille

2. 1. Interpretation of novel: methodological considerations

As I have already pointed out in the introduction, in this thesis, I interpret Bataille's novels first of all as literary-religious texts. A literary-religious text in this case can be understood as a fictional work that deliberately attends to religious ideas, concepts and notions. Such a text above all is an artwork that contains a message by which the reader perceives implicit religious thoughts contained within it. A few examples can be mentioned for a better understanding of what I mean by a literary-religious text. Such popular authors as J. R. Tolkien with his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, as well as Clive Staple-Lewis with *Chronicles of Narnia*, also Carol Rowling with *Harry Potter*, in my opinion, have produced literary-religious texts, each representing a separate field of literature and interpretation of religion within it.

Bataille's novels differ from the above-mentioned examples due to various reasons. Firstly, they are pornographic, and one should know Bataille's nonfictional works for perceiving his novels as literary-religious texts or interpreting them in the light of the concept of the "death of God." Secondly, his theme is not expressed in the form myths (as it is for Tolkien) or clear Christian symbols (as for Staples-Lewis), or in the form of fairy tales (as for Rowling), but in the form of an implicit message of the death of God and *the impossible*. The impossible is another concept in Bataille's thinking, and it is connected with the "death of God" and God's absence. The impossible may also refer to the state of being where one cannot reach God (because God is dead) as well as to literature as transcript of "inner experience" and thus a "mystical" way of reflecting on the "death of God". Besides, the impossible "encapsulates the paradox of existence since our essential motivation (motivated, that is, by anguish) is to go beyond our limits and yet, at the same time, it is apparent that if we were to do so we should in fact cease to exist."⁵⁷

It can be said that Bataille is one of the few authors (with Pierre Klossowski and Witold Gombrowitz, for example) whose works make a direct link between metaphysics and human flesh. "These works reveal an anti-psychological delineation, antirealism, erotic intellectualism, straightforward symbolism, and a perception of the universe, hidden behind all of these."⁵⁸ The novels of Bataille speak about the universe where God is absent, using erotic experience of the flesh as a mirror for the inner experience which is metaphysical

⁵⁷ Michael Richardson, op. cit., 40.

⁵⁸ Yukio Mishima, op. cit., 11.

because, through the inner experience, one becomes aware of the “death of God”. My interest is the metaphorical aspect of religious expressions, where inner dialogue or “inner thought” (also essential in considering Bataille’s works as expressions of “inner experience”) and the religious and artistic aims of the message are of equal importance. Literary narrative is used for reaching these aims. At first, narrative could be understood as a story or plot – for example novel or story can be a narrative.⁵⁹ Story is a medium through which we learn many things about the world. For example, the histories of our family, state, religion etc. are conveyed through stories. In the same way, there can also be a “story” about the “death of God”. In some sense, the “story” about the “death of God” can be seen as a reversed continuation of the “story of God” which uses the flesh and blood stories of the Bible to help reader to see a complete picture of God’s love to the world, also using current language and ideologies. Such approach to narrative theology helps to understand the Christian faith today.⁶⁰

Stories form the basis of our convictions; they have both literary as well as historical importance.⁶¹ Keeping in mind this double-faced importance of stories, atheology can be used as a reflective and more philosophical approach to the narrative of the “death of God”, while Bataille’s (and other writers’ who address this issue) fiction works take and represent the literary side of atheology. In this thesis, both forms of the “death of God” narrative appear as a literary-religious text and can be conceived through the legitimation of literature analysed in the last chapter. The assertion about uniting the narrative of the “death of God” and literary-religious text can be better understood if one keeps in mind that the relationship between the author and the text can mirror the relationship between God and his creation (both create something, which leaves the creator by living the life of one’s own). In the context of the “death of God”, one should also keep in mind the concept of the “death of the author” described later in this chapter.

Before trying to describe Bataille’s narrative, I would like to take a short look into literary text as narrative and try to define it in the context of my work. Narrative has been defined and analysed in various contexts. Here is one possible definition:

A narrative presents a chain of events which is situated in time and space. [...] Part of the explanation for the importance of, and our fascination with, narrative lies in the fact that it is fundamental not only to different forms of cultural expression but also to our own patterns of experience and to our insights into our own lives.⁶²

⁵⁹ Edwin J. Barton and Glenda A. Hudson, *A Contemporary Guide to Literary Terms with Strategies for Writing Essays About Literature* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 114.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God. A Narrative Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Still Press of Kansas City, 2008)

⁶¹ Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 35–36.

⁶² Jacob Lothe, op. cit., 3.

I should explain what it means to declare that narrative is fundamental to the insights of human lives – the assertion is closely related to the idea that “narrative structure of our understanding and experience implies that we organise our experiences in storylike forms. [...] We live our lives from day to day, but we understand our life as if it were a story. Our collective identity, history, and religious tradition are likewise structured as stories.”⁶³

A simple narrative example is given by Gerald Prince: “John was happy, then he saw Peter, then, as a result, he was unhappy.”⁶⁴ This example explains the *main task* of narrative – the change of state without describing it directly, instead using events to explain this change.

Narrative can also be explained as *récit* (French: “narrative” or “account”), i.e. a short novel, usually with a simple narrative line.⁶⁵ *Récit* can also be part of a larger narrative structure, as I will explain later.

It is quite clear that literary texts contain various meanings and therefore can be variously interpreted. It seems that text often creates its own sense through obstacles, which seem unknown at the first glance. The obstacles are various – such as the lens of the reader, the historical time when the text is read (and written), usually also other works of the author and the meaning one reads “into them”, as well as previous interpretations of the text (for example, a reader of the twenty-first century reads Homer differently than a reader of the nineteenth century). Also, the text is always connected with the development of thinking – be it science (science fiction written in the beginning of the twentieth century may seem ridiculous for the reader of the twenty-first century) or philosophy, or even sociology. As such, text is always in dialectical relationship with the world, creating the sense of its own, as the case might be. One explanation of how narrative works can be found in Russian formalists, who were pioneers of narrative theory. In the 1920s they used the conceptual pair *fabula/syuzhet* in a way that was helpful for distinguishing between *story* and *discourse*. *Fabula* is a material for narrative construction and includes summary of the action, while *syuzhet* refers to the literary quality of the text, i.e. the different devices in the text that make it literary. *Syuzhet* can also be related to *plot* as a “construction of the events”. Thus the formalist concept of *suyzhet* is linked to the word “discourse”. *Syuzhet* is an element of form which extends over into the text’s content field. In this way, *syuzhet* is related to *plot*.⁶⁶ According to Aristotle, plot can be understood as a mimesis of *action* or, in other words, construction of the events, which transforms the events in a necessary sequence. The mimesis

⁶³ R. Ruard Ganzevoort, “Narrative Approaches” in B. Miller-McLemore, ed., *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 214.

⁶⁴ Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1991), 53.

⁶⁵ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/493571/recit>, accessed on 15/12/2011.

⁶⁶ Jacob Lothe, op. cit., 7.

of the action is plot which is also the first principle of the literary work, while characters who reveal moral choice is the second, and thought is the third.⁶⁷ Thus, it can be said that the aim of the literary work is to describe an action through which the characters are revealed. Plot can then be seen as the force that shapes the narrative discourse. As Jacob Lothe puts it:

The term thus not only refers to *how* a fictional narrative is presented – as linguistically formed discourse and through an act of narrating (narration) – but also draws attention to the relationship between textual form and content and the reader’s vital role in the understanding of narrative.⁶⁸

Plot is essential in considering literary works or fiction. In fiction we can discern the purpose of the author. However, as I have already pointed out, reader is not always capable of perceiving the message of the author. Why? One explanation can be found in the specific characteristic marks of fiction. As Gerard Genet puts it, narrative can be divided in three parts. The first is *discourse (récit)* as the spoken/written presentation of events, i.e. text that the reader accesses directly. The second part of narrative is *story (histoire)* or the already mentioned action, which explores events in their sequence and shows them in a chronological discourse of the development of characters. This part is extremely important, because it includes the structuring activity from the reader’s side (this is not an interpretation of the story yet; rather, it is a way how the reader perceives events and characters in the context of events). The third is *narration (narration)*, the way how text is written as a communicative tool. Narration is a trace of the process of writing, thus being the process whereby the author becomes an agent, who is responsible for the production and communication of the narration.⁶⁹

It can be said that, approaching a text for interpretation, both writer and reader are of equal importance. Concerning interpretation, it is useful to remember Roman Jakobson, who made a simple schema for verbally communicative acts. Undoubtedly, text must not be treated as an object but rather as a verbally communicative act by means of language.⁷⁰

Jakobson’s schema can be represented as follows:⁷¹

Table 1.

	Context	
ADDRESSER →	MESSAGE →	ADDRESSEE
[Author]	Contact	[Reader]
	Code	

⁶⁷ Aristotle, “Poetics”, transl. Stephen Halliwell, in *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 53.

⁶⁸ Jacob Lothe, op. cit., 7–8.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁰ I borrowed this idea from Roland Barthes. He talks about text in a more specific way, while I use the idea as I deem it useful for a short introduction of Bataille’s narrative within the limits of my thesis.

⁷¹ Jacob Lothe, op. cit., 15.

Exploring this schema, one can see that message needs a *context* – verbal or capable of being verbalized – because of the necessity for the message to be graspable by the addressee. Next, *code* is a system of norms that is partly common to the addresser and the addressee.⁷² Another component is *contact*. Writing on this schema, Roman Jakobson himself explained the contact as “a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication”.⁷³

Some branches of contemporary literary theory emphasise the reduction of author’s “meaning”. Narrative gains its sense not only from the author’s intent but also from the reader’s point of view. The way how the reader as an individual (i.e. as a person with his/her own inner and outer experiences, concepts, ideas, etc.) perceives the text is equally important. When so interpreted, the meaning of each text is subjective.⁷⁴

So, the meaning of the text is, on the one hand, dependent on the viewpoint of the reader – no one is able to leave one’s own historical time, nor the society, one’s knowledge and beliefs and the world one lives in. On the other hand, in the process of writing, the author “creates an image of himself and another image of the reader, he makes the reader as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find a complete agreement.”⁷⁵

Keeping in mind the dialectical relationship between author and reader, where narrative functions as a mediator of some kind, it is clear that interpretation is unavoidable. Still, it must be limited somehow, and I am going to use two different frames for interpreting Bataille’s narrative, which I will describe more specifically at the end of this chapter.

Another definition of narrative should be kept in mind while interpreting Bataille’s narrative as a religious narrative, i.e. understanding narrative as a “temporal series of actions [...]”, which “[...] are individually significant only in so far as they are interrelated as parts of a meaningful whole.”⁷⁶ The “meaningful whole” in my thesis is the “death of God” as it appears in the novels of Bataille, and the “temporal series of actions” are characteristic marks which are similar throughout his novels and manifest as parallels in the plot, kindred protagonists, comparable details used for describing a situation as the story goes on etc. I will

⁷² Jacob Lothe, *op. cit.*, 15.

⁷³ Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 66.

⁷⁴ Edwin J. Barton and Glenda A. Hudson, *op. cit.*, 20.

⁷⁵ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961) *op. cit.*, 138.

⁷⁶ Paul Brockelman, *The Inside Story: A Narrative Approach to Religious Understanding and Truth* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 102.

also generalise these similarities as “Bataille’s mythology”, by this meaning the “narrative disclosure of an interpretive understanding of what life is about”.⁷⁷

Further factors that I have to keep in mind in interpreting Bataille’s novels is context and content – in literary as well theological sense. A literary work always has a context of the system of signs which “incarnate” it. The system of signs can be variously structured – a sign can be a word, a combination of words, a letter etc.⁷⁸ The sign

has not only a reference (an object, using that word very generally as that to which it points) but also a sense, which contains its “mode of presentation.” [...] The sense mediates between the sign and the reference; a single reference may be given many senses, and a single sense may be expressed with various signs.⁷⁹

Using this approach, yet another schema worth to keep in mind is possible. My strategy is to combine this schema with the previous one whenever helpful for interpreting Bataille’s novels. The table can be found in George Aichele’s book *The Limits of Story: A Narrative Approach to Religious Understanding and Truth*.⁸⁰

Table 2

CONTEXT	CONTENT	CONTEXT
SIGN	SENSE	REFERENCE
MEDIA	PLOT FABLE	REPRESENTATIONS

Combining this schema with the previous one, the *context*, *sign* and *media* can be interpreted as the *addresser* or the *author*. It means that, when reading Bataille’s novels, the part of the *author’s context* will be understood as the historical and sociocultural background when the novel was written (when necessary) as well as some important details from Bataille’s biography. Another part from the concept of the *author* is the sign – by this the symbols characteristic for Bataille’s thinking (such as the eye, the mirror, also a woman) will be understood. The third part is media – it is based on Bataille’s non-fiction works where the “death of God” has been explained. As I have already mentioned, Bataille’s non-fiction works will be used as a lens for interpreting the novels in the context of the “death of God”. It means that without knowledge of Bataille’s concept of the “death of God” as reflected on in his non-fictional works one cannot properly understand or interpret the “concept” of the “death of God” in his novels.

⁷⁷ Paul Brockelman, op. cit., 103.

⁷⁸ George Aichele, Jr. *The Limits of Story* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1985), 9-11.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 9. For this explanation Aichele uses Gottlob Frege’s distinction between “sense” and “reference”.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 11.

Content, sense and *plot fable* construct the *message* of the text; in other words, when put together, the content, sense and plot fable answer the question: What is this novel about, what do I as a reader understand with this novel? *Sense* is also related to my interpretation of the text, using my knowledge about Bataille's thinking. *Plot fable* is a simple narrative, telling the sequence of events (for example, "the protagonist meets a prostitute and sleeps with her"). When put together, these three forms complete the message of the text.

The *context, reference* and *representation* stand in the place of the *addressee*, or *reader*. The context has already been formed for the reader, in this case, myself – I am a white woman theologian who lives in Northern Europe in the 21st century. *Reference* is the part which refers to everything I know about possible influences of Bataille and to everything I have in mind when speaking about the "death of God". *Representation* is what the text represents for me, its very essence for me as a person who reads Bataille's novels, concentrating on the "concept" of the "death of God".

Since my thesis deals with Bataille's literary texts, I will enhance my interpretation with a simplified literary analysis as well. Initially, I will make a few very simple, yet very important steps towards reading novel as a literary work. These steps are:

1. Read or reread the text with specific questions in mind.
2. Marshal basic ideas, events and names (additional review of the text).
3. Define my personal reaction to the book: identification, enjoyment, significance, application.⁸¹
4. Identify and consider most important ideas (importance will depend on context⁸²).
5. Return to the text to locate specific evidence and passages related to the major ideas.⁸³

The narrative in a literary work is composed using such elements as message, characterisation, dialogue, monologue, inner monologue, letter, author's remark etc. that also appear in the novel. The composition begins, when the scene has been developed, using the message. Separate details of the message are combined into scenes, which, in turn, are combined into episodes, which constitute the basic structure of a prose narrative. However, it is not possible to separate one compositional technique from another – they amalgamate to make the narrative structure. Another essential element for the scene is incident – acting, which tells more about the characters of the novel. In psychological sense, message is constructed from both objective (using facts) and subjective (using attitude towards the character) perspectives.⁸⁴ The subjective perspective is more characteristic of the novels, in

⁸¹ I will not mark out this step separately, as it is implicit throughout the reading process.

⁸² Bataille's atheology and its influences, in this case.

⁸³ <http://www.goshen.edu/english/litanalysis-html/>, accessed on 12/12/2011

⁸⁴ Harijs Hiršs, *Prozas poētika* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1989), 150-159.

which the protagonist is also the narrator (or makes an impression to be the author as well).⁸⁵ The problem is that these relations are complicated in literature. Unlike in visual art, literature can fuse perspectives, thereby making the analysis much more complicated. The point of view is also of great importance – it may be chronotopic and include the perspectives of space and time. In addition, the point of view has other functions, some of them are:

- 1) Psychological point of view determines which character can be revealed from the inside and how deep this revelation could be;
- 2) Evaluating point of view determines the authority and competency of the character (and of the author as well), i.e. it is a criterion of truth and certainty;
- 3) The point of view which organises the “internal” time of the narrative and determines synchronicity/diachronicity, retrospective and chronological transpositions and montage etc.
- 4) The point of view which organizes the “artistic space” and determines the breadth of the place of action, intensity etc.
- 5) The narrator’s point of view, which is most essential from all the abovementioned points of view.⁸⁶

It seems from such a point of view that the novel, the text itself brings about a situation that demands answers from the reader. These answers are reader’s reactions to the text, and, dependent on the reader, they are open to countless possible reactions at any particular point of time. As such, text is polyphonic, and to narrow it to one particular interpretation, the possible answers should be delimited by the reader him/herself. Using Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, the literary text can be described as “heteroglossia”.⁸⁷ The term “heteroglossia” means “many-languagedness”, and it is “a situation of the subject surrounded by the myriad responses he or she might make at any particular point, but any one of which must be framed in a specific discourse selected from the teeming thousands available.”⁸⁸ This is an appropriate illustration for the infinite possibilities of interpreting the text, which, as I hope, explains the reason why I narrow and simplify my approach as much as possible.

Since my key theme is atheology, this is also how I will narrow my approach to the text, interpreting it in the light of the “death of God” concept and leaving aside all other interpretations possible in the context of Bataille’s thinking. First, as I have already described in the previous chapter, the aim of my interpretation is to find where the text speaks about deconstruction of God as far as it is a thing and, consequently, see what the text can tell about Bataille’s understanding of the “death of God”. Secondly, I will try to read Bataille’s novels in the light of his influences, thereby risking in some cases to be drawn into speculation.

⁸⁵ This literary device is at work in all Bataille’s novels that are analysed in this thesis. Each novel is written using the “I” for the protagonist.

⁸⁶ H. Hiršs, op. cit., 162-163.

⁸⁷ Michael Holquist, *Dialogism. Bakhtin and His World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 67.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

Building on Jacobson, my schema for interpreting Bataille’s novels can be systematised like this:

Table 3

	(Influences of Bataille)	
BATAILLE →	NOVEL →	INTERPRETER
	Narrative composition (also includes “codes” and “symbols” appearing in the text)	(the one who seeks the “death of God” as it appears in a novel)
	Atheology (as it appears in Bataille’s non-fiction works)	

This schema illustrates my method of interpretation. It can be understood as attentive reading, while also keeping in mind what Bataille says about atheology in his non-fiction works as well as selection of symbols which can possibly be related to Bataille’s concept of the “death of God”. Besides that, I will use other explanations and interpretations of Bataille’s novels where I deem it necessary.

2. 2. Peculiarities of Bataille’s Narrative

My challenge is to write about literary-religious text as a (de)construction of sense. One must keep in mind that most of Bataille’s novels contain certain types of violence (there are scenes of self-destructive and sacrificial eroticism, elements of S&M, and even murders). Thus, the construction of the sense of his novels cannot be considered apart from deconstructing *something*. What is this *something*? A hypothetical claim in the context of this thesis could be that this something to be deconstructed is the concept of God. As a result, Bataille’s concept of the “death of God” can be sketched out, and this concept could also be indicative of Bataille’s odd “religiosity”.

While Bataille did not claim being a professional philosopher, he was a philosopher of sorts, just as Nietzsche was, and his non-fictional writing on religion and philosophy holds a key to his narrative. Bataille writes that the incompleteness of philosophy is never like that of science, which is composed of finished parts and non-mastered lacunae among them; contrary to that, in philosophy, completeness is not possible at any point. This condition delimits all

real philosophy – the answers to the philosopher’s questions are given in the process of waiting, before a philosophy has been elaborated. Answers can change the philosophy that is being constructed, but the philosophy cannot justifiably be subordinated to them.⁸⁹ Thus, philosophy despises the individual position and gains the extreme mobility of thought. It is open to all previous or subsequent movements and from the very start is linked to or rather is consubstantial with the response, the dissatisfaction and incompleteness of thought.⁹⁰

Thus, from the philosopher’s viewpoint, one way to interpret narrative is to see how it develops simultaneously with its own explanation. From the viewpoint of philosophy of religion, narrative is knowingly restricted to its subject matter. Text is then analysed in a tendentious crosscut, which in this case is my aim as well. As I had already pointed out in the previous chapter, there are many possible approaches to the text as a phenomenon, although my subjective observation will always prevail. Tendentious interpretations based on knowledge about the author’s personality and the time and place where the text has been written, or the historical, political, philosophical, social, economic etc. background are insignificant when compared to subjectivity, person’s religious and artistic being. Bataille is one of the authors hard to be classified. Roland Barthes points out that Bataille could be a mystic as well as an essayist, poet or economist. He goes on to say that a definitive answer in this case “is so difficult that the literary manuals generally prefer to forget about Bataille, who, in fact, wrote texts, perhaps continuously one single text”.⁹¹

The second key when speaking about Bataille’s narrative is his own attitude towards literature. Bataille himself writes “on writing” in many of his books. His subtle point is that language is a tool not only of literature and narrative but also of one’s religious feelings and experience. Although Bataille never speaks about narrative as a phenomenon, he talks about reaching the end of language. The meaning of language is implicit in the words that bring language to a halt. Words acquire meaning only to the extent they take place immediately before silence – a silence that puts a stop to them. “Only *forgotten* would they take on full meaning, falling suddenly, conclusively, into oblivion.”⁹² In the very beginning of his work *On Nietzsche*, Bataille writes: “Motivating this writing – as I see it – is fear of going crazy.”⁹³ Feeling of going crazy, of losing one’s mind, is the leading motif in his fiction works. He also concedes that the malaise, writing, literature, from which he suffers, cannot be overcome

⁸⁹ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, op. cit., 11f.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹¹ Roland Barthes, *Image. Music. Text*, transl. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 157.

⁹² Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, transl. Bruce Boone (Venice, California: The Lapis Press, 1988), 8.

⁹³ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., xvii.

without lying.⁹⁴ This is an emotional and involved attitude towards the text, and this attitude leads towards anguish. Taking into account the claim about literature as a malaise, it is essential to point out that Bataille sees literature as something fatal: “Literature is either the essential or nothing.”⁹⁵ It may mean that Bataille sees literature as a subtle point of his existence which has to be overcome. Trying to overcome the totality of our existence only in vain, we follow the desire which leads us to an illusion of never dying. The same happens in writing – the author seeks the immortality which is inscribed in his text.⁹⁶

If we return to the question about writing on writing, this “detaching from all ties”, which Bataille mentions, gains a brand new meaning when looked at in the light of obliged writing, as many literates tell that they must write in order not to deceive their readers. Bataille is not the one who writes for the sake of his reader, although he seems to know quite clearly who his [possible] reader is. One important aspect of writing in this perspective is its freeing from obligations, which means that the reason for writing must not come from outside (i.e., for Bataille, inner experience is essential for writing). The writer must not be “politically” or “intellectually” oriented and should not write for the sake of one specific idea or school of ideas. Writing must be personal involvement in history, the effect of passion. Writer is very much of his/her own, knowing “how to die in solitude”. Writer is lonely, and he/she must be the one who reveals to the solitude of everyone an intangible part which no one will ever enslave, as Bataille points out in one of his articles.⁹⁷ As such, literature contains a sovereign value for a human, an endless freedom from everything which, from a certain (moral/project) point of view, can be seen as an instance of evil. More precisely, literature is the “acute form of Evil which it expresses.”⁹⁸ Thus literature becomes a way of communication which “requires loyalty. A rigorous morality results from complicity in the knowledge of Evil, which is the basis of intense communication.”⁹⁹

The knowledge of evil goes together with one of the most scandalous influences of Bataille – Marquise de Sade (see chapter 2. 2. 5). For both of them, Bataille and de Sade, knowledge of evil and good is connected with the understanding of violence. For Bataille, violence seems to reveal itself not only straightforwardly in the narrative but also in the frankness (or freedom) of his talking about human’s sexual functions. It seems that he

⁹⁴ Georges Bataille, *L’Abbe C.*, transl. Philip A. Facey (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1988), 136.

⁹⁵ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., ix.

⁹⁶ Leslie Anne Boldt, “Translator’s Introduction”, op. cit., x. Denis Hollier, “A Tale of Unsatisfied Desire”, op. cit., xi.

⁹⁷ Bataille’s response to Jean-Paul Sartre, in Jean Paul Sartre, “Qu’est-ce que la littérature?”, *Situations II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948) 265, cited in Jean-Michel Besnier, “Bataille, the Emotive Intellectual”, in Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed., *Bataille. Writing the Sacred*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), 16.

⁹⁸ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., ix.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

speaks of himself with a freedom without restraint that should free us from all discretion – but that does not give us the right to put ourselves in his place, nor does it give us the power to speak in his absence. And is it certain that he speaks of himself? The “I” whose presence his search seems still to make manifest when it expresses itself, toward whom does it direct us?¹⁰⁰

The unknowable direction makes the act of writing dangerous; as it is communication, it can no longer be reconciled with the form of representation: it becomes violent as an intellectual function.¹⁰¹ This function also has a driving force, and it is a desire (for communication, for the sense of existence, for truth, for the impossible whatever we call it). Desire cannot be for satisfaction; it cannot be satisfied, because it always stages the emptiness of satisfaction.¹⁰² The question about writing is: Is a person capable of inscribing his/her existence and leave a record of his/her life?¹⁰³ Is there any criterion for this capability? We cannot say that it is led or inspired by the divine reason, not in Bataille’s case. One of the possible answers can be related to the violence of literature, which for Bataille is closely related to death as the condition of life and thus also to the “little death” or orgasm. For Bataille, the “little death” is a state of a human being which reminds about his/her death (as the end of the human being) and also can mirror it in fictional work. The human is also an animal that propagates in order to avoid extinction and has sex to forget about death and cherish a hope of the continuation of his kind. At the same time, each new-born baby is condemned to death because this is how things are with animals – nobody is immortal, and each living organism wears out. This is the paradox Bataille sees in the sexual act and also in eroticism. A sexual act thus is bound with the awareness of death (which can also be unconscious, if judged psychologically), which, explained in the terms of how Bataille understands eroticism, is of equal importance for life as the issue of existence is for writing. For Bataille, eroticism can be the approval of life.

Sexuality implies death, not only in the sense in which the new prolongs and replaces that which has disappeared, but also in the life of the being who reproduces himself is at stake. To reproduce oneself is to disappear [...]. Those who reproduce themselves do not die, if, by death, we understand the passage from life to decomposition, but he who was, by reproducing himself, ceases to be what he was – because he doubles himself. Individual death is but one aspect of the proliferative excess of being. Sexual reproduction itself is only one aspect – the most complicated – of the immortality of life which is at the stake in asexualised reproduction. It is an aspect of immortality, but at the same time of individual death. [...] The basis for sexual effusion is the negation of the isolation of the ego which only experiences ecstasy by exceeding itself, by surpassing itself in the embrace in which the being loses its solitude.¹⁰⁴

It is worthwhile to make a parallel with Barthes’s famous claim, which is known as the “death of the author”. The process of writing begins in an instant when a fact/event is put into

¹⁰⁰ Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, transl. Elizabeth Rotenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 290.

¹⁰¹ Allan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual. Commitment, Subjectivity, and the Performative in the Twentieth Century French Tradition* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 7.

¹⁰² Denis Hollier, “A Tale of Unsatisfied Desire”, op. cit., xii.

¹⁰³ Leslie Anne Boldt, “Translator’s Introduction”, op. cit., x.

¹⁰⁴ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 16.

writing, thus losing its previous function [of the fact/event] and becoming a symbol [of the fact/event], an integral part of the text. The author is associated with his/her works and vice versa (for example, Baudelaire the writer is a failure of Baudelaire the man), while the explanation of a written text is sought in its author. Still, it is language which speaks, not the author. To write means to reach that point, where only language acts and performs.¹⁰⁵ Like Barthes, in speaking about author, emphasises the publicity of this person, Bataille points out that being loses its solitude. Writing and sexuality are of one kind – it is an aspect of immortality, but simultaneously the one of the individual death. For Bataille, this death also implies an ecstasy, which, from its side,

isn't explanation, isn't justification, isn't clarification. What it is, is flower – as unfinished, a perishable. The only way out: take a flower, look at it till there's harmony in it, so that it explains, clarifies and justifies *because* of being unfinished, *because* of being perishable.¹⁰⁶

It seems appropriate to explain his meditations on ecstasy in most of his literary works. Ecstasy, erotic ecstasy in particular, has nothing to do with a stereotyped figure of Eros from the Hellenistic age. It is a theme and a vehicle of meditation and reaching God-the absolute, or, more precisely, the nothing, which is absolute for Bataille. He points out that ecstasy is *communication* between terms, and communication possesses a value the terms didn't have: it annihilates them.¹⁰⁷ In fact, the same happens with writing, as we will see in the interpretation of Bataille's novels. So, it can be said that, for Bataille, narrative is a phenomenon of communication, thus being equalled with ecstasy and eroticism, so far as they both care about observation. In novel, narrative is based on the use of words that function like means of conveying the familiar. The reader is captured in his/her own experience, for the words already have a meaning for the reader's interpretation of the text. As such, literature is caught up in itself, because words are images "charged with emotions already experienced, attached to the objects which link them to the known."¹⁰⁸

When thought through like that, literature always takes a risk of some kind of misunderstanding, but the risk depends on the reader, not on the author. More important, literature is communication between the author and the reader with no guarantee of mutual understanding. By using the images of eroticism, Bataille shows his deepest conviction: language can and does *communicate* [emphasis mine – I.J.] even the most interior of experiences.¹⁰⁹ This is how he seeks for the possibility to speak about the impossible. As an

¹⁰⁵ Roland Barthes, *Image. Music. Text*, op. cit., 143.

¹⁰⁶ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 29.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 3.

impossible possibility to speak about the impossible, literature is for Bataille the necessity, not a “project”. “High literature” can speak through the mask and cannot be mixed with “popular literature”, which fills the libraries and comes from dust. The difference is simple – the “high literature” tends to speak about the impossible, about the meaning of life and death, which Bataille finds in eroticism, while studying it through the lens of psychology, anthropology, economics, politics and histories of art and religion.¹¹⁰ As it is for de Sade, also for Bataille, eroticism is related to violence and has both an aesthetic as well as a moral value. They both defeat virtue and verify the limits for passion and vice.¹¹¹ And, more important, the relevant theme for both of them is religion, although for de Sade it is the religion of his time and state, while for Bataille it is the misunderstanding of religion. In this approach, he is more similar to Nietzsche: while Nietzsche wrote about *Das Ungeheure*, Bataille writes about the impossible, and this is the crucial point where their interpretation of religion in literature becomes similar. They are both using language and fiction for explaining the “unexplainable”, i.e. both are speaking about mysticism and ecstasy and thus, especially Bataille, also about the “death of God” in order to be able to speak about God.¹¹² As Bataille himself says:

The idea of being the dream of the unknown (of God, of the universe) is, it seems, the extreme point which Nietzsche attained. In it the happiness of being, of affirming, the refusal to be everything, natural cruelty, fecundity are at work: man is a bacchant philosopher.¹¹³

So explained, literature and writing become for Bataille, as it was for Nietzsche, an essential element of life, not less important than religion. They both write about religion, although each in his own style; so, in *Guilty* Bataille gives a short insight in his theological thinking, which I will also further use as a key for interpretation of his novel in the next chapter of my thesis:

It seemed to me there were two terms to human thought: God and the awareness of God’s absence. But since God’s just a confusion of the SACRED (a religious aspect) and REASON (an instrumental aspect), the only place for him is a world where confusion of the instrumental and the sacred becomes a basis for reassurance. God terrifies when he’s no longer the same as reason.[...] But if he’s not the same as reason, I’m confronted with God’s absence. And this absence is confused with the last stage of the world, which no longer has anything instrumental about it and furthermore doesn’t have anything to do with *future* retributions or punishments.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Helga Finter, “Vorwort”, in *Bataille lesen: Die Schrift und das Unmoegliche*, hrsg. Helga Finter, Georg Maag (Muenchen: Wilhelm Fink Verlag), 7–8.

¹¹¹ Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, “Sadean Libertinage and the Aesthetics of Violence”, in Catherina Cusset, ed., *Libertinage and Modernity* (Yale University: *Yale French Studies* No. 94, 1998), 187.

¹¹² Ruediger Safranski, *Nietzsche. A Philosophical Biography*, transl. Shelly Frish (New York, London: W. W. Norton Company, 2002), 187-189.

¹¹³ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 28.

¹¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 6.

Unlike Bataille, Nietzsche did not write novels; his way of writing was sometimes aphoristic, sometimes poetic. Nevertheless, there is a common essential point in their writing. Nietzsche wrote about his life, and with all of life-force he could master; ultimately he wrote to stay alive.¹¹⁵ In Nietzsche's book *The Gay Science*, where he also wrote about the murder of God, there is a paragraph titled *But why do you write?* The thought in this paragraph, uncharacteristic to Nietzsche, is laid out in the form of dialogue:

A: I am not one of those who think with an inky pen in their hand, much less one of those who in front of an open inkwell abandon themselves to their passions while they sit in a chair and stare at the paper. I am annoyed by and ashamed of my writing; writing is for me a pressing and embarrassing need, and to speak of it even in a parable disgusts me.
B: But, why, then, do you write? – A: Well, my friend, to be quite frank: so far, I have not discovered any other way of getting rid of my thoughts. – B: And why do you want to get rid of them? – A: Why I want to? Do I want to? I must. –B: Enough! Enough!¹¹⁶

It is similar for Bataille: he takes writing very seriously and, as writers usually do, knows exactly what his reader should be like: “I write for one, who, entering into my book, would fall into it as into a hole, who would never again get out.”¹¹⁷ Thus, it can be said that he sees his own texts as transcendental, while trying to speak about the impossible. This assumption of transcendence can also be helpful in the interpretation of Bataille's novels. There is a possibility of distinguishing two axes of earthly life described in the fiction works – vertical (transcendental) and horizontal (although this axis strives to raise itself up in a vertical position, as, e. g., a ritual pretends to be divine, immanence claims to be transcendent etc.). For example, the vertical axis could be that of transcendence, objectification, conceptualization, representation, distantiation, homogeneity, knowledge, history (as written or as narrated) and the domain of theory. The horizontal axis, from its part, could be the one of immanence, ritual, difference, horror, silence, heterogeneity, abjection, non-discursive domain, or practice (history as practice).¹¹⁸

To conclude, it seems that in Bataille's case literature can gain for itself a religious sense. It is a rehearsal to talk about the impossible, to explain the unexplainable, using the means which are available to human beings. In this process, literature becomes communication about silence, and it ceases to “explain” anything.

¹¹⁵ Ruediger Safranski, op. cit., 25.

¹¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 181–146.

¹¹⁷ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 116.

¹¹⁸ John Lechte, “Surrealism and the Practice of Writing”, in Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed., op. cit., 120.

2. 2. 1. Influences on Bataille: Hegel

In this part of the work, I will characterise possible influences on Bataille's thinking. A major influence can be found in the thought of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). It is not possible here to describe Hegel's philosophical claims in the context of the "death of God" fully, so I will try to be as short as possible and not enter into the details of Hegel's difficult thinking.

Although Bataille considered himself closer to Nietzsche than to any other thinker, he also mentions such figures as S. Kierkegaard, W. Blake, F. Kafka, F. Dostoyevsky, M. Proust and others. G. W. F. Hegel plays a prominent role among these references. Bataille has explored some facets of Hegel's thinking in the paper "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice". Hegel's influence throughout Bataille's writings is mostly allusive, ambiguous and hard to trace, so in this chapter I will try to highlight some thoughts common for Bataille and Hegel.

Writing about the relation between Hegel and Bataille, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida points out:

To bear the self-evidence of Hegel, today, would mean this: one must, in every sense, go through the "slumber of reason", the slumber that engenders monsters and then puts them to sleep; this slumber must be effectively traversed so that awakening will not be a ruse of dream.¹¹⁹

The citation of Derrida is a good point to start explaining the dialectics between Bataille and Hegel. To put it shortly, they had two points of view to share and both are important for interpreting Bataille's novels. The first point is about their understanding of God (or the death of God), while the second concerns the place of the human who tries to understand the divine and, through this process, is situated within the system of understanding of the divine. In trying to understand the divine, the human is at the same time inside and outside the system, because of being the one who makes the system of how to reflect on the divine as well as the one who reflects on the divine. The dialectics between these two points could also be described as a slumber of reason: a human being strives to become "totally other", tends to take the place of God, and does it, paradoxically, by performing religious rituals, such as sacrifices.¹²⁰ The paradox which emerges in such religious practices is that the human oneself is the object of these practices, because the human knows nothing about God except one's own concept of God, which is, in fact, that of the human oneself. Sacrifice functions as an "attempt to rediscover the 'sacred intimacy'" and simultaneously is a "religious response to

¹¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, transl. Alan Bass (London & New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2007), 318.

¹²⁰ Compare: Georges Bataille, "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice", in Allan Stoekl, ed., *French Yale Studies* (Yale: Yale University, 1990), 11, and Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, eds., op. cit., 215.

the rise of uncompromisingly *human* nature.”¹²¹ Thus, the conflict of human consciousness is “the flight from and search for this ‘sacred’, ‘sovereign’ aspect of existence: ‘intimacy’”.¹²² This tension is also observable in Hegel’s understanding of human thinking of God, where it appears as the social estrangement. It was Hegel who took the decisive steps of relating the concept of God to certain social circumstances and of emphasising the historical connection between philosophical theism and Christianity. In Hegel’s understanding of the relationship between theism and Christianity, philosophical elements in theism reduce and simplify Christianity to a mere a historical movement. The advantage of his interpretation was that he could render the philosophical doctrine of a personal God vulnerable to the same social critique devised for Christianity as a positive, historical religion.¹²³ As it turned out later, this “historical approach” was meaningful also for the twentieth-century “death of God” theologians (see, for example, Thomas Altizer’s *Godhead and Nothingness*).

Theory of God, of course, was at the storm’s eye of the entire movement of German idealism. Hegel reflected most deeply and consistently on the relationship between God and the philosophical principle of the absolute. One of his permanent convictions was that no philosophy is worthy of the name unless it can answer this question: What does it mean to approach God? Hegel criticised the theories of Fichte and (early) Shelling and simultaneously did independent research into the social, religious and philosophical aspect of the problem of God. The young Hegel disengaged his distinctive viewpoint of God from that of the orthodox Lutheran Christianity, the Enlightenment, and his German philosophical predecessors. Hegel’s absolute can be defined as “self-conscious knowledge”; i.e., the absolute is knowledge which must be separated from the terms of “being” and “concept” (as terms that can be attributed only to human thinking), knowledge which “exists” within itself, not in the concept (made by human) of itself. Sometimes the term “absolute” is attributed also to God. Yet, it had to bear a relation of identity with the total system of knowledge and morality rather than to serve a purely instrumental function in respect to them. Under these conditions, Hegel developed his master theme of the *absolute-spirit-as-totality*. He made a clear differentiation between his absolute spirit and the God of religious theism, not by eliminating the latter entirely, but by treating it as an imperfect, symbolical expression of the absolute spirit itself. Most of his successors forgot about the cardinal distinction between God and the Hegelian absolute, thus giving rise to grave and potent misunderstandings concerning relation of the

¹²¹ Christopher M. Gernerchak, op. cit., 2.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ James Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy* (Chicago: A Gateway Edition, 1959), 203.

human to God.¹²⁴ Thus, it can be said that Hegel's attitude towards the "death of God" somehow also includes the "concept" of the absolute.

Hegel himself said that the doctrine of God pertains to religion only, which for Hegel means the subjective consciousness of God.¹²⁵ From the viewpoint of Christianity, the causal relation between human's consciousness of God and self-consciousness is quite clear – the main core of (Protestant) Christianity is to be aware of one's "nothingness" (*Nichtigkeit*) compared to God. The direct way how to face this "nothingness" for a human being is death, one's own death in particular. This awareness is the only way for the human to regard oneself as an object of God's unconditional grace and reflect on God as a sustaining power who comes to human self-consciousness. In this interpretation, Hegel speaks about the death of Jesus, like Luther did. Thus, from the perspective of faith, the perspective of the "death of God" also changes: a non-believer will see God's death on the cross as the death of a great master, while the believer will find there the death of God himself, at the same time being aware that this is also the death of an individual, the one who is "made in the likeness of God", who is an *imago Dei*. Thus, seeing the death of Jesus as the death of God, the believer realises that finitude is the incarnation of God's majesty. The "event of Christ" signifies God's love toward humanity. As such, the death of God means the "death of death" – God himself has died and thus has overcome death.¹²⁶

Of course, this is only one, more "orthodox" way of interpreting the "death of God" in Hegel. Another way to interpret Hegel's conception of the "death of God" results from the failure of philosophy, as it appears in Hegel's criticism of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Friedrich Heinrich Jakobi (1743–1819) and Johan Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814). Hegel labels the systems of these philosophers "philosophies of reflection".¹²⁷ The problem with the philosophy of reflection is this:

[T]hinking which begins with the empirical cannot escape the empirical, and especially not by way of a problematic notion of the reasonable and the Absolute. This becomes in its highest form the incompleteness of thought. [...] [T]he union of common sense and scepticism manifest in the reflection-philosophy as the incompleteness of thinking marks the climax of a world-spiritual principle. To anticipate this may be called the death of God.¹²⁸

The empirical way of thinking, for Hegel, must be substituted with a speculative one, or, in other words, the possibility to make God a never-ending reflection of philosophy. The only

¹²⁴ James Collins, op. cit., 201–202.

¹²⁵ Wilhelm Weischedel, *Der Gott der Philosophen. Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theologie im Zeitalter des Nihilismus* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1983), 285.

¹²⁶ Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History. An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 206–221.

¹²⁷ Deland S. Anderson, op. cit., 144.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

possible place for religion is in thinking, because the forms of thinking are absolute and have truth (*Wahrheit*) within them. The beginning of “speculative thinking” is the will to reflect on the problems and questions of philosophy as the problems and questions of theology. God is reachable only through speculative knowledge.¹²⁹ The speculative account of the “death of God” is thus necessary for overcoming the opposition of the finite and the infinite.¹³⁰ In short, it can be said that to “speculate” means to be engaged, to be “in” the subject of reflection. Philosopher by definition cannot be indifferent to reflection, and reflection on God is the highest point of philosophy and theology alike. Philosophy has made God its subject, making God its constituent part and highest aim of its reflection. However,

the pure concept of infinity as the abyss of nothingness in which all being is engulfed, must signify the infinite grief of the finite purely as a moment of the supreme Idea, and no more than as a moment. Formerly, the infinite grief only existed historically in the formative process of culture. It existed as the feeling that ‘God Himself is dead’. [...] By marking this feeling as a moment of the supreme Idea, the pure concept must give philosophical existence to what used to be either the moral precept that we must sacrifice the empirical being, or the concept of formal abstraction. Thereby it must re-establish [...] the speculative Good Friday in place of the historic Good Friday. Good Friday must be speculatively re-established in the whole truth and harshness of its Godforsakenness.¹³¹

To “speculatively re-establish the Good Friday in the whole truth and harshness of its Godforsakenness” can be understood in at least two ways. First, God must not be mixed with [speculative] philosophy, because philosophical thought changes God into thought; one must overcome “the opposition between wealth of traditional faith and poverty of philosophical reason.”¹³² Second, one should avoid the assertion that God is a “being” or an “existence”, because such identifications imply that God is a finite entity, and it is a try to set apart God from the concept of God. There is a contrast between the existence of something and the concept of something, while for Hegel, “God is not distinct from the concept of God, since God is infinite rather than finite.”¹³³ Like Bataille, Hegel also speaks about full awareness of the “whole”, mentioning God’s absence in the Good Friday as an example. The full awareness of the whole means a possibility of thinking stretched to its borders (as Hegel tries to do it with his speculative thinking, where God is the essence of thought, and Bataille – with literature as transcript of inner experience). However, it does not mean refusal to know but the necessity to develop speculative thinking which aims to discover God as an absolute “within the panoply of differences”.¹³⁴ The death of God is the identity which is the goal of such

¹²⁹ Wilhelm Weischedel, op. cit., 349-350.

¹³⁰ Christopher M. Gemberchak, op. cit., 232 (note 48.).

¹³¹ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, transl. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 190f, cited in Christopher M. Gemberchak, op. cit., 232 (note 48).

¹³² Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 113.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Deland S. Anderson, op. cit., xvii.

speculative thinking: “to think God is not to know that God exists – this must be seen as an intellectual basis of the infinite pain which accompanies the feeling that God is dead.”¹³⁵

The complexity of thinking thus shows itself up in the struggle for recognition between independent and dependent subjects, which is closely related with Hegel’s understanding of the absolute – “any possible cognitive relation to objects must involve the ‘I’s’ taking up the world ‘for itself’, and so some sort of self-relation, or apperception, understanding theoretically how a subject could come to know itself in its relation to all otherness”.¹³⁶ This is also the way how Hegel could have liked to understand the absolute Spirit. The passionate involvement in life that Hegel talks about is the one Bataille aches to carry out in his life; in other words, Bataille wants to reflect on life, while being involved in it. Bataille calls life an open wound. This is also a considerable insight to keep in mind, especially when talking about Hegel’s influences on Bataille.¹³⁷ A serious difference here is Bataille’s concentration on poetry, laughter and ecstasy. As Bataille himself pointed out, “they are not means for other things, in the ‘system’ they are nothing, Hegel gets rid of them in a hurry.”¹³⁸ There is a consideration that Bataille opposed to Hegel’s dialectic; however, in this case one must keep in mind that Bataille’s reading of Hegel was influenced by Alexander Kojève (1902–1968), especially by Kojève’s commentaries on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Bataille has criticized Hegel’s negation (action, in the interpretation of Kojève, or the destruction of the world as it is) for “being a perfect system of reduction: of facts to ideas, of matter to thought, of difference to contradiction.”¹³⁹ Undoing the system attracted Bataille, while the fear of the system was, for him, comparable with the fear of God. Thus, Hegel’s system, for Kojève and Bataille as well, sketched out the end of the historical human of creative and negating action.¹⁴⁰ What is left for the human is the decision which can be taken into the night of nonknowledge, and, simultaneously, this is the only possibility to face the absolute – through despair.¹⁴¹ In other words, what is left is an entirely inward self-negation without any results; negativity negating itself, negativity as an end of itself.¹⁴² The human stands opposite to one’s own being, and the desire for the death of God has reached the

¹³⁵ Deland S. Anderson, op. cit., 168.

¹³⁶ Robert Pippin, “‘You Can’t Get There from Here’: Transition problems in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*”, in Frederick C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 59.

¹³⁷ Peter Brueger, *Das Denken des Herrn. Bataille zwischen Hegel und dem Surrealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 39.

¹³⁸ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 111.

¹³⁹ Bruce Baugh, op. cit., 72–74.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 26, 33.

¹⁴² Bruce Baugh, op. cit., 76.

heights of transcendence.¹⁴³ The completion of the circle for Bataille was the completion of the human for Hegel. The complete human “works” and has “knowledge”. Yet, poetry, ecstasy, laughter do not belong to the “complete human” – they do not provide any satisfaction.¹⁴⁴

In such situation, for Bataille, the absolute becomes an integral part of thinking, while “knowing”, on its part, can be explained as relating to the known. To know means to grasp that an unknown thing is the same as another thing known. Thus, the circularity of knowledge is crystallised. In this situation, it is possible to perceive the unsatisfying nature of knowledge. The circular, absolute knowledge is definitive nonknowledge. “[T]here can be no knowledge, not even in God, which goes beyond absolute knowledge”.¹⁴⁵ Thus, the movement means: an individual entity vanishes as it rejoins the universal. This tendency (which, for Bataille, can also be explained as a desire to return to the Garden of Eden) to identify oneself as an independent individual is a vain try to avoid the inevitable: the individuality is a limit to be overcome in order to affirm one’s social and divine nature.¹⁴⁶ The tendency refers to the human reflection about oneself as well as about God: one must die to reach one’s own very nature. Besides, discourse alone is capable of revealing the totality of “what is”. It is the Sage at the end of history who arrives at absolute knowledge. “The Sage is fulfilled in an *identity with* the totality of ‘what is’, not in *relation to* a transcendent ‘beyond’. Within Hegel’s system, the Sage replaces God, and God is rendered finite.”¹⁴⁷ The history is itself finished and completed. Together with the Sage of Hegel, the history occupies a sovereign position, which God occupies only temporarily as a regent.¹⁴⁸

There are two things one must keep in mind when speaking about Bataille’s “concept” of the “death of God” and possible Hegelian influences. First, for Hegel:

The saying that God is dead is uttered in a *tete a tete* between Hegel and the idea of philosophy, and the alienation of such a thought is only the more apparent when this conversation is made public for all to see. [...] The point is to realize that thinking, critical and philosophical alike, is an affair of fate. And, if fate entails the feeling that God is dead, its truth and reality cannot be denied to thought. The harshness of the saying must be known to any who would dare to philosophize, for to philosophize is learn to die, even it be God who must die.¹⁴⁹

This is also what separates atheism from the concept of “the death of God” for Hegel: while the “death of God” belongs to speculative thinking, atheism is a complete

¹⁴³ Peter Buerger, op. cit., 55.

¹⁴⁴ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 111.

¹⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 108.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher M. Gernerchak, op. cit., 4–6.

¹⁴⁷ Leslie Anne Boldt, “Translator’s Introduction”, op. cit., x.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Deland S. Anderson, op. cit., 170.

incapacity for thought. Hegel himself believed in God as the Trinity, emphasizing that God's relation to the world is neither identity, nor difference:

The world of nature and world of spirit are rather phases or moments of God: he (the father) achieves consciousness in nature (the son) and rises to self-consciousness in the human spirit [...]. God the father is the logical idea, the conceptual system presented in Logic, and the philosophies of nature and of spirit present the son and the holy ghost respectively. This identity-in-difference of God and the world is, on Hegel's view, symbolized in the incarnation and death of Christ. [...] Hegel's belief that opposites change into each other when they reach their highest pitch implies that if he arrived at atheism, he did so by stretching theism to its logical limits.¹⁵⁰

The failure of critical philosophy was that it has sustained the opposition between God and the world, thus leaving the human being in suffering caused by the desire to know God. The desire is also an essential concept for Bataille's philosophy, and, as an erotic desire which aches for the continuation of being but ends up with death, it includes the awareness of death. This awareness, from its side, is one of the most essential preconditions for achieving the awareness of the "death of God". Thus, for Bataille the death of God and the death of the human are dialectical. This is so also for Hegel (and thus, also the second thing one should keep in mind): with speculative thinking, Hegel proclaims that God is dead and that the way how the human can think about God must be reformulated:

Paradoxically, if we knew that God is dead, we know that He existed. Death presupposes existence. At the same time, if we know that God (of all beings) is dead, we know also that existence entails death. For if God cannot escape the clutches of death, surely we cannot expect to. Thus we come to know what speculative reason seeks to express through language, namely, that God and death are absolute necessities. And, as necessary, they are reconciled from the beginning. This is the unity of thinking and being. To feel that God Himself is dead is to know that God exists by necessity. To philosophize is to learn to die. This is the advent of Hegel's system of philosophy.¹⁵¹

For both of them, for Bataille as well as for Hegel, the hermeneutical imperative of philosophy (and literature as well, in Bataille's case) is to interpret discourse as bespeaking the "death of God", although they chose different ways to do so.¹⁵² Bataille defines Hegel's unknown as unknowable by its nature. Thus, one can suppose that one is God and that one knows everything, including the innumerable particularities of oneself and the history that has produced them. Thus, the question is formulated: Why must there be *what I know*? Why is it a necessity?¹⁵³ The death of God is necessary in the same way as "we know that self-knowledge

¹⁵⁰ Michael Inwood, op. cit., 114–115.

¹⁵¹ Deland S. Anderson, op. cit., xviii.

¹⁵² Ibid., 195.

¹⁵³ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 109.

is won only through self-negation, or death”.¹⁵⁴ In his philosophical theory of life as a divine totality, Hegel proposed the remedy for the dislocations of modern existence. For Bataille, desire, poetry, laughter move from the known to the unknown. Existence in the end discloses the blind spot of understanding and becomes completely absorbed in it. The “concept” of the “ultimate possibility of thought” or the endlessness of possibilities of thinking is also very important – nonknowledge can still be knowledge. As Bataille himself writes, “absence and death are without reply within me, without fail, absorb me cruelly.”¹⁵⁵ Hegel uses crucifixion to add on the movement of the infinite towards the finite. For a human, crucifixion means realisation of one’s finitude, and this realisation leads to meaning that returns to the infinite (necessity for immortality, for “life after death”). For Bataille,

to make a divine finite is a cause for more laughter. In laughing at death, which does not mean mocking suffering, we become close to the pain of the Other in the paroxysms of laughter which seamlessly turn into sobbing. This is no ‘cult of death’ but a demand to experience death as an event that shatters us.¹⁵⁶

Again, for Bataille, the individual, when facing the death of God, is simultaneously nothing and all reality.¹⁵⁷ For Hegel, the necessity of the death of God is related to language, life and learning; as such, it is the same necessity by which an individual knows that self-knowledge could be won only through self-negation. Simultaneously the death of God for him is a stimulus that makes an individual able to think together or reconcile two subjects – God and freedom (the freedom of the individual brought by the Enlightenment) – as death. Thus, the history of philosophy, as well as the history of culture have reached the end. In other words, history as such is tended to move forward to the “speculative union of thinking and being.”¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile I leave this discussion here, and I will return to Hegel’s interpretation of the “death of God” as well as the interpretations of Hegel’s interpretation in more details during the analysis of Bataille’s novels.

Thus it can be said that the “speculative union of thinking and being”, for Hegel, also means the “death of God”. From the side of “being”, this is the awareness of God’s love toward humanity as Jesus dies on a cross (the death of death). From the side of “thinking”, it is God as a permanent object of reflection for philosophy, God as an incessant thought in development. Considering Bataille’s attitude towards literature, it can be said that inner experience is also the development of thinking and reflection on religion. Thus, the

¹⁵⁴ Deland S. Anderson, op. cit., 196.

¹⁵⁵ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 111.

¹⁵⁶ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 26.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Buerger, op. cit., 61.

¹⁵⁸ Deland S. Anderson, op. cit., 195-201.

speculative union of thinking and being can also be called the “death of God”, because it overcomes the contrast between the finite (a human being) and the infinite (thought) through the awareness that God himself is dead because of the human.

2. 2. 2. Influences on Bataille: Nietzsche

Another thinker which Bataille heavily relies on is German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900). His “death of God” concept is also hard to explain in short, and this concept could be modified in many ways; still, there are a few points important for Bataille’s context.

In fact, Nietzsche proclaims two “deaths of God” – the first one is a murder, while the second shows a God who has died from sickness, has faded out. The first “death of God” is a violent action; people have murdered God by their own hands and are forced to live with guilty conscience as the murderers of God.¹⁵⁹ The first death is described in Nietzsche’s aphoristic book *The Gay Science* (1882) – it appears first in paragraph 108, where the necessity to overcome the shadow of the dead God is mentioned.¹⁶⁰ The most famous is the Madman’s proclamation of the “death of God” in paragraph 125. The madman lights his lantern in bright morning hours and goes to the market place, shouting “I seek God! I seek God!” And then he proclaims to the disbelievers hanging around in the market:

“Whither is God?” he cried. “I will tell you. *We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.”¹⁶¹

Here it is possible to trace many interesting guide-marks that could be associated with possible influences on Bataille. I will sketch just a few of them. Firstly, it is worth to pay attention to the fact that the proclamation in the context of the text is verbal; it is expressed by means of language (language, of course, is an essential thing for Nietzsche, as he was a philologist). In the context of Bataille, it is essential to add that he strongly identified himself with Nietzsche, probably also because they were both interested in writing. In another

¹⁵⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op. cit., 181–182.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 181–182.

context, speaking about Nietzsche and Communism, Bataille writes: “I am the only one who thinks of himself not as a commentator of Nietzsche but as being the same as he.”¹⁶²

The simplest definition of language is that it is a system of sounds and signs which is used for communication between people.¹⁶³ *Weltanschauung* is formed through language, thereby giving the world its designation and sense. Language is a tool for making concepts, including the concepts of the divine and their related systems of beliefs. Thus, the difference between human and divine or spiritual realities is marked: if God is (or has been, if he is dead now) simply a mythical spirit, without any substratum in reality, he is not subject to death like a mortal body. Thus, God is purely divine (sacred).¹⁶⁴ Who is the dead one then? If Nietzsche asserts that “we have killed him”, then how did we manage to do it? The language we use presupposes that the *self* acts in relation between subject and object. Thus, the existence of God is constructed by a verbal agreement. Everyone, including metaphysicians, religious believers and scientists, are guilty of misunderstanding the nature of language when they make their claims about God.¹⁶⁵ So, we talk about the concept of God which is a linguistic construct. Language can also be understood as an integrative system where each component is closely related to form, intent and purpose. Spoken language (as proclamation) shows itself as an action performed by a human being (The Madman) and correlates with the speaker’s collaboration, experience and activity within the respective action. What makes sense for a spoken word is its context.¹⁶⁶ Keeping in mind Jakobson’s schema (see section 2.1), the proclamation of the “death of God” in *La Gaya Scienza* can be divided in six parts: the language which embodies the message (a proclamation); the speaker who delivers the message (i.e., the Madman); the object to whom the message is addressed and who listens to it (people in the market place); means by which message is transferred (words); and context to which message refers (which could also be the market place).¹⁶⁷

In this way, language emerges in the act of proclaiming, which points out to a *fait accompli* – God is dead, with the following explanation – we have killed him. Regarding the Madman, Walter Kaufmann points out that Nietzsche sees himself in this character. Losing God means madness, and humans have destroyed their belief. The consciousness of death of

¹⁶² Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share. An Essay on General Economy. Vol. II, III*, transl. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 367.

¹⁶³ *Filosofskij enciklopedjicheski slovarj* (Moskva: Sovetskaja enciklopedija, 1983), 816.

¹⁶⁴ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, op. cit., 37.

¹⁶⁵ Carol Diethe, *Historical Dictionary of Nietzscheanism* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1999), 109.

¹⁶⁶ “Language”, Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., *Gale Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition* (USA: Macmillian Reference, an Imprint of Thomson Gale, 2005), 8:5301.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

God makes the human existence more solitary and tragic.¹⁶⁸ It is not accurate to explain Nietzsche's "death of God" only as a protest against dogmatic and institutional theology. An aspect which is really important with respect to Nietzsche's "death of God" (as well as for Bataille's) is tragedy.¹⁶⁹

What does the Madman achieve by his proclamation? Religious thinking sometimes links existence to designation.¹⁷⁰ The content of the proclamation tells us that there is no God anymore – he has been and now he is gone. By this proclamation, every concept and system of God is destroyed; the system has destroyed itself. It could be asserted that destruction marks the impossibility of the concept of God. Other aspects that mark this proclamation are contrast and paradox: the Madman searches for God; the death of God is proclaimed within the company of disbelievers. In this situation, the proclamation does not make sense at all, because disbelievers do not care if someone like God has died or not. Still, the link between subject and object in the proclamation (*We have killed him*) stimulates thinking about unification, which in fact ruins both of them, the object and the subject. No one believes in the Madman. He has left completely alone with his dreadful experience and the *awareness* of the death of God. The Madman probably does not believe in God; what he does believe in is the death of God. Thus, another paradox crystallizes: it is possible that the Madman believes in the death of God because he proclaims it – the death of God as a spoken word, as a linguistic concept. That is to say, God is dead because the Madman says so. At the same time, while God is still alive, i.e. while words connect him to the human reality, he still stays alive, even if just as a concept of language. Language provides God with his/her corresponding concept, name and definition. In other words, language gives a name to God and thus creates him/her. Being so created, God will sooner or later die; his existence will be interrupted. The God, who is definable, could be dead as well. And the God created by human language remains dead because language is stronger than him. By the way, there was a time in Nietzsche's life when he thought that Richard Wagner, a German composer and thinker, has diagnosed the poor state of language. Scientific progress had undermined clear-cut views of life, and thinking became important. At the same time, civilization became more complex. Specialization and division were on the rise. The chains of events through which each individual was linked to the whole were getting tangled; those who tried to grasp the totality of their existence found that language failed them. Language no longer comprised the totality of which human is a part

¹⁶⁸ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1950), 81–83.

¹⁶⁹ Carol Diethe, op. cit., 46.

¹⁷⁰ For example, primitive religions contain myths about designation as creation. See "Language", Lindsay Jones, ed. in chief., 5301.

and no longer reached into human's innermost self.¹⁷¹ Thus it becomes clear that language can be used as a knife for killing God, making the human being a murderer. What does such consciousness change in the realm of the sense of the world? In a way, it fully changes the world as it has been before. However, let us recall the concept of intimacy mentioned in the previous chapter. The Madman is conscious of himself as one of the murderers of God; nevertheless, he continues to search for him. This aspect can be linked with Bataille's understanding of intimacy and thus with his sense of God as a continued story (not as proclamation, but still enacted through the medium of language):

Although mute, God addresses himself to me, insinuating, as in love, in a low voice:

– O my father, you, on earth, the evil which in you delivers me. I am the temptation of which you are the fall. Insult me as I insult those who love me. Give me each day my bread of bitterness. My will is absent in the heavens as on earth. Impotence binds me. My name is lackluster.
Hesitant, troubled, I reply:
– So be it.¹⁷²

Bataille's God is mute, even if he is put in words (or in narrative). What is left is silence, driving one to madness. If the entire existence of humankind was incarnated in a single being (it seems that here Bataille speaks about Jesus Christ), the peak of that incarnation should be a site of violence. It is not given to humans to understand God. As Bataille says, "he would look upon God only to kill him, becoming God himself but only to leap into nothingness."¹⁷³ This quote crystallizes out the tension that Bataille calls *intimacy*, which is also somehow related to the "concept" of nothingness and is of great importance. In the Nietzschean context, it could be said that the proclamation of God's death gives rise for the intimacy and thus for an eternal inclination towards the awareness of nothingness.

When analysed from theological and metaphysical perspectives, the proclamation creates a new world where the Platonic metaphysics has no meaning, cannot inspire to life anymore. In other words, the crisis of metaphysics has begun. This crisis leaves its stamp on the human who becomes completely alone. There is no secure foundation for him, nor there is a secure concept of the world. Moreover, speaking and thinking of God disappears with that, not to speak of living up to the Christian concept of God.¹⁷⁴ The situation of humans is desperate loneliness:

How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will

¹⁷¹ Ruediger Safranski, op. cit., 99–100.

¹⁷² Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 131.

¹⁷³ Georges Bataille, "Nietzsche's Maddness", transl. Anete Michelson, *October*, vol. 36, Georges Bataille: Writing on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Unknowing. Spring 1986, 43. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778548>, accessed on 26/03/2011

¹⁷⁴ Michael Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, transl. and ed. by Michael Gendre (New York: State University Press, 1966), 131.

wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us – for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.¹⁷⁵

By killing God, humans in fact have ended up their own existence as it has been until then. Consequently, the way for another Nietzschean concept is made – for Overman, the one who has overcome the man (human). The God of concepts and dogmatic has been killed by means of dogmatic and concepts. In fact, God has destroyed himself, using human hands as a weapon of this destruction. Does it mean that there is no God at all? Awareness of oneself as a murderer makes any attempt to call God “back to life” impossible and useless. The only possibility of such reconstruction of God could be a world where God is not only dead but also one of his own murderers. Simultaneously, the proclamation reveals Nietzsche’s attitude toward individuality – everything that has been told about one’s inner life is a lie; there must be “outside of oneself”, where the authentic depth of the human could be find. There are two possibilities: one is that which lies in the past and, thus, in the [social] history, and another – the one that lies in the contemporary world, experienced as an absence of oneself.¹⁷⁶ The awareness of one’s own absence is also extremely important when talking about the “death of God” concept in Bataille’s novels, but I shall return to this during the analysis of the novels.

Proclamation does not mean the end of all questions that could ever be asked about God, gods or the divine; quite the opposite – “atheism”, declared by Nietzsche, matches up with relative or incomplete definition of God; proclamation is not related with *to be* or *not to be*. In other words, when the Madman cries that God is dead, he has nothing to do with the possibility of God’s existence. The Madman talks about the difference between a domestic God, who is a pet for anyone who proclaims oneself a Christian, and a divinity that is liberated from the concepts and perceptions of metaphysical theology.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, the market place is also of great importance, as it is the place where the gathering and ordering of time and space happens and where the possibility of changes lies.¹⁷⁸

There is a possibility that Nietzsche could be inspired for his “death of God” concept from another German philosopher, Max Stirner. There is a large discussion about Nietzsche’s attitude to Stirner; he has never mentioned Stirner in his works, while memories of Nietzsche’s contemporaries tell the opposite. That is the reason why I will give a short description of Striner’s death of God conception before turning to the dead God of *Thus*

¹⁷⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op. cit., 181.

¹⁷⁶ Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, transl. Daniel W. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 185.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, op. cit., 131–132.

¹⁷⁸ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 72–73.

Spoke Zarathustra and analysing Bataille's possible reception of Nietzsche's thought (I will return to Bataille's reception of Nietzsche's "death of God" concept throughout the work, especially in the last part).

Stirner, or Johann Caspar Schmidt by real name, published his book *The Ego and His Own* in 1844. Reaction to this book was controversial. In fact, the book was officially dismissed by serious philosophers and dissidents alike, while privately many readers were mesmerized by this work (German "atheist" Ludwig Feuerbach was one of them and Nietzsche, probably, another). The fact is that, prior to Nietzsche, Stirner was the most radical nominalist. He concurred with the medieval nominalists who designated general concepts, especially those pertaining to God, as nothing more than breath devoid of reality. He discovered a creative power in the essence of human being that creates phantoms; even when we proclaim the God dead, the phantoms of our imaginations keep on haunting us. Acknowledging that human had destroyed the "other world inside us" ("superego" or reign of general concepts within human, such as "mankind", "freedom", "humanity", a trap for the self), namely, God and morality that is allegedly based in God, Stirner contended that the evaporation of the "other world outside us" did not do anything to undermine the "other world in us". Although we have pronounced God dead and have recognized that he is a phantom, there are even more pertinacious phantoms to haunt us. Stirner accused the left Hegelians who had seen the vanquishing of God. At the same time, he affirmed the existential principle that existence comes before essence; so, his impetus was to bring the individual back to a nameless existence and liberate people from the essentialist prisons. The first among these prisons were the religious ones. An individual must be freed from these prisons. What he sought was not an absence of thought, but rather a freedom to think creatively, which means that the individual does not accede to the power of one's thoughts, but remains their creator. Just as for the medieval nominalists God was a colossal power who created himself and the world *ex nihilo* and was free to stand above any logic, even above the truth, for Stirner the individual similarly constitutes a state of freedom emanating from a void. Like Stirner, Nietzsche sought to liberate himself from phantoms, although his actions were less defensive than Stirner's. Nietzsche wanted to liberate himself from himself. Stirner was determined to demolish, whereas Nietzsche sought a new beginning.¹⁷⁹

Now, to return to Nietzsche's "death of God", its second version appears in his *Introduction to Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883). There God is the one who has died from sickness and agedness – it is a weak God who has been exhausted, run out.¹⁸⁰ In the beginning

¹⁷⁹ Ruediger Safranski, op. cit., 125–131.

¹⁸⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1961), 41.

of the book, Zarathustra speaks about this God, and the Saint urges Zarathustra not to go to humans, but better stay in the forest and be an animal between animals. When asked what he is doing in the forest, the Saint answers that he is composing hymns, singing them and mumbling; this is his way how to praise God. In this moment, Zarathustra says good-bye, speaking to himself: “Could it be possible! This old saint in the forest hath not yet heard of it, that God is dead!”¹⁸¹ Thus the very essence of the “death of God” is revealed: God is torn away from all living existence and simultaneously polished; God has been made a codex, a canon, based on the doctrine of peaceful coexistence with his creation. The human has renounced the living God. This God becomes a perfect standard of good and bad, as well as a level gauge. Nietzsche objects to such a God and proclaims that he is dead. In fact, the Saint sings hymns for someone who is a figment of his own imagination. This is why I think that Nietzsche protests strictly against moralising the doctrine – such action creates a God who is outside one’s imagination, who is transcendent and outside the human, a complete stranger, thus separating this God from the human as a living being. Nietzsche emphasises that a credible doctrine is the one which is flexible as well. Morality is in conflict with human nature. This is an essential point of Nietzsche’s thinking.¹⁸² However, it does not mean impunity and degradation. It means the very opposite – i.e., everything what is essential for Nietzsche – a Dionysian element, the ability to feel joy, to be alive, the ecstatic and aesthetic experience of enjoyment, briefly, the phenomenon and attitude Nietzsche called *Ja-sagen*, “yes”-saying to life. Dionysus is an inconsiderate, amoral God-artist, who craves to grasp enjoyment and autocratism in construction and deconstruction or in good and evil. This is a Dionysian way of getting rid of suffering which has originated from the contrasts within one’s self.¹⁸³

Nietzsche agreed with his friend, Jewish-German philosopher Paul Reé (1849–1901) in his critique of the metaphysical grounds of morality, but he did not insist that morality has originated from the altruistic human nature. There is nothing moral in the history of morals; morality has not developed as a virtue; quite the opposite, it has developed as a result of old history of habits. Nietzsche pointed out that one can consider himself moral if he acts morally, but the fact is that it is a history of body and culture acting within humans.¹⁸⁴ According to Nietzsche, there is no moral system which could explain what is right and wrong. Morality has nothing to do either with revelation or with reason. It is created by men in the process of

¹⁸¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, op. cit., 41.

¹⁸² Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche. Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, op. cit., 144, 162.

¹⁸³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, transl. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 97.

¹⁸⁴ Ruediger Safranski, op. cit., 183.

self-definition within the framework of culture. Thus, morality can be called an idol of our own creating, but God, who is first of all moral – the incarnation of this idol.¹⁸⁵ It can be said that God in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* has died in a natural death, as from illness or agedness.¹⁸⁶ It reads: “God is dead; God has died of his pity for man.”¹⁸⁷ Such a death does not have very much in common with the brightness of tragedy. This death sounds quite logic and natural, without mourning of the Madman in his search for God. In other words, this God, the Creator and Ruler of all, has worn himself out, faded away, together with metaphysics. In effect, some kind of reincarnation of God has taken place – the God of Tradition has vanished together with the Tradition, while the sacred in God is still alive and is freed for another development.¹⁸⁸ In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, section *Out of Service*, Zarathustra talks about the death of God with a Pope. The Pope declares the death of the Saint, who lived in the forest, and tells that he is in search for the last believer who knows nothing about the death of God. Zarathustra asks what kind of death is it in which God has died; is it true that he was strangled by the pity, as he saw that man is crucified. Is it true, Zarathustra asks, that love toward humans has become a hell for God and at last – a death of God.¹⁸⁹ And the Pope answers:

When he was young, this god from the Orient, he was harsh and revengeful and built himself a Hell for the delight of his favourites.
 But at length he grew old and soft and mellow and compassionate, more like a grandfather than a father, most like a tottery old grandmother.
 Then he sat shrivelled, in his chimney corner, fretting over his weak legs, world-weary, weary of willing, and one day suffocated through his excessive pity.¹⁹⁰

Zarathustra seems quite dissatisfied with such an answer and points out that when gods die, they die different deaths. Besides, he emphasises that God has been similar to priests – he has been polysemantic.¹⁹¹

The most significant aspect of this story about the death of God is that he has died because of the sympathy he felt toward humans. In Nietzsche’s view, sympathy is connected to what he called the “slave morality” (*die Sklavenmoral*) – this is a moral perspective which nurture the “Christian values” and *ressentiment*. Nietzsche pointed out that the slave morality is bad conscience, anti-life (or “no”-saying to life). It is characteristic of the last man (*der letzte Mensch*), who is the opposite to the Nietzschean ideal of a powerful Overman.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ Bruce Ellis Benson, *Graven Ideologies* (Illionis: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 88.

¹⁸⁶ Michael Haar, op. cit., 133.

¹⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, op. cit., 114.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, op. cit., 114.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 273.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Carol Diethe, op. cit., 195.

Sympathy is a shameful witness of other's suffering. This witnessing is bad *per se*, because it makes the one who suffers feel ashamed for this suffering and thus even more humiliated. Sympathy and pity is shame for co-experience of suffering. Besides, suffering is humiliating itself. Shame, in turn, resists subjectivity as such, and thus risks stagnation. Suffering, shame and sympathy have a lot to do with sentimentality which is centred on itself. Hence the only thing which sentimentality is "interested in" is itself, and it works only with itself. In a wider perspective, sentimentality becomes choking, and such narcissism – fatal. With the help of sentimentality, God's love toward humans becomes an endless love of God towards himself. In fact, the Pope has lost his faith in a non-living God, trying to explain this death as he understands it. The death of a sympathetic God is a human concept for explaining the death of God, more explanation than investigation of this death. In fact, the God who has died because of the sympathy he has felt toward humans demonstrates the weariness of sympathy and repugnance toward such feeling.¹⁹³

The atmosphere that marks the proclamation of the death of God is restless and stands in front of a cosmic catastrophe. The death of God is not a joyful incident; humans must take all responsibility for this murder. Besides, the death of God brings horrible and apocalyptic misgivings. In the history of Western religious thought, God has always been related to the sun, which gives light and warmth to the earth, regulates the natural processes, changes the seasons and night and day. However, after the death of God, the eternal night has come; a human has separated the earth from the sun, and so the cosmic order has been demolished. This is a catastrophe which can end only with a death of humankind. In fact, this happening still continues – the belief in a Christian God has been discredited, and this makes a great shadow over the Western world.¹⁹⁴

Soon Zarathustra meets the ugliest man who is the murderer of God. The murderer has been described as "something" (*etwas*) very ugly, something indescribable, a human-monster. He is seeking for refuge because he is pursued by sympathetic men.¹⁹⁵ The murderer explains why he has killed God:

But he – *had* to die: he looked with eyes that saw *everything* – he saw the depths and abysses of man, all man's hidden disgrace and ugliness.
 His pity knew no shame: he crept into my dirtiest corners. This most curious, most over-impertunate, over-compassionate god had to die.
 He ever saw *me*: I desired to take revenge on such a witness – or cease to live myself.
 The god who saw everything, *even man*: this god had to die! Man could not *endure* that such a witness should live.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Michael Haar, op. cit., 136.

¹⁹⁴ Carol Diethe, op. cit., 132.

¹⁹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, op.cit., 277–278.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 278–279

If we take that the murderer is ugly because he is immoral, we must remember that everything that is beautiful is YES (or the affirmation of life) to Nietzsche, whereas anything ugly is rooted in the inability of self-acceptance. The murderer does not love God, nor does he love humans. He has become a murderer because he could not accept that some omniscient consciousness could see and know his suffering and hate. In fact, he has killed God because in God he has denied the unbearable being of his own.¹⁹⁷ Thus, God becomes the hypostasis of a guilty conscience, which has been transferred to the metaphysical level because of continuous presence. So, the murder is an exaggeration – a man tries to stop *his* suffering because he is convinced it can end only together with the death of God.¹⁹⁸

Nietzsche could be interpreted as a foremost modern enemy of faith and as the one who employed his work only to point to the antithesis of faith. Karl Jaspers, for example, took Nietzsche as a nihilist. In fact, this is in contradiction to Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy with its "YES"-saying to life in the centre. Heidegger asserted that Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God marked the end of the "Western metaphysical thought" (I will return to Heidegger in the next chapter).¹⁹⁹ In fact, his Dionysian philosophy is centred on participation in an all-encompassing, colossal reality – the same strived for in search for the *Ungeheure*. His theme was an ontology of a vast domain that was not just theoretical but experienced, as both agony and ecstasy.²⁰⁰

Nietzsche's influence on philosophy and atheology reaches far beyond his era; his proclamation "God is dead" is, as I have pointed out above, most essential because of the character of the murder. God *has been* here once but *is not* here anymore. He never said that there was no God at all; he was not an atheist. Instead he said that the Eternal has been vanquished by Time and the Immortal died from the hands of mortals. At the same time, this idea is the very core of Nietzsche's spiritual existence, and what follows is not only despair *but also* hope in a new greatness of human, not only visions of catastrophe *but also* glory.²⁰¹ In fact, he is the Madman, breaking the sinister news into the marketplace, to the auditory of non-believers. In fact, human in his heart is incapable of forgiving himself for having killed God. Man is tended to punish himself for this, and the cure Nietzsche offers for this illness of bad conscience is a new kind of physical health. He says that humans must create perfectness

¹⁹⁷ Michael Haar, op. cit., 136–137.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 137.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity. Readings in the Death of God Theology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, INC, 1967), 81–82.

²⁰⁰ Ruediger Safranski, op. cit., 160.

²⁰¹ Erich Heller, "The Modern German Mind: The Legacy of Nietzsche", in Thomas J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity. Readings in the Death of God Theology*, op. cit., 93.

– perfect self-knowledge and perfect self-transcendence.²⁰² How to transcend oneself, and how to be aware of this transcending of oneself? In fact, the question is about reflecting oneself in a mirror of self-awareness. This is another essential point in this schema. It is essential to be aware of oneself as a part of this world, as a part of the world where God has been killed. It is extremely important to acknowledge a murderer of God in oneself and to be aware of it with this confession. Is it possible to go on living in that way? How can a perfect self be borne? And, after all, how can one transcend oneself? Pierre Klossowski relates the death of God to the concept of the eternal return and describes the death of God as follows:

The emphasis must be placed on the loss of the given identity. The “death of God” (the God who guarantees the identity of the responsible self) opens up itself to all its possible identities, already apprehended in the various *Stimmungen* of the Nietzschean soul. The revelation of the Eternal Return brings about, as necessity, the successive realizations of all possible identities: “at bottom every name of history is I” – in the end, the Dionysus and the Crucified. In Nietzsche, the “death of God” corresponds to a *Stimmung* in the same way as does ecstatic moment of the Eternal Return.²⁰³

Again, the interpretation leads towards intimacy and human identity as a dual tension between escaping from God and searching for God: “I once again become what I am at the moment I discover the law of Eternal Return.”²⁰⁴ A fitting illustration of this tension is the last sentence of Nietzsche’s last book, *Ecce Homo*: “Have I been understood? Dionysus *versus* the Crucified.”²⁰⁵

Bataille, on his part, pushed Nietzsche’s proclamation to its most extreme consequences, trying to rise human being at the impossible height of self-transcendence and pointing out that one of essential points in continuing Nietzsche’s thought is the death of the spirit and the sacrifice of God. He talks about the absence of God and its overcoming with the help of overcoming one’s own self.²⁰⁶ This has also something to do with the so-called “mysticism” of Bataille (and Nietzsche). I will focus on the idea of mysticism in the next part of this work, when analysing one of the most complicated novels of Bataille – *Madame Edwarda*.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger in his lecture *Nietzsche’s Word: “God is Dead”* wrote about Nietzsche’s “death of God” concept.²⁰⁷ He explains that with this exclamation the essential time begins, the last period in the history of metaphysics, because

²⁰² Erich Heller, op. cit., 99–100.

²⁰³ Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, op. cit., 57.

²⁰⁴ Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, op. cit., 57.

²⁰⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of Idols, and Other Writings*, op. cit., 152.

²⁰⁶ See: Sylvere Lotringer, op. cit., vii–xiv.

²⁰⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1963), 193–248.

with it metaphysics becomes Un-being (*Unwesen*).²⁰⁸ This concept changes the usual order of the world. It does not mean to wake up one day in a godless world – God has been here but is killed, “we” have put him into a concept and killed him. Thus, there is no possibility to talk about God by means of some philosophical concept or theological system, as systems and concepts have destroyed the “living God”. Does the “death of God” as a concept try to explain that there is no God anymore? Does anything still have a meaning? In fact, the awareness of this concept is a call to step outside of the area of comfort, outside of the system, including theological systems, outside the world as it is.²⁰⁹ Anything of this would be an attempt to call the “old God” back to life, an attempt to restore the usual order of the world and thus make a new paradox where God is not only dead but also called back to life, and, if God is a man, then, according to Nietzsche, he is God’s murderer as well, a forcible self-murderer.

A fact of the deicide shows an alienated world which still functions by the human standards. The world is not empty and without God; it has fully changed, is unpredictable and insecure. It is a world where everything is possible; it allows for a possibility of death, of murder. It is not a world of the “self” anymore; in fact, it has become a world of the “other”.

Heidegger cites another passage from Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* in his *Holzwege*. The title of Nietzsche’s passage is *The meaning of our cheerfulness*.

The greatest recent event – that “God is dead”, that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. For the few at least, whose eyes – the *suspicion* in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt; to them our old world must appear daily more like an evening, more mistrustful, stranger, “older”.²¹⁰

Heidegger comes to a conclusion that the “death of God” relates to the Christian God and writes about the use of this word in a transcendental world, i.e., a post-platonic world or the world of metaphysics.²¹¹ Heidegger proclaims the end of the “old” metaphysics.

Bataille reflects on Heidegger’s metaphysics in the *Inner Experience*. He points out that philosophy stumbles – its meaning should be linked to *Dasein* determined by inner experience. This makes Bataille claim that there cannot be knowledge without a community of seekers, nor inner experience without a community of those who live in it. In this case, community is a phenomenon which is not something added to *Dasein* but constitutes it. The communication of this *Dasein* assumes not formal bounds among those who communicate,

²⁰⁸ Martin Heidegger, op. cit., 193-248.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op. cit., 279.

²¹¹ Martin Heidegger, op. cit., 199–200.

rather general conditions (i.e., historical, actual conditions).²¹² It is so in the case of the “death of God” – the communication of *Dasein* is tended towards the general condition which forms the life itself; as such, the “concept” of the “death of God” stays closer to the *Ja-sagen* of life than any formality characteristic to the dogmatic God.

In short, it could be said that Nietzsche’s influence on Bataille can hardly be overrated. Nietzsche emphasises the importance of ecstasy (in the “concept” of the eternal return) and also the one of laughter – let us remember that the “death of God” is proclaimed in the book called *The Gay Science (Die Froehliche Wissenschaft)*.²¹³ Bataille rediscovers the connection between laughter and the death of God in the intimacy and metaphysics of transgression.

2. 2. 3. Influences on Bataille: Marquise de Sade

As Stuart Kendall puts it, in the company of “Surrealists of the rue Blomet”, Bataille discovered not only Dostoevsky and Nietzsche but also the recently published works of the Marquis de Sade.²¹⁴

It is time now to recall Bataille’s identification with the Marquis de Sade and his postulating the question of the scandal of de Sade’s works – how could they still be a scandal at his time. Benjamin Noys points out that every time when Bataille writes about de Sade, he is writing about himself as well.²¹⁵ Simultaneously, Bataille keeps on interpreting de Sade’s works, pointing out that “nothing would be more fruitless than to take de Sade literally, seriously.”²¹⁶ The same could be said about Bataille – his novels have to be read in the light of his thinking, as it appears in his non-fictional works, also keeping in mind the historical and social situation of his time. Of course, Bataille is the continuator of de Sade’s pornographic style, but not all of de Sade’s ideas. At the same time, Bataille is concerned with two opposite attitudes concerning de Sade – (public) admiration of his works and their categorical denial. They are both similar in their reflection on religion. Also, Bataille’s materialism can be related to that of de Sade.²¹⁷ However, there are also a few essential differences between both writers. I will explain them further in this chapter.

Bataille himself wrote *The Use of D. A. F. de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades)*, probably dated between 1929 and 1930.²¹⁸ He speaks about de Sade in several of

²¹² Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 24.

²¹³ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 31.

²¹⁴ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 45.

²¹⁵ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 2.

²¹⁶ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 110.

²¹⁷ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 2.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

his works, and in his *Eroticism* two chapters are devoted to de Sade. I have limits for this thesis, and this is why I will only sketch some important aspects about de Sade's life and works, concentrating basically on similarities between Bataille's and de Sade's thinking and, of course, on Bataille's interpretation of de Sade. How far was Bataille the continuator of de Sade's thought, or, more specifically, of de Sade's "atheism"? Bataille's own point about de Sade's "atheism" could be helpful, and it goes as follows:

Through the creatures of the novel, he [de Sade – I.J.] at times elaborates a theology of the *supremely wicked* Being. At other times he is an atheist, but not a cold-blooded one: his atheism defies God and battens on sacrilege; it usually substitutes *Nature in a state of perpetual motion* for God. On still other occasions he is devout, on others a blasphemer.²¹⁹

Marquis de Sade is, of course, a contradictory personality, someone like a mythical hero, the "would-be liberator of the beast in man", "the threat of anarchy", and simultaneously the one who "dared to think the unthinkable, imagine the unimaginable, and write what should not be written."²²⁰ This "un-" is the indicative syllable for de Sade's influence on Bataille's thinking, especially on the concept of anguish on which he dwells so often in his novels. Once de Sade wrote: "If atheism wants martyrs, let it say so and my blood is ready."²²¹ For Bataille, his acknowledgement of anguish, so often used in his novels, is rooted in the knowledge of one's freedom.²²² In de Sade, from his part, freedom can be explained as one of his philosophical conceptions. De Sade reveals himself as a philosopher particularly in his early works (for example, *Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man*, 1782). The most famous of his works is, of course, *Justine or The Misfortunes of Virtue* (1791). It is not possible to analyse *Justine* or any other of de Sade's works in this thesis. I will use them in the interpretations of Bataille's novels where it will be necessary, using the philosophy of de Sade and Bataille's interpretation of it as a key to the possible "sense" of some novels. De Sade's atheism can relatively be divided in two parts: materialism, which is based on the concepts of nature (and thus on the philosophical thought of his time; a concept also familiar to Bataille) and transgression (the concept also essential for Bataille).

As I have already mentioned, Bataille has described a few works of de Sade, and one worth mentioning is *120 Days of Sodom*, referred to by Bataille in the *Inner Experience*. He characterizes his feelings after reading this book with suffering, caused by anguish, and

²¹⁹ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 110.

²²⁰ David Coward, "Introduction" in *The Marquis de Sade, The Misfortunes of Virtue and Other Early Tales*, transl. David Coward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), vii.

²²¹ Cited in: John Phillips, *Marquis de Sade. A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32.

²²² Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, transl. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1991), 35.

interconnects it with one's desire to escape this suffering and be happy.²²³ The source of this feeling for this time is literature, a word, written by de Sade. Writing on the French Revolution, Bataille points out that only one individual developed a system of the new-born democracy while criticizing it. Of course, this is a reference to de Sade. In his criticism, de Sade developed an individual whose sexual desire and satisfaction of this desire makes another man "the crowd" and a victim. The key to de Sade's system is a self-centred person who absolutely denies other peoples' rights and make them victims.²²⁴ Another important phenomenon to keep in mind about de Sade is his attitude towards text, when compared to his own life. The manuscript of *120 Days of Sodom* was lost during the storming of the Bastille in 1789, and it was found (and published) later, after the death of the author. The Marquise de Sade died, thinking that the manuscript of *120 Days of Sodom* has been destroyed or lost. Although his grieving for the manuscript was indescribable, he did not keep an adequate attitude when reflecting on the death of his own; quite the opposite, he wanted to be buried in the corner of his land and asked for the traces of his tomb to disappear from the surface of the earth.²²⁵ In such combination, the attitude towards the "death" of one's manuscript and the death of oneself makes a difference which can also be related to eroticism and can thus be helpful when explaining Bataille's work through the lens of de Sade. Bataille writes:

If eroticism leads to harmony between the partners its essential principle of violence and death is invalidated. Sexual union is fundamentally a compromise, a half-way house between life and death. Communion between the participants is a limiting factor and it must be ruptured before the true violent nature of eroticism can be seen, whose translation into practice corresponds with the notion of the sovereign man.²²⁶

A similar key for reading de Sade's works, although in a more linguistic than anthropological sense, was developed by Michael Foucault, emphasising that, with de Sade, name was simultaneously the fulfilment and the substance of language because it was traversed through its whole expanse by desire. The name thus became the place of occurrence, satisfaction and perpetual recurrence. Thus, language "emerges in all its brute being as a thing."²²⁷ He says that, in the same way as de Sade, Bataille understood that for modern thought no modernity is possible; thought has in this way become a "perilous act".²²⁸ In de Sade's time, the medium of generality was a logically structured language, which reproduced and reconstituted the normative structure of the individuals. However, de Sade's works are short of this logical

²²³ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 43.

²²⁴ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 165–167.

²²⁵ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 107–109.

²²⁶ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 167.

²²⁷ Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of Human Senses*, n. transl. (New York: Routledge, 1966), 130.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 357.

structure; thus, de Sade has changed the individual, reshaping the “average individual” into a pervert. The essential point is that these perversions are defined by the absence of logical structure. A counter-generalality is also thereby created – atheism is proclaimed by the normative reason, and this is done for the sake of individual freedom and sovereignty. Thus, atheism serves to establish the reign of the total absence of norms.²²⁹ Bataille, on his part, pointed out that such interpretation of de Sade was very Hegelian, yet lacking Hegel’s rigour.²³⁰ He goes on:

The Phenomenology of Mind, to which such dialectics bear a resemblance, constitutes a circular whole embracing the entire development of the mind in history. But Klossowski draws too hasty a conclusion [...] To proceed to substitute the king’s execution for the execution of God is indeed tempting – a sociological concept based on theology, guided by psychoanalysis, and clinging to the ideas of Joseph de Maistre. Yet all this is a little fragile.²³¹

Bataille is one of the authors for whom language has posited itself as experience – that of death, of the unthinkable thought, of the experience of finitude.²³² With this, it becomes clearer that a key to works of both Bataille as well as de Sade is language, where the violent nature of eroticism is used as a tool for describing the “unthinkable thought” and the “experience of finitude”, or, as it is for Bataille, the absolute (see Chapter 3. 5).

In fact, both, Bataille and de Sade can be considered the “martyrs of atheism”, and both knew the art of transgression (I will analyse Bataille’s concept of transgression in the last part of this work). De Sade was influenced by the materialist philosophers of the Enlightenment, some of whom thought that there is neither soul nor spirit and that everything in the universe is a physical matter. Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709–1751), one of the philosophers influencing de Sade’s thinking, held that human beings are simply machines, in a sense that they can be only defined by scientific observation, and they are subject to the laws of mechanical motions. Yet this assertion raises a question how can a machine feel pleasure, which, for de Sade, is the sole purpose of human existence – this concept is reflected in de Sade’s characters as well.²³³ It is not the same with Bataille. He invented his own “materialism”, based on transgression. While Bataille’s contemporaries concentrated mostly on the materialism of Karl Marx, hoping this could solve the problems of history after the World War II, Bataille declared that history was over and theorized about politics from this viewpoint. From such a perspective, Bataille could be deemed an anarchist. The anarchism of Georges Bataille also “refigures community as tragic in the sense that its animating

²²⁹ Pierre Klossowski, “Sade, or the Philosopher – Villain”, in David B. Allison, Mark S. Roberts, Allen S. Weiss, eds., *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34–35.

²³⁰ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 113.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things*, op. cit., 418–419.

²³³ John Phillips, op. cit., 32–34.

effervescence coheres around unproductive, sacrificial self-loss.”²³⁴ Bataille’s materialism was influenced by de Sade. For Bataille, materialism is above all a negation of all idealism. Matter thus becomes for him a non-logical difference that represents in relation to the economy what crime represents in relation to the law. The universe for him is formless and resembles nothing. The ideal human form is impossible, because each individual, like for de Sade, is in nature but not of it; an individual is a prey to physical desires.²³⁵ Once this vision of nature, common for Bataille and de Sade, is accepted, blasphemy becomes nonsense because of the fall of all moral values; “blasphemy is absurd since there is no God. [...] There is no difference between a murder and a death by natural causes.”²³⁶

As for Bataille’s anthropology, it is closely related with the concept of transgression as a substitute for a possibility of knowing what human nature is “in reality”, and thus, again – with the “concept” of intimacy. For Bataille, recovery of intimacy is the aim of the sacred, which manifests itself as life consisting of communication (heterogeneity, the communication of the different). The other side, church, is homogeneity which proclaims knowledge – it “associates eroticism with impurity and filth, it being the ‘useless’, non-productive aspect of sexuality, just as it denies death and the present moment or pleasure.”²³⁷ This is the reason why he examines human life in terms of its passions and suggests experiencing life as a discontinuous phenomenon. Renee Fuchs distinguishes three interconnected key tensions, which illustrate the relationship between death and transgression:

1) Continuity and discontinuity. As far as a human being is a part of cosmos, he/she is involved in the continuity; the opposite of this continuity is death.²³⁸ “The whole business of eroticism,” says Bataille, “is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives”.²³⁹ The erotic longing that tends towards the continuous, encompasses the inclination to transgress discontinuity. In the pagan antiquity this longing (or desire) was satisfied with the help of rituals which included violence, orgies and sacrifices.²⁴⁰ This kind of ritual became a transgression and was strongly connected with taboo. This pair of opposites embodies the second key tension.

2) Taboo and transgression. According to Bataille, taboos and prohibitions exist in order to maintain productivity. It is easy to see that in the Western civilization both eroticism as well

²³⁴ Jesse Goldhammer, “Dare to Know, Dare to Sacrifice: Georges Bataille and the Crisis of the Left” in Shannon Winnubst, ed., *Reading Bataille Now*, op. cit., 32.

²³⁵ Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 75–76.

²³⁶ David Coward, “Introduction”, op. cit., xxxiii.

²³⁷ Georges Bataille, “Misfortunes” in Georges Bataille, ed., *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, op. cit., accessed on 28/06/2012.

²³⁸ Renee Fuchs, “Taboos and Transgressions: Georges Bataille on Eroticism and Death”, http://alcor.concordia.ca/~gnosis/vol_x_3/Fuchs.pdf; accessed on 06/08/2011.

²³⁹ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 17.

²⁴⁰ Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, op. cit., 210.

as death have been (and still are) taboos. For Bataille, eroticism cannot be separated from death because of the concept of *l'angoise*.²⁴¹ *L'angoise* is always linked to eroticism. Sexual activity “rivets us to the distressing image of death, and the knowledge of death deepens the abyss of eroticism.”²⁴² As Bataille sees it, de Sade tried to find the impossible by facing the rational expression of uncontrollable desires and simultaneously by basing consciousness on the social structure and the image of a man with the help of negation. Thus,

Sade based himself on a common experience. Sensuality, which liberated from ordinary constraints, is aroused not only by the presence, but by a modification of the possible object. In other words, an erotic impulse, which is a release (as far as the performance of work and propriety in general are concerned), is sparked off by the concordant release of its object.²⁴³

It is also important to note that erotic union, for Bataille, means a fusion of two separate beings into one for the purpose of having a sense of continuity and intimacy – in contradistinction to sex for reproduction – because it can be seen as “a denial of established order”²⁴⁴. Thus erotic activity can also be defined as transgression.

3) Productivity and unproductiveness. Strongly related with the previous point, this pair of opposites is related to religious experience and the experience of eroticism. Being an act of transgression, lovemaking embodies unproductiveness as a sacrifice. The female partner in eroticism was seen as a victim, the male as sacrificer, but “both during the consummation losing themselves in the continuity established by the first destructive act.”²⁴⁵ In his thinking, Bataille reverses this socio-historical (and also Sadean) concept – man usually becomes a prey of woman, but there is also the concept of destruction – in his novels: man becomes a “field” where woman interprets her experience, and thus man is an object of violence, while woman remains a subject. In both ways, being a sacrifice and interpretation of women’s experience, erotic act remains transgression, having both the element of violence (as transgression) and the element of destruction (as an intimate act).²⁴⁶

Applying this “classification” to de Sade’s works, it is obvious that woman is, for de Sade, both a victim of man as well as the one who interprets man’s experience. Like Bataille, de Sade puts into question human behaviour inasmuch as it proceeds from the subordination of life function (sexual activity), which, from its part, is subordinate to common sense. Pierre Klossowski indicates that reason arrives at atheism “by deciding that the notion of God would once again alter reason’s autonomy in an illogical, hence monstrous, way. It declares that from the notion of God, which is itself arbitrary, all arbitrary, perverse and monstrous

²⁴¹ Renee Fuchs, op. cit.

²⁴² Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, op. cit., 245.

²⁴³ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 120.

²⁴⁴ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 54.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁴⁶ Renee Fuchs, op. cit.

behaviour would derive”.²⁴⁷ It is possible to find parallels with Bataille’s concept of transgression in this interpretation: the notion of God can be seen as an act of transgression; while altering reason, it also alters the productiveness, taboo and thus converts continuity into discontinuity. As a consequence, the notion of God becomes more personal, more connected with individual as oneself, and not with the socio-historical tradition. It can be said that this notion of God is so personal that it remains strongly connected to the notion of one’s death, and it has something in common with de Sade’s conception of morality.

Like it is for Bataille, De Sade’s morality is based on absolute solitude, on assertion that a human being is born alone and remains alone until his/her death. There are no links between one man and another, and the suffering of others is unimportant when it is compared with individual’s lust.²⁴⁸ Still, there are links between individuals, made by themselves, and thus every individual of humankind is bound in “human life”, or, more precisely, in the interdependence of humankind.²⁴⁹ From de Sade’s perspective, there is no society that would function in accordance with shared ethical and moral principles; human beings are driven by personal interest and morality comes down to social utility or pragmatism. Moreover, if there is no God, moral values can never be established, and society exists in accordance with the desires of the individual.²⁵⁰ Still, “in the anguish of death, something is lost and eludes us, a disorder begins within us, an impression of the emptiness, and the state which we enter is similar to that which precedes a sensual desire.”²⁵¹ Thus, a religion-based morality is useless, even though it can exist without God.

In this context, stepping for a little while aside from de Sade, it is worth to mention another writer Bataille refers to – the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), important for better understanding of Bataille’s position.²⁵² As Nikolai Berdayev, an interpret of Dostoevsky, indicated, this Russian writer represents a “Dionysian thinker” – love in his works is Dionysian, and Christianity is thus directly linked to life on earth. His view on God is also an anthropological one, and it means that the idea of man is divine. Consequently, resolving the problem of man means to resolve the problem of God. Like Nietzsche,

²⁴⁷ Pierre Klossowski, “Sade, or the Philosopher-Villain”, op. cit., 35.

²⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that this kind of loneliness is also essential to another French thinker, Jacques Lacan (1901–1981). Lacan was not only the friend of Georges Bataille and the second husband of Bataille’s first wife; they also both attended Kojève’s lectures; so, perhaps the traces of Kojève’s Hegelianism show up in Lacan’s thinking as well.

²⁴⁹ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 168.

²⁵⁰ John Phillips, *Marquis de Sade. A Very Short Introduction*, op. cit., 34–35.

²⁵¹ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 121.

²⁵² It is not easy to determine Bataille’s views on Dostoevsky, as he has not written on him separately. At the very least, he has read the *Notes from the Underground*, as evidenced in the *Inner Experience*, mentioning that Dostoevsky’s Christianity is “that of shame” (Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 43).

Dostoyevsky continuously tried to find the relationship between man and God.²⁵³ In Andre Gide's analysis of Dostoyevsky works, Kirilov is an atheist who hopes to take God's place by committing a suicide as an act of destruction of fear. Accordingly, history becomes divided into two stages: the one from primates to the destruction of God, and another from the disappearance of God to the transformation of man into God. Thus, Dostoyevsky's "atheism" transforms into a "man-God" concept (as it can be seen in his *Notes from Underground* as well).²⁵⁴

In some way, we can see similarities in de Sade: he sketches reason that is subordinated to sexual desire, which is paramount in all human behaviour. Nature takes the place of God, and body is the source of everything that is human.²⁵⁵ The insignificance of other people is of no doubt, and tenderness has no effect on the interaction of eroticism and death.²⁵⁶ The other reveals itself as a foreign body due to sexual activity, sobbing, defecation, urination, ritual cannibalism, religious ecstasy etc. This notion of the foreign body enables an individual to note the elementary subjective identity by distinguishing not only the types of excrement but also everything that can be seen as sacred, divine.²⁵⁷ Thus, being a tool of awareness of oneself, an erotic/perverse/"sick" activity gives individual a chance to be aware of him-/herself as a human being, as one who is a part of Nature and embodies it as a substitute for God. Simultaneously, the total lack of rationale behind Nature's effects is perceived by the libertine as a disturbing absence. Thus, the Mother Nature becomes an absence, and the individual strives for infinity.²⁵⁸ God, as he is conceived of in Christianity, becomes an illusion and irrelevant hypothesis. De Sade held a view that life is subordinated to Nature and thus the system of morality is also based on the "supposed goodness of a non-existent being".²⁵⁹ Since religions make a profound separation between the superior and inferior worlds, they necessarily lead to a progressive homogeneity of the entire superior domain – God, and the final stage of degradation thus becomes a simple sign of a universal homogeneity.²⁶⁰ For Bataille, the signifier of the opposite, of heterogeneity is the community which is also "not a moral fiction: it is the connection that forms around the repulsiveness of violent, useless destruction."²⁶¹

²⁵³ Valentin Morgovan and Viorica Banciu, "Dostoyevsky – a Prophetic Slavophile", *The Scientific Journal of Human Studies*, 2001:1, 110.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁵⁵ John Phillips, *op. cit.*, 36–37.

²⁵⁶ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, *op. cit.*, 169-170.

²⁵⁷ Georges Bataille, "The Use Value of D.A.F. Sade", in David B. Allison, Mark S. Roberts, Allen S. Weiss, *op. cit.*, 20.

²⁵⁸ John Phillips, *op. cit.*, 37.

²⁵⁹ David Coward, *op. cit.*, xxx-xxxiii.

²⁶⁰ Georges Bataille, "The Use Value of D.A.F. Sade", *op. cit.*, 23.

²⁶¹ Jesse Goldhammer, *op. cit.*, 32.

If libertinage can be divided in two parts, “passive” and “active”, then de Sade belongs to the “active” one. The control over instincts is quite important, and it is possible because of the denial of love – love, for libertines, is a “death sentence”.²⁶² Thus, de Sade’s system is a ruinous form of eroticism. There are no moral rules and no laws – the individual is free and can do everything, as no respect to other individuals is required. Writing on de Sade, Bataille refers to his friend philosopher Maurice Blanchot (1907–2003), who analysed de Sade, describing the state of de Sade’s individual as “apathy”, i.e., “the spirit of denial applied to the man who was elected to be sovereign.”²⁶³ Through the destruction of such emotions as pity, gratitude and love, and through the understanding that individual’s power is wasted on such things as other people, God or ideals, one becomes a “true man”, i.e., an individual who is aware of his loneliness and accepts it.²⁶⁴

This awareness of one’s loneliness also goes together with de Sade’s atheism as a guarantee of the responsible ego, its agency and individual identity. Atheism must become integral in order to be purified from inverted monotheism.²⁶⁵

It may seem weird, why I concentrate so much on de Sade’s “anthropology”, while speaking of him as an atheist, but, as far as it is possible to speak about de Sade’s concept of “non-existing God”, the understanding of human position is essential (like in the case of Bataille and his atheology). De Sade’s atheistic philosophy shows itself up in his early work “Dialogue between the Priest and the Dying Man” (1782). In this work, the Dying Man says:

I was created by Nature with the keenest appetites and the strongest of passion and was put on this earth with the sole purpose of placating both by surrendering them. They are components of my created self and are no more than mechanical parts necessary to the functioning of Nature’s basic purposes. [...] I defy you to say that you believe in God whose praises you sing, because you cannot demonstrate His existence nor is it within your capacities to define His nature, which means that you do not understand Him. [...] Anything which is beyond the limits of human reason is either illusion or idle fancy, and since your god must be either one or the other, I should be mad to believe in the first and stupid to believe in the second.²⁶⁶

This passage can be considered de Sade’s “abstract” of origination of everything, thus making a path toward conceiving of God as an illusion. This dialogue continues in a discussion about God’s usefulness and wisdom’s role in human’s life. The Dying Man operates with Socratic questions and arguments that mirror the standard theological responses (of de Sade’s time) to the issues regarding God and the existence of evil, conflicts in the name of religions, life after

²⁶² Catherine Cusset, “Editor’s Preface: The Lesson of Libertinage”, in Catherine Cusset, ed., op. cit., 2–5.

²⁶³ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 172.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Pierre Klossowski, “Sade, or the Philosopher-Villain”, op. cit., 35.

²⁶⁶ The Marquis de Sade, *The Misfortunes of Virtue and Other Early Tales*, transl. David Coward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 151–152.

death etc.²⁶⁷ The Dying Man summons the Priest to abandon his divinities, to give up the idea of another world, and not to turn his back to pleasure. In the end of the dialogue, the Dying Man rang, and women entered into the room – “and in their arms the priest became a man corrupted by Nature – and all because he had been unable to explain what he meant by Corrupted Nature.”²⁶⁸ It is worth mentioning (also for further interpretation of Bataille’s novels) that God for the Sadean libertine has some similarities with female body, which is simultaneously an object of intense fascination and of immeasurable contempt.²⁶⁹ The hunted and the hunter are of frequent occurrence in de Sade’s works, marking the human existence as a tension between these two states. The urge to tyranny and torture is natural, and there is no reason to resist it. In fact, to want to behave “well”, unless there is pleasure attained from doing so, can be seen as philosophical absurdity in de Sade’s schema.²⁷⁰ Still, the denial of others invites the denial of oneself as well – man is a victim of his own sovereignty, and thus a transcendental reality becomes impossible. Moreover, the continuity of crime transcends nothing and is linked with infinite destruction.²⁷¹

At the end of this chapter, there are a few things I would like to accent about the narrative of de Sade that could be useful in further analysis of Bataille’s narrative. One essential characteristic mark of the works of de Sade is pornography, which infiltrates stretches of dialogues telling about past or future events. The function of pornography appears to be the one of accelerating the narrative and intensifying it.²⁷² De Sade is trying to describe a representation of the sensuous which is manifested in an aberrant act. From this follows the relationship “between the *actualization* of what is sensuous in an act through writing and the *performing of the act* independent of its description.”²⁷³ As Klossowski points out, for de Sade such writing is not purely descriptive but interpretative. “Sade makes twofold relationship between a perverse way of sensing and acting:

- 1) The exteriority of an Aberrant Act;
- 2) The exteriority of Normative Reason.

Thus the distinction between deliberate sadism and unreflecting sadistic act can be made only through the intervention of normative reason.”²⁷⁴ At the same time, as I will try to show in the

²⁶⁷ John Phillips, op. cit., 38.

²⁶⁸ The Marquis de Sade, op. cit., 160.

²⁶⁹ John Phillips, op. cit., 41.

²⁷⁰ David Coward, op. cit., xxxiii.

²⁷¹ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 174–176.

²⁷² Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, “Sadean Libertinage and the Aesthetics of Violence”, Catherine Cusset, ed., op. cit., 186.

²⁷³ Pierre Klossowsski, “Sade, or the Philosopher-Villain”, op. cit., 37.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

following chapters of the interpretation of Bataille's novels, desire as an active force that makes a human being live in the present is also of great importance.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 123.

3. Bataille's Atheology in Novels

3.1. Bataille as a writer

In this chapter, keeping in mind the influences described in the previous chapter as well as Bataille's attitude towards writing itself and his understanding of atheology, I will interpret Bataille's six novels in the context of his "concept" of the "death of God". The first novel he ever published was the *Story of the Eye* (1928) with a pseudonym Lord Auch. Bataille also used other pseudonyms, mostly for his fiction works, but also for several non-fiction works published in his lifetime (*Guilty* is a good example), such as Dianus, Pierre Angélique (with this pseudonym one of the most important novels of Bataille's "literary canon" was published – i.e., *Madame Edwarda*, 1941), and Louis Trente. The novel *L'Abbe C.* (1950) was the first one published with his real name, so was the *Blue of Noon* (1957, although it was written circa 1935–1936). After his death two more novels, *My Mother* (1966) and *The Dead Man* (1967), were published. Perhaps the choice to use his own name for *L'Abbe C.* and *Blue of Noon* was inspired by the change of his work: around 1942, Bataille left the job in Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and only in 1951 became a keeper of Orléans library. In the interim period he edited scientific journals, and in 1946 founded the influential literary review *Critique*.²⁷⁶ My guess regarding the reason for using the pseudonyms is based on Stuart Kendall's note that Bataille was afraid of possible sanctions, like losing his job in the Bibliothèque Nationale.²⁷⁷ The choice of pseudonyms is interesting for me, as far as it reveals or could reveal something about the text of the novel, so I will return to specific pseudonyms in this chapter.

The notion of the impossible in Bataille's novels is related to his view of existence as paradoxical. Another aspect hard to let pass is Bataille's struggle with language. The authority of the (literary) subject could be inspired also by Nietzsche's saying that we cannot get rid of God as long as we continue to believe in grammar.²⁷⁸ As such, "the death of God and deconstruction of divine authorities are prerequisites for a transvaluation of values."²⁷⁹ Deconstruction of divine authorities means to use language in order to set God free from the presumptions and concepts. At the same time it means to free language from the presumptions and concepts it contains. For Bataille, deconstruction of divine authorities in literature means

²⁷⁶ "Georges Bataille." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/55732/Georges-Bataille>, accessed on 24/01/2012.

²⁷⁷ Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 7.

²⁷⁸ Barbara Mella, *Derrida's Detour*, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/024/mella.htm>, accessed on 19/09/2012

²⁷⁹ Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy. A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (New York, London: 1995), 25.

the overturning of morals (this is also the reason why he writes pornography, like de Sade did); simultaneously, this is his way how to speak about death:

[W]hat pornography is really about, isn't sex but death. I am not suggesting that every pornographic work speaks, either overtly or covertly, of death. Only works dealing with that specific and sharpest inflection of the themes of lust, "the obscene", do. It's toward the gratifications of death, succeeding and surpassing those of eros, that every truly obscene quest tends.²⁸⁰

To analyse this citation deeper here would mean to withdraw from Bataille's "concept" of the "death of God". Still, there are two reasons to keep in mind: firstly, no doubt that Bataille was familiar with this aphoristic saying of Nietzsche, and thus the link between the death of God and language must be kept in mind while reading Bataille's novels from the atheological perspective. Secondly, the assumption points to Bataille as a mediator in the imperceptible sphere of continuity of influences. The influence of Bataille himself is the reason why during the interpretation I will also keep in mind such philosophers as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, , and Michael Foucault.²⁸¹ Of course, this acknowledgement anticipates an interpretation which leaves an open space for discussion. It also means that this doctoral thesis remains an open site and does not set out to clarify the "truth" about Bataille's "death of God" concept. Bataille was not a popular writer in his lifetime; rather, his writings are a response to the challenge to think, as he saw himself in the line of the nineteenth-century outsiders, like Marx, Kierkegaard and, of course, Nietzsche.²⁸² To describe his attitude towards thinking and writing more precisely: "When he defined the way he thought as being like 'a girl taking off her dress,' he also defined the way he wrote."²⁸³ The consciousness of a writer was far more essential to him as success. Issues of writing, text, and the way how the text communicates were not a matter of life-style for Bataille; it was his life, as seen from and it is reflected in his novels. In other words, literature for Bataille embodies intimacy, because "only literature can experience the pleasure of pleading guilty."²⁸⁴

Another essential point for the analysis of Bataille's novels is his equivocal relationship with Catholicism, to which he was devoted in his youth and on which he reflects in several of his non-fiction books. To my opinion, it would be more appropriate to explain his attitude towards Catholicism in the context of the novels where references to Catholicism

²⁸⁰ Susan Sontag, *Styles of the Radical Will* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 60.

²⁸¹ Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 8.

²⁸² Michael Richardson, op. cit., 15.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Dennis Hollier, Richard Miller, "Bataille's Tomb: a Halloween Story", *October*, Vol. 33 (Summer, 1985), 75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778394>, accessed on 26/03/2011.

can be found (*L'Abbe C.*, *Story of the Eye*, and, not so directly, *Madame Edwarda*), and this is the reason why I only sketch some outline in the meantime.

Being twenty years old, Bataille even entered the seminary of Saint-Fleur, and his intention was to become a priest or a monk. He lost his faith three years later, while staying in the Benedictine monastery.²⁸⁵ Bataille's Catholic past reveals a few facts about his life that will be important for my second interpretation of *L'Abbe C.*, so here I will describe some aspects of his experience in detail. Although the author is dead and his intentions cannot be inferred from the text, the influences, especially those of personal experience, should be kept in mind.

It seems that an external motive of his searching for God could be the death of his father in 1917. His priority in Catholicism was a monastery, not priesthood, because priest is a public person, while monk lives in solitude. In 1920 Bataille fell ill with pulmonary disease, which marked all of his life. This fact is also of great importance for interpreting Robert's illness in *L'Abbe C.*, where it serves as a mediator for a human being to remember how frail and corporeal one is. In other words, the illness helps to remember the finitude of the human and the frailty of the body.²⁸⁶ The fact of life spent in the shadow of illness cannot be ignored, especially considering what Bataille says in *Guilty*:

The experiences I've lived through and been so concerned about have led me to think there is nothing more for me "to do". [...] If action ("doing") is (as Hegel says) negativity, then there is still the problem of knowing whether the negativity of someone who "doesn't have anything more to do" disappears or remains in a state of "unemployed negativity." As for me, I can only decide in one way, since I am exactly this unemployed negativity (I couldn't define myself with more clarity. [...] I think of my life – or better yet, its abortive condition, the open wound that my life is – as itself constituting a refutation of Hegel's closed system.²⁸⁷

As Stuart Kendall points out, and also Bataille (or, Lord Auch) himself in the preface to the *Story of the Eye*, his piety had a lot to do with the death of his father during the World War I. Bataille's father was a syphilitic and was left with a housekeeper; he died alone a few miles from the German lines in 1915. Later, in 1943 Bataille wrote:

My father, an unreligious man, died refusing to see the priest. During puberty, I was unreligious myself (my mother indifferent). But I went to a priest in August 1914; and until 1920, rarely did I let a week go by without confessing my sins! In 1920, I changed again, I stopped believing in anything but my future chances. My piety was merely an attempt at evasion: I wanted to escape my destiny at any price, I was abandoning my father.²⁸⁸

Bataille was in military service during the World War I, and his piety made his colleagues to come to a conclusion that he lived a life of a saint. After the war Bataille continued to study,

²⁸⁵ Michael Richardson, op. cit., 20.

²⁸⁶ Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 22–23.

²⁸⁷ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 123.

²⁸⁸ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), 46.

and in 1918 conflicting desires tortured the young man: on the one hand, he wanted a Christian family life with all earthly joys; on the other hand, he wanted to give everything to God. The inner conflict also included a young woman with whom Bataille was in love, and the young girl wanted to become a nun. The love story ended in 1919, and for Bataille there was still no deeper wish than to become a monk or a priest. Bataille appears to his biographers as a man who desperately wanted to believe, not the one who did believe. Finally he chose an escape route by acquiring knowledge and begun to study church history.²⁸⁹ In this period his deepened interest in mysticism also emerged, and Bataille was tempted to loneliness and reflection as well as once again to the abovementioned Christian family life. In *Inner Experience* he remembers the monastery he visited in 1920 and also writes about his feelings about the monastic life:

[...] a house surrounded by pines, beneath a moonlit softness, at the seashore; the moonlight linked to the medieval beauty of the service – everything which made me hostile towards a monastic life disappeared – in this place I only experienced the exclusion of the rest of the world. I imagined myself within the walls of the cloister, removed from agitation, for an instant imagining myself monk and saved from jagged, discursive life: in the street itself, with the help of darkness, my heart streaming with blood became inflamed – I knew a sudden rupture. With the help as well of my indifference to logic, to the spirit of consequence.²⁹⁰

The religious crisis of Bataille is not easy to explain, as most religious crises are to an outside observer. The monastery presented him a vision and experience of “a site of religious refuge and escape: outside secular society.”²⁹¹ During this period Bataille deepened his studies in philosophy, and, notably, his understanding of laughter also began to take shape at that time.²⁹²

3. 2. Concept of the “inner murderer” and Bataille’s “High Mass”: *L’Abbe C.*

a) Concept of the “inner murderer”

The novel *L’Abbe C.* was published in 1950, and Bataille did not use any pseudonym for publishing it. The narrative of the novel *L’Abbe C.* is about twin-brothers: Charles is a libertine of the modern time, whereas Robert is a priest, who is passionately devoted to his vocation. They cannot understand each other, and frequently one does not hear or understand what the other is saying. Neither of them can overcome or explain this isolation, at the same time both knowing that it exists. A friend of theirs, Eponine, returns in their relationship, and this is the milestone of the novel – they are both in a way in love with this young woman,

²⁸⁹ Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 25.

²⁹⁰ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 58.

²⁹¹ Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 29.

²⁹² Ibid., 31.

only that Robert should keep his chastity and innocence as a priest. Charles sleeps with the girl, who herself is obsessed with the other twin-brother, trying to seduce him all the time. The text balances on a border where libertinism contrasts with religious devotion, but it is also clear that they are both alike.

The author's attitude toward his text takes a substantial position here – the novel for the most part is written from the “first person's” perspective, i.e., the narrator uses the “I” form. Yet, the narrators also change as the novel progresses – at the beginning, the narrator is the editor of the book; later on, it is Charles; after that, in the end of the story, Robert's notes are added; finally, the editor's notes again. In fact, it can be said that the text has three authors: Charles, Robert and the editor. Thus, the text acquires deeper dimensions and new senses. Notably, such a structure is indicative of its author (Bataille) as a person who has been involved French Surrealism, who concentrates attention to silence, the unsaid, manifestations of unconscious, and uses improper similes. Thus, the border between the rational and the irrational begins to disappear. Besides, the narrator is dead, as the editor explains, also being his brother (the *other* narrator). In fact, the reader is being acquainted with the notes of a dead man, and this method seems to illustrate Bataille's attitude as a writer – the text lives a life of its own, it has gone out of control of the author-God. About twenty years later Roland Barthes would describe this situation aptly:

We shall never know for a good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of body writing. [...] As soon as the fact is *narrated* no longer with a view of acting directly on the reality, that is to say, outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, the writing begins.²⁹³

From such a perspective, it could be said that, by “killing” the authors of the text (both twins), Bataille aimed to show that the text goes out of control. His aim could as well be to point to the transgression of the text. As shown in the second part of the doctoral thesis, writing for Bataille is existentially vital. The act of writing itself is dangerous. Together with unrestrained sexuality, writing is immoral. It is easy to make parallels between *L'Abbe C.* as writing about writing and the author-God of whom Barthes spoke. For Bataille, the author-God is (are) dead, and the text lives a life of its own, or, more precisely, it becomes literature, and “the only thing a page of literature says is, I am *not* a page of literature. Writing doesn't show. Literature, if it exists, begins with the resistance to literature.”²⁹⁴ Through the annihilation of

²⁹³ Roland Barthes, *Image. Music. Text*, op. cit., 142.

²⁹⁴ Denis Hollier, “The Word of God: I am Dead”, *October*, Vol. 44 (Spring, 1988), 75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778975>, accessed on 26/03/2011

writing, the battle against literature is waged. *L'Abbe C.* is rarely analysed in secondary sources about Bataille (unlike the *Story of the Eye* or *Madame Edwarda*), and a possible reason for this fact could be the complexity characteristic to writing. As Giartosio puts it:

In fact, *L'Abbe C.* is an attempt to explore the roads by which literature can – or cannot – reach its aim, and at the same time, through a search for its specific limit, can and cannot define and legitimate itself; within this interpretative frame the novel's "failure to write" – the emptiness of unwritten – acquires full significance. [...] Literature's *raison d'être*, in fact, can only be found in the quest for an absolute "revealed" in inner experience; conversely, the inner experience is the only possible legitimation for the literary enterprise.²⁹⁵

The task Bataille sets for literature is uneasy because of the complicated "concept" of the absolute, which reveals itself through and in inner experience. Therefore, my aim in the context of *L'Abbe C.* is not to reveal the absolute, but rather to look for the ways how the novel copes (or does not cope) with communicating with the absolute in the framework of the subject of my interpretation, i.e. the "death of God", as well as to reveal the link (if there is any) between the absolute and the "death of God".

If one of the principles of inner experience is "to emerge through the project from the realm of the project"²⁹⁶, and if we assume that language could in a certain way be explained as a project, then the need emerges to understand what this concept is all about. In short, the project could be defined as the "world", i.e. the active and explainable part of the world where one thinks in order to find true answers to philosophical problems, performs religious rituals in order to achieve the divine etc., and "Bataille conceives human existence as a space for the interaction between life and the world, in terms of a dwelling in which the cosmic time and the time of the project constantly interrupt each other."²⁹⁷ Thus, the project can be interpreted as some power in the physical world, as something that a human being can *use*, while the cosmic time, I believe, belongs to the realm of the absolute. Literature, like sexuality, perfectly illustrates this implicit duality – as a human product, it has an aspect of a project as well as that of the absolute; both aspects are simultaneously potential and active. For instance, a person engaged in ordinary *activity* sees bodily pleasures as unclean and thinks that they should be condemned (reasons for such an attitude can also be traced to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which to a certain extent has formed the Western thinking). A sexual act is animality, even violence that frightens the active human being, because he/she is at the same time enraptured by the thought of such act. To put it simpler, the fact that a human being avoids to speak of a sexual act as something that can give some sort of happiness does not

²⁹⁵ Tomasso Giartosio, "La vérité du bonheur": The Legitimation of Literature in Georges Bataille's *L'Abbé C.*", *Qui Parle*, Vol. 5, No. 2, *Distractions* (Spring/Summer, 1992), 22–23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20685947>, accessed on 26/03/2011

²⁹⁶ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 46.

²⁹⁷ Zenyep Direk, "Erotic Experience and Sexual Difference in Bataille" in Shannon Winnubst, ed., op. cit., 96.

mean that he/she does not involve in the sexual act. However, the sexual act “consumes our reserves of energy so dangerously that we contemplate it with anguish. It enraptures and frightens us. [...] [T]he dread which transfigures its value demands that, provisionally, we evade this value, and that our humanity actually depends on the extent to which we deny it.”²⁹⁸ The act becomes divine only when it is fallen, and a violent contrary movement takes place within the human being.²⁹⁹ The movement which takes place in the human being could also be explained as the movement between the realms of the project (acting) and the absolute. It can manifest itself in the expression of this movement through an action which is simultaneously a non-action, i.e. through the text which has been written and now lives a life of its own because of the death of its authors.

These violent contrary movements which confine humanity – language and life – within the conditions of falsehood, are found in *literature*, to which they give the disguised face of truth. If the glacial expression of clear language is deceptive, if literature fascinates, it is because of the desire, proud or exhausting, for laughter and love relentlessly maintains us in its grip.³⁰⁰

A subtle possibility of truth emerges and vanishes simultaneously through the process of reading. It could be said that literature embodies the desire for truth, and a human being cannot crave for more than this desire which, from its part, embodies the possibility to come closer to the realm of the absolute. Still, the condition that makes literature to be literature in the true meaning of this word is the language used by the author who creates the text and the reader who conceives it. In addition, the language should simultaneously be a component of inner experience as well as be excluded from it. As humaneness is closely linked with this condition of the implicit duality and mediates between the realms of the absolute and the project, words cannot be slaves for humans. It is also impossible for the human to avoid *using* words, and this is why the human assumes the role of a priest, in tearing words from the links of the project “in a delirium.”³⁰¹ In this way, language becomes a sacrifice, and the human being becomes the priest who performs the act of sacrifice. From the very beginnings of the religiousness of humankind, sacrifice includes killing. Thus, tearing words from applicability, one frees language from the realm of the project, thus “killing” the words in one cosmos with an intention for them to continue in another cosmos – that of the absolute. In the context of sacrifice “death means continuity of being.”³⁰² This is also the reason why

[t]he three writers of *L'Abbe C.* fail in their attempts to provide a representation of inner experience, but at the same time prove that in this failure – the failure to write, if writing, in

²⁹⁸ Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, ed. and transl. by Michael Richardson (London, New York: Verso, 1994), 186–187.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 187.

³⁰¹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 135.

³⁰² Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 13.

the strongest sense of the word, can only be writing the absolute – lies literature's extreme realization, its illegible achievement.³⁰³

Another important aspect to remember when speaking about the narrative of *L'Abbe C.* is the shock all three writers seem to go through – for the editor the shock is associated with the death of Charles, while for Charles it is associated with the death of Robert, and for Robert, as it seems, it is caused by the death of God. Let me explain this supposition in some detail. Firstly, I would like to accent parallels with the two “deaths of God” proclaimed by Nietzsche. Robert or, more precisely, his priesthood, represented by his cassock, embodies the old structure of the world, i.e. Christianity, and dies from the illness caused by torment – when in prison, he simply fades away in suffering, just as Nietzsche's God in *Zarathustra*.³⁰⁴ Also, the suffering marks Robert with a quality of the Saviour (Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition; I will return to the “concept” of the Saviour constructed by all the authors of the text as I proceed). Charles, the opposite of the old-fashioned Christianity, gives the manuscript to the editor and commits suicide two months later.³⁰⁵ The direct and outer reason for Charles' choice cannot be found in the text but in Germaine's (Charles' wife) instruction to the editor: “Whatever you do, don't talk about Robert again in the front of Charles.”³⁰⁶ Although it is not a murder of the kind proclaimed by Nietzsche's Madman, it is a violent death and must be taken into account when speaking about the ways how the “death of God” can be read into the novel. So, I will bear the abovementioned two types of death in mind, and it may also be worth taking a closer look into the similarities and differences between the two brothers.

Another violent action of Charles is his giving the manuscript to the editor. If Robert, being a priest, tries to sacrifice the words and make them belong to the realm of the absolute, Charles, from his side, gives the text “back” to the realm of the project (the book is meant for reading, i.e. for *using*). In this way, and also keeping in mind the “concept” of the Saviour, Charles can be interpreted as Judas, the betrayer of Jesus in the Christian tradition. Suicide also is a symbolic act which makes the interpretation possible, and simultaneously Charles rehabilitates himself – through the act of killing, he also sacrifices himself through the moral torment and, thus, also becomes a symbol of the “death of God”. In other words, Charles is losing himself because of inner experience of his own; his suicide is not only inner experience of himself; it is also the moment of transgression. Consequently, by killing himself as the representation of the “death of God” in the realm of the project (by acting), Charles becomes a

³⁰³ Tomasso Giartosio, op. cit., 23.

³⁰⁴ Georges Bataille, *L'Abbe C.*, op. cit, 119.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 28.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 25.

dead God, while the “transgression of a prohibition is that prohibition’s fulfilment.”³⁰⁷ The function of the transgression in the context of the “death of God” is to carry the reader all the way through to the limit of being; it does not contain anything negative. In other words:

The experience of the transgression must be detached from its questionable association to ethics. It must be liberated from the scandalous or subversive, that is, from anything aroused by negative associations. Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing to another; it does not transform the other side of the mirror, beyond an invisible and uncrossable line, into a glittering expanse. Transgression is neither violence in a divided world (in an ethical world) nor a victory over limits (in a dialectical or revolutionary world. Transgression affirms limited being).³⁰⁸

Thus, suicide affirms the human as a limited being, and the death of God emerges not as an opposite to human nature (or to the suicidal action) or a scandal; rather, the death of God is a logical turn after being has reached its limits, thus making a step further into the reality of the absolute and the impossible. The suicide is an action, but, simultaneously, it is also surrender to the desire to act which “suffers from no longer being able to reach its goal because history is over.”³⁰⁹ The history is over, and the future can be only a tragedy – the only possibility for escaping is to try to raise oneself to the level of the impossible.³¹⁰

Secondly, eroticism is part of inner experience also in the case of Robert. I will explain this assertion later on; first I would like to tell more about the development of the narrative which marks the oneness of the twins. Since the brothers have so much in common, they are also united in a kind of a symbolic death, while both being still alive – Robert, as a potentially dead man, ignores Eponine, and thus he also makes Charles stand with one leg in the grave, because the only difference in their appearance is Robert’s cassock. It can be said that the “death of God” casts its shadow over the entire text, as the brothers mirror each other, becoming inseparable, and when Eponine asks Charles to talk to Robert if he could sleep with her (“Every priest went to a whore at one time or another,” – she explains³¹¹), the priest is ready to lend his cassock to his brother – as if he, along with the cassock, could pass on his priesthood to his brother. But it cannot be passed on in this way, because the cassock is only a symbol, not a substance of priesthood, and this passing, though not in a literal sense, actually occurs only at the end of the novel, and not because of Eponine – it happens because the two brothers have changed their roles. The talk about lending the cassock makes the twins nervous, so that they start mocking at each other and alienate from each other even more, at the same time becoming yet closer on an unconscious level, in the anticipation of the sacred,

³⁰⁷ Christopher R. Gemerchak, op. cit., 63.

³⁰⁸ Roberto Nigro, “Experiences of the self between limit, transgression, and the explosion of the dialectical system: Foucault as reader of Bataille and Blanchot”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 2005: 31, 660. <http://psc.sagepub.com/content/31/5-6/649>, accessed on 28/01/2012.

³⁰⁹ Jean-Michael Besnier, op. cit., 19.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Georges Bataille, *L’Abbe C.*, op. cit., 57.

as they continue to change roles. The crisis started earlier, in the tower, since at the beginning Robert was the comforting one. When Charles is drunk, he asks his brother to accompany him to the tower where Charles is supposed to meet Eponine. They almost slip and fall from the tower, and just for a moment Charles imagines himself in the place of his brother. This also marks the mirroring and identification between them. A significant characteristic trait for Bataille is also the fact that, being very close to dead, both Eponine and Charles are heavily drunk. There is an episode where Eponine undresses herself, and this also has to be kept in mind when talking about the transformations of Robert's personality. Charles knows that Robert would not survive the joy Eponine could give him – “all that was necessary to complete the destruction of the priest.”³¹² Besides, from Charles' perspective, the friendship between brothers is impossible because of Robert's “ardent Catholicism”.³¹³ After silent refusing to sleep with Eponine, Robert falls ill, and at this point the brothers change their roles again – Charles feels simultaneously helpless, happy and sad – as the one who is in love. Robert confesses that he was just faking his illness and refuses to talk. So, the main question in this situation is: How can one overcome the absence of the sacred? Charles continues making love with Eponine, pretending she is dead – and soon they both understand that they are under observation. Who is the observer? At first they think it's one of Eponine's lovers, the butcher, who has sworn to kill his rival, Eponine's other lover Charles. They continue to make love in the perceptible presence of death, and the couple soon reaches the limit of lust: what seemed to be in opposition – the classical antithesis between death and sex as destructive and creative – become one, and soon they both augment one another in an orgasmic ecstasy.

Furthermore, the illusion of the jealous butcher becomes a disillusion when it becomes clear that the observer, in fact, is Robert, the priest. Moreover, the copulating couple feel the presence of the dead God: the observer is God, who has in a way turned into its own opposite – into the absence, non-representation of God. They live under the strength of the presence of the dead man (I will further explain this term in the third part of this doctoral thesis). This fact in its absurdity convinces Charles that Robert is dead as a priest, as the representative of the sacred, and God wants him, Charles, in this empty place, and they both, the living dead, the priest and the libertine-priest, still remain the same. Although they know each other's suffering, they cannot know the person who suffers. Consequently, Charles begins to write down this strange incident, while Robert is arrested. Actually they are trying to take each other's place – Charles becomes a writer in a vain try to overcome the absence of the transcendent, while Robert becomes a peeping Tom and is arrested. Yet, his aim is the same –

³¹² Georges Bataille, *L'Abbe C.*, op. cit., 48.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 33.

driven out of his self-constructed paradise, broken and lost to his God, he tries to live out a monstrous mirror image of the life of a libertine.³¹⁴ Everything becomes clearer with Robert's notes that Charles finds after the brother's death. Here is a key passage from Charles's own writing:

The only way to atone for the sin of writing is to annihilate what is written. But that can be done only by the author; destruction leaves that which is essential intact. I can, however, tie negation so closely to affirmation that my pen gradually effaces what it has written. In so doing it accomplishes, in a word, what is generally accomplished by "time" – which, from among its multifarious edifices, allows only the traces of death to subsist. I believe that the secret of literature is there, and that a book is not a thing of beauty unless it is skilfully adorned with the indifference of the ruins. Otherwise it would be necessary to shout so loudly that no one would imagine the survival of someone who bellowed so naively. That is why, with Robert dead and these ingenuous writings being left, I had to destroy this evil he had created: why, indirectly through my book, I had to annihilate, to kill him again.³¹⁵

Here he comes again – the murderer of God! The point is – maybe he has forgotten, but maybe he knows very well – he *is* a representative of the sacred, perhaps even God himself. Also, by killing Robert, he is killing himself as his double – a suicide again. Thus, there is a double murder of God – one of them is violent, and the murderer is the other, one of the humankind (as it was for Nietzsche), while the other murder more resembles a suicide – God has given up and decided to kill himself, in a paradoxical way, through word. On the basis of Robert's notes, Charles comes to a conclusion that his brother, the priest, was the real libertine. Has he, Charles, all the time been the representative of the sacred? Or, has the "killing by text" something to do with "Judas' work" and the suicide of Charles as a "death of God"? The difficulties of writing and twofold nature of language are rooted in the position of the author, which is constrained and uncomfortable. The constraint has to do with stupidity and naiveté, as well as with anguish (anxiety), and thus writing as part of the inner experience gains another religious dimension, for, next to desire, anguish is also an important part of that experience. Moreover, "the writing I' identifies with 'the ecstatic I', and *says* what cannot be *said*".³¹⁶ Furthermore, the text gains the meaning of the impossible. It is the "concept" I will analyse in detail when discussing other novels, e.g. *The Impossible*. This is why I am not doing it here, instead turning to the inner experience of Robert.

Later, in Robert's notes, we read his re-thinking of crime, criminal and victim:

[T]he victim isn't cursed, he simply succumbs to chance: fatality strikes only the *criminal*. So that sovereign being burdened with a servitude *that crushes him* and the condition of free men

³¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *L'Abbe C.*, op. cit., 121–122.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

³¹⁶ Tomasso Giartosio, op. cit., 25.

is deliberate servility. [...] But the curse isn't what it seems, and the sighs or tears of the cursed are to joy what the sky is to grain of sand!³¹⁷

It turns out that Robert has been concerned with the same matters as Charles after the death of his brother – he was writing these notes, fixing time and letting his fantasy fly; at the same time, there is fear and the awareness of death, and it comes near. Thus, he finds himself in an impossible situation – he is a representative of the sacred and he is also a libertine, just as his brother. They are both the same, and Robert's fantasies about Eponine being in bed with Charles, in my opinion, imply one of the most profound issues touched upon in this novel – the dead God attains his own absence in observation, as he sees himself dying together with someone whom he thinks he loves. If, following the desire, a man and a woman connect through lust, the nakedness of their laceration determines the communication joining them. It is impossible to *see* the being of the other, only the wound.³¹⁸ Explained in this way, the illness of Robert gains a brand new meaning – through the observation, he is aware of his loneliness, in other words, of God's loneliness, as the one who cannot avoid death, and this is also another way to see Charles's suicide as logical in the context of the novel's narrative – he has identified himself with Robert, thus becoming a God himself, and the only way “out” of the memories of the “dead God” is to become the “dead God” himself, becoming the inner murderer too, and, simultaneously, making active this tendency towards killing God, i.e. killing oneself. “Inner experience is the opposite of the action.”³¹⁹ Thus, the passivity of Robert's death gives it the meaning of the “death of God” as well. For Charles, it is the sacrifice of himself which includes both the violent activity (killing as an act) and passivity (refusing to live, destroying himself as a text because of the betrayal). As I see it, the priest's notes also contain a key to the “inner murderer”:

I can't even for an instant imagine a man apart from God. For any man who has eyes to see sees God and not tables or windows. But God doesn't give him a minute's rest. HE has no limits, and HE breaks those of the man who sees HIM. And HE never lets up until the man resembles HIM. That is why HE insults MAN and teaches MAN insult HIM. That is why in MAN HE laughs a laugh that destroys. And that laugh, by which MAN is completely overcome, deprives him of all comprehension: it gets worse when, from high in a windswept cloud, HE perceives what I am; it gets worse if, as I rush down the street to get something done, I see MYSELF, I see the sky being emptied by the wind.³²⁰

He speaks about God and human mutually insulting each other, which is an outrageous overcoming of their difference. Besides, the “ambiguity of human life is really that of mad laughter and sobbing tears. It comes from the difficulty of harmonizing reason's calculations

³¹⁷ *L'Abbe C.*, op. cit., 135.

³¹⁸ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 31.

³¹⁹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 46.

³²⁰ Georges Bataille, *L'Abbe C.*, op. cit., 137.

with these tears... With this horrible laugh.”³²¹ Here is another element essential in the context of the “death of God” concept – it is reason, and, if tears and laughter are a natural part of the human life, then, perhaps, reason does not have a place in eroticism and transcendence, in other words – in the sense of the presence of the sacred. If so, reason must be overcome – this is another key to the “death of God” concept, and I will use it in the next part of my doctoral thesis, when analysing the novel *Story of the Eye*. In this interpretation, I will pay more attention to Robert’s observation that could be related to “Bataille’s mysticism” – the priest’s meditation on lovers. In *Guilty* Bataille describes a method in meditation:

Method in meditation is analogous to technique in sacrifice. The point of ecstasy is bared if inside myself I shatter individuality that confines me to myself. So too sacredness replaces an animal in the exact moment the priest kills or destroys it.³²²

Thus, for him, meditation as inner experience means to experience the world from the position of God, not in relation to him.³²³ In this case, the observation outlines the possibility – because of the intermixed identities of the two brothers, Robert could be in the place of Charles; at the same time, it is impossible because of his cassock. Still, it can be said that he vainly tries to stretch all farthest reaches of the possible, making a step closer to the impossible through the inner experience.³²⁴ At the same time, Robert leads his life in silent meditation – as if confession of any sin would be irrelevant to him, as if he experienced “the agony of God in the person of man.”³²⁵ As a priest, he is also resisting to the God of Christianity, who is a God of language, or of speech,³²⁶ although, is extremely important to remind – not the one of literature, because literature belongs to the realm of the absolute. Recalling the interpretation of Nietzsche in the previous chapter, the self of Robert has refused to act in the relation between the subject and object; the silent peeping into the copulating couple’s activity appears as a refusal of language and, thus, also as a transformation of the relation between the subject and object. Robert negates himself in order to achieve self-knowledge – and successfully, as it seems, taking into account the citation from his notes. Somehow it seems that Robert has come to the impossible: “[T]he impossibility of speaking in everyday language of an experience that is unspeakable; the realization that the death of God has left a hole in language, one that words would always fail to fill.”³²⁷ His silent watching as well as his writing is rather a meditation on the “death of

³²¹ Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, transl. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), 20.

³²² Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 35.

³²³ Stuart Kendall, “Editor’s Preface”, op. cit., xxx.

³²⁴ Michelle R. Pollock, “Georges Bataille: Literature and Sovereignty. *SubStance*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (Autumn, 1973), 65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3684587>, accessed on 26/03/2011

³²⁵ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 47.

³²⁶ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 37.

³²⁷ Roberto Nigro, op. cit., 654.

God” than the death of God itself, because Robert, being one of the authors of the text, becomes a reader through the position of the observer. To put it simply, while making love, Charles and Eponine *enact* literature, while Robert *reads* their lovemaking through the observation. Still, Robert has been pleaded guilty for this observation and can be easily identified with his twin brother, Charles, also as a reader.³²⁸ Thus, both brothers lose their continuity through Robert’s meditation on the “death of God”; the continuity becomes a discontinuity which marks the end of (individual) history for both of them.

b) Bataille’s “High Mass”

Since Bataille himself converted to Catholicism in his youth, Section 9, titled “High Mass”, where the culmination of the triangle’s relations appears, seems particularly interesting in the context of the “death of God”. Robert is celebrating a mass, and both Eponine and Charles are also attending. Charles is convinced that his brother cannot carry on in the presence of Eponine, while Robert is still trying desperately. He is as weak as a handicapped man and does everything with strain, while Eponine and Charles are trying hard to suppress laughter. Charles craves for a scandal, being afraid of it at the same time. “A scandal seemed to me at that point to be just as necessary as the orderly competition of the service would seem to a person who was deeply religious.”³²⁹ Before the communion, Robert’s strain reaches its culmination, and he faints. The congregation gathers around Robert, the church suddenly becomes silent, the presence of the priest is interrupted – the only thing bearing witness that there has been a priest is a tattered cassock by the altar. It makes Charles feel as if he was attending a funeral. Who is the dead one?

This fragment marks several essential points of the narrative – scandal (or craving for it), fainting as a resemblance of death, funeral without a corpse and laughter, which, in Bataille’s way of thinking, not only manifests shame but also is associated with the transformation of the principle of prohibition or the lack of understanding, unwillingness to understand. Besides, the joking mood and laughter are accompanied by a refusal to perceive the truth of eroticism tragically. As laughter is a manifestation of shame or refusal, its opposite – tears – is a manifestation of participation, of consciousness.³³⁰ So, we can assume that those who are attending the high mass are ashamed of themselves; in fact, Charles and

³²⁸ Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, “Sacrifice and Violence in Bataille’s Erotic Fiction” in Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed., op. cit., 99.

³²⁹ Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, op. cit., 75.

³³⁰ Georges Bataille, “Preface” to Pierre Angelique’s (Bataille’s pseudonym) novel *Madame Edwarda* in Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, transl. Austryn Wainhouse (London, New York: Marion Boyars, 2003), 139.

Eponine are aware of their sexuality, and all the three protagonists know that Christianity condemns it. Could it be a reason for their shame? Is shame really a reason to their laughter? Or is this interpretation too Christian? Another possibility – in *Inner Experience* Bataille points out that “we *sacrifice* the one ‘whom we laugh at’, abandoning him, without any anguish whatsoever, to some downfall which seems slight to us (laughter, no doubt, does not have a gravity of sacrifice).”³³¹ Thus Eponine and Charles make Robert a sacrifice – he is condemned to a downfall and is really dead. They, who sacrificed him, did not dare to face the fact that Robert (as a priest, brother, lover and as a human in his stream of life) is really dead at that moment; and perhaps Robert’s illness that follows this fall is actually Charles’s and Eponine’s refusal to see Robert as a dead one. Sacrifice requires not only the victim but also those who sacrifice; laughter requires the inconsequential throng of those who laugh.³³² It is more than clear that, during the Mass, Robert feels ill and weak, as tortured by the terrible antinomy of life and death. The sacrificial killing should resolve the antinomy by means of a reversal.³³³ The presence of Eponine and Charles in the High Mass links the priest with another world, the one of which his brother is a representative. Thus, libertinage *per se* and the nakedness of Eponine she has revealed in the tower are also present during the Mass. What tortures Robert is human pain – the contrast between life and death is still alive while one believes in the flesh created by God. To be released from pain, the sacrifice or death of God is needed, because “if there is no God who created a flesh, then there are no longer these excesses of language residing in the spirit that aim to reduce the excesses of the flesh to silence.”³³⁴ This is another aspect of transgression, probably more intimate than in the case of the “death of God” fulfilled by Charles, although not equivocal. The transgression of Robert’s fainting is simultaneously intimate for all three of them, and, as the “double sacrifice” is included here, this could also be described as a delusion of intimacy – a characteristic trait inherent to the individual alone. Eponine as well as Charles and Robert share the intimacy of the transgression; they have it in common. Besides, sacrifice is also present twice – firstly, the sacrifice is Robert who faints in the public (and sacral) place; secondly, the Mass itself is meant to be a sacrifice, according to Catholicism. For Bataille, transgression was necessary for social life as “communal negativity”³³⁵, although this negativity does not represent a stable

³³¹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 96.

³³² Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 97.

³³³ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, op. cit., 45.

³³⁴ Pierre Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, transl., ed. Russel Ford (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 67.

³³⁵ “Communal negativity” means an organised form of transgression “which describes the fact that transgressions do not destroy social life but are necessary for it. So, festivals, ceremonies and sacrifices are often forms of ‘communal negativity’ which are fundamentally stable.” See Benjamine Noys, op. cit., 86.

“definition” of what transgression means.³³⁶ According to Bataille’s views on literature and its functions, transgression can also be a medium for revelation, which tells more about the relationship of the triangle and also points to the absurd paradox of the “death of God” – if God has to be dead, then he must have been alive (or: born) as well:

Another form of the transgression is operative more directly in the descriptions and actions of characters. If bourgeois society forbids nudity, nudity is here revealed. If society respects the dead, the dead (corpses) are here [*in the text – I.J.*] disrespected. Transgressive reversals and contrasts such as these generate textual ideas and structure the text.³³⁷

In such interpretation transgression shows death as a phenomenon without meaning (God must be dead). The sacrifice has accomplished its task: “There is no difference between death and life, and there is no fear from it or defense against it, it invades everything without giving rise to any resistance.”³³⁸ The human existence has changed its very (Christian, according to Klossowski) nature by overcoming the death of God, and, paradoxically, also the death of the human. Existence, for Bataille, is communication between particles of “being” and between “particles”. Being is always a group of particles whose relative autonomies are maintained. The existence of each particle is ordered by a constitution transcending the constituent parts, their relative autonomy. Particles are pursued by anguish, they surrender to the desire to submit the world to their autonomy, they are condemned to wishing to be other: all and necessary.³³⁹ And, again, it is death that shows how this “real world” (or, in other words, the world of the project) “can only have a neutral image of life, that life’s intimacy does not reveal its dazzling consumption until the moment it gives out.”³⁴⁰ In my opinion, fainting thus delineates the “edge” in the concept of the “death of God” in this novel, because the state of fainting is simultaneously the state of being dead and alive.

So what is it that is really going on here, during the Mass? At first, there is a public place, church (church has similarities with marketplace³⁴¹), which is supposed to be a sacred place. It turns out that the representative of the sacred, the priest, is also one of those who provoked the scandal, and now he has lost his strength, has fainted, as if being dead while still alive. Consequently, the sacred in a way has come to its end – Robert will never be the same priest again, and everyone in the congregation is aware of the absence of the sacred, grappling

³³⁶ Benjamine Noys, op. cit., 86.

³³⁷ Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 61.

³³⁸ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, op. cit., 45.

³³⁹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 85.

³⁴⁰ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, op. cit., 47.

³⁴¹ First of all, they are both public places where social actions take place. In ancient thinking (and that was well-known to both Nietzsche and Bataille), the marketplace or agora was an open space where people’s daily religious, political, judicial, social and commercial activities took place. (“Agora”, *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/9404/agora>, accessed on 27/07/ 2010). The same could be said of the church – congregation gathers for religious, social and sometimes also political, judicial and commercial activities.

for ways to overcome it. In this moment, Robert dies as a priest, as a representative of the sacred. At the same time, he is resurrected for the mediation of the absolute. As I see it, there are some parallels with Nietzsche's "death of God" concept. Here too the sacred is doubly dead – from weakness and agedness and murdered simultaneously. Who is the murderer? From the very first sight, the answer seems clear – she, of course, Eponine, because her lust for Robert has become a knife. But we must remember that with an assertion like that we take the Christian position, where lust is "bad" and must be condemned as the opposite of piety. Bataille goes further still, compared to Nietzsche, as this death is a simulation. Robert is not dead, not even ill – he is simply exhausted from temporal passion and is ready to give up his sacred identity. In fact, the sacred here has simulated a suicide by renouncing its identity (as the state of fainting resembles the state of death), and others are forced to live on with this sense. On the other hand, the fainting of Robert can as well be interpreted as reaching "the edge", i.e. knowing that God is dead. Fainting as a symbol in this novel shows the possibility which frees a human being from the (Christian) tension between life and death. The one who has fainted is biologically alive even if appearing to be dead. Thus the "death of God" gains a meaning which is useful only for the one who reflects on the tension between life and death; salvation is possible only through the lack of the Saviour. In other words, the Saviour is essential and needed only as long as "he" carries within himself a possibility of dying, a possibility "not-to-be" or vanish. Especially in the High Mass, the Saviour is really present in the form of his death (as the "real presence" in the bread and wine).³⁴² Still, if the sacrifice in fact is an evil comedy which demands that a sole individual dies in the place of all the others,³⁴³ there must be the one who demands the death of God – and Bataille finds it in the priest, since the priest speaks out the consecration formula: "What consecration abolishes in the profound meaning of the transgression are – under the form of the bread and wine – the *transgressions* of the flesh, since its desires are what are nailed upon the cross."³⁴⁴ To put the interpretation into the model of the Christian tradition described previously, Robert could be a Christ-figure who is betrayed by his twin-brother; both of them are Saviours and traitors for each other and both of them gain and give the salvation through the text and death which is common for both of them. The text, literature becomes the transgression of the flesh, since it is a desire to act which has been sacrificed to the realm of the absolute.

³⁴² Pierre Klosowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, op. cit., 69.

³⁴³ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 98.

³⁴⁴ Pierre Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, op. cit., 69.

c) Conclusion: Bataille's concept of the "death of God" in *L'Abbe C.*

There are a few points I would like to accent when speaking about the "death of God" in *L'Abbe C.* Firstly, there is a unity between text and life and between text and religion as well. Secondly, there is a division into the world of the project, where God could as well be a thing, and the world of the absolute, where God's absence is present after the "death of God" or in the moment of the "death of God". Thirdly, this interpretation concerns transgression as essential to the "death of God" concept in Bataille's novels. Admittedly, it is hard to define transgression as a "concept". In the context of *L'Abbe C.*, it can be said that, as far as the function of transgression is to carry the transgressor to the limit, the concept includes at least two characteristic marks. First, transgression affirms the limited being, and, second, it can be understood as an overcoming of the text, which gives a new meaning to it. As a tool of revelation, transgression is also a process in which a human being becomes aware of death; still, transgression is not violent; it does not change anything; rather, it highlights the meaning of the "death of God".

The phenomenon which unites literature, life and religion is inner experience. The words which are *usable* remain in the realm of the project, while "purity belongs to the silence alone and thereby to the absence of the speakable."³⁴⁵ As an aspect of inner experience, literature is also the opposite of language, and as such it has a potential to become a site where the "death of God" happens: "[I]t refuses to communicate, preferring to be absolutely powerless, and thus becomes, paradoxically, a super- or anti-communication – and the meaning it conveys, a refusal to mean, or meaninglessness itself."³⁴⁶ Still, the meaninglessness also has a meaning, which is "the ecstatic emptiness of the inner experience, a glimpse of the 'unknowable'".³⁴⁷ In this way, the difference between meaning and meaninglessness can be sketched out – whereas meaninglessness is part of inner experience, the meaning created by the activity or constructed by means of the project is not. Activity gives meaning, which is the project, constructed explanation and usefulness. The project or activity puts a human being into the prison of meanings and useful objects, throwing the human being out of the realm of the absolute. As Bataille himself puts it, it is the realm where the depths of the world have opened; what he sees and what he knows no longer has any meaning, any limits.³⁴⁸ The death of God liberates a closed space which could eventually open on the impossible. In a sense, "God" marks the outer limit of thought and experience for a community, a limit beyond which meaning and experience dissolve into "nothingness".

³⁴⁵ Pierre Klossowski, *Such a Deathly Desire*, op. cit., 65.

³⁴⁶ Tommaso Giartosio, op. cit., 27.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Georges Bataille, *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 98.

Bataille was sensitive to the significance of God as a figure, the *point* in which all sources of authority meet. The deity is also the “object” of mystical experience, also the fountainhead of reason, the father, and the source of the word. He is the origin of an order in which all things remain subordinated to the “possible”.³⁴⁹ The juxtaposition *possible/impossible* also refers to the authors of *L'Abbe C*. It is worth mentioning that the text is completed only for the editor – it is unfinished for both dead brothers, for Charles as well for Robert. The meaning of literature is also of great importance – Robert dies, tortured by the Gestapo after finishing his notes; Charles dies after giving the manuscript for to the editor. The editor stays alive but undergoes psychoanalytic treatment while working with the text.³⁵⁰ Thus, the “trinity” of the authors embody inner experience, as it is described in the *Summa Atheologica* as well.

Declaration of silence is reminiscent of that vocal silence which constitutes one of the typical traits of [...] figure of *L'expérience intérieure* – the double. Robert is, in Charles' eyes, the one who understands him, reads him, his silent *reader*; he is also [...] Charles' *discourse*, the subject of his text: he turns Charles into an author. Robert has the power to *act upon* Charles, not only as reader/discourse, but also [...] through a threefold action: he *loves* Charles [...], he *forgets* him [...], and, eventually, in the Nazi prison, he tries to *kill* him. [...] The symmetry extends even to the desire to kill ‘the other’: Charles admits that ‘indirectly through his book, [he] yet had to annihilate, to kill’ Robert. Finally, the abbe [...] is of course also [Charles] physical *double*, his twin.³⁵¹

The desire to kill the other also means to acknowledge oneself as a subject capable to act upon the other; through the desire to get rid of the other, doing away with the notion of the object (such as represented by God, for example), the experience is necessarily immanent rather than transcendent, the later contained by the realm of authority and specific goals. Still, keeping in mind that the twins are *doubles* of each other, the death of one brother also means the death of the other. Thus, by sacrificing the other through the text, by murdering the deity, the murderer also dies, i.e. “the subject is also annihilated.”³⁵² Both of them die, the sacrifice (God) and the one who sacrifices God (a priest). This conclusion is more in accord with the Christian interpretation if one keeps in mind that, for Catholics, Jesus dies in the Mass every time anew and a human being has to die for the old life to be reborn into the life of Christ. This simple equation does not touch the moral aspect (which can also be strongly related to the historical and cultural circumstances of Christianity) and, as such, concerns the realm of the absolute, thanks to the “death of God” and of the human. This kind of death is freely chosen by the one who dies and, as such, can also be interpreted as a sacrifice (for the sin of the humankind in Jesus' case and for the sake of the life in Christ in the case of a human being). As Bataille himself puts it:

³⁴⁹ Michelle R. Pollock, op. cit., 63.

³⁵⁰ Tomasso Giartosio, op. cit., 30–31.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 37.

³⁵² Michelle R. Pollock, op. cit., 64.

The realm of morality is the realm of project. The opposite of project is sacrifice. Sacrifice falls into the forms of the project but only in appearance (or to the extent of its decadence) [...] Nothing in sacrifice is put off until later – it has the power to contest everything at the instant that it takes place, to summon everything, to render everything present. The crucial instant is that of death, yet as soon as the action begins, everything is challenged, everything is present. Sacrifice is immoral, poetry is immoral. [...] This is so barely paradoxical that the sacrifice of mass is, in its essence, the greatest of all crimes. The Hindus, the ancient Greeks knew the profound immortality of sacrifice.³⁵³

To keep the divinity of the Mass, it should not become an action. Like it is in the case of literature, the Mass should subsist in the desire for the truth and not be the truth itself. Like literature has an author, the Mass has the performer – the priest. Considering that both literature and the Mass are means of communication, it is important to note that, in distinction from literature that has an author, the capability of the Mass to convey its meaning is ensured by its performer. However, the author and the performer are both bound by the necessity to die. That is to say, for literature to fulfil its aim as the means of communication, the author must be dead, absent. Similarly in the Mass – the priest must die, so that participants could become witnesses to his death, thereby facing the tenuous “truth” that God (as the God of the Church, Christianity, dogma, represented by the priest) has died. The Mass cannot be completed without observers attending the Mass in a vain try to know the desire which the death they witness is about. From such a point of view it can be said that the Mass, for Georges Bataille, is literature – a site where the process of the “death of God” takes its place endlessly.

3. 3. God has died in an outrageous death: *Story of the Eye*

This is a novel Bataille published with a pseudonym Lord Auch in 1928. As I have already pointed out, the novel has a commentary written by Bataille; Besides, it contains a reference to his father, and there is also a reference to a novel the author has written previously (W.C.), using the pseudonym Troppmann. This is the information worth keeping in mind while continuing the interpretations of novels (Henri Troppmann is the main character of *Blue of Noon*). He also explains the meaning of the pseudonym used in this novel in Preface to W.C.: “Lord is English for God (in the Scriptures): Lord Auch is God relieving himself. The story is too lively to dwell upon; every creature transfigured by such a place: God sinking into it rejuvenates the heavens.”³⁵⁴ Bataille’s assertion helps to interpret the narrative, full of liquids

³⁵³ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 136.

³⁵⁴ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 45.

of the human body as well as sexual fever – in a way the text itself is a relief. Like it was for de Sade, sexual relief helps to modify the object (a human being), so that the necessary suffering should be obtained from it. In this sense, modification means destruction, as the plot clearly shows.³⁵⁵ This work, like other novels of Bataille, describes human consciousness as the eroticism of agony, like it was for de Sade. It is eroticism where

death is the only end to the odyssey of pornographic imagination when it becomes systematic; that is, when it becomes focused on the pleasures of transgression rather than mere pleasure itself. Since he could not or would not arrive at his ending, Sade stalled. He multiplied and thickened his narrative. [...] Bataille manages to eschew anything resembling the counter-idealisms which are Sade's blasphemies [...]; his blasphemies are autonomous.³⁵⁶

Compared to *L'Abbe C.*, the narrative of this novel is in some sense reversed, i.e. it begins with observation, and reason in this narrative is viewed more as an obstruction which has to be overcome (or modified, as explained before) – the protagonists of this novel try to do it in all possible ways. There are two main characters: Simone and the “I”-person, the narrator, a young man (teenager – he is sixteen at the beginning of the book). They fall in love with each other, and their first sexual encounter takes place without touching, later it becomes co-masturbation and they involve in their play a young, unwary and naively pious girl – Marcelle. She is one of their friends who, as Bataille puts it, has an “unusual lack of will power”.³⁵⁷

At a party, also attended by Marcelle, they drink a lot of champagne and involve other adolescents in their games, while Marcelle experiences a mental breakdown, locks up in the wardrobe and later on is put into a madhouse. The narrator flees from his parents' house; he has taken a gun (which, of course, can be explained as a symbol pointing to death), and, together with Simone, they visit Marcelle in the madhouse. The couple become obsessed with Marcelle and crave to involve her in their sexual play again. They reach Marcelle through the window and masturbate together, and, soon after that, help Marcelle to flee from the mental hospital. Marcelle tells that she has been locked in the wardrobe by a Cardinal, the priest of the guillotine.³⁵⁸ When Marcelle realises that the narrator is the man she is calling the Cardinal (in a way, he is – he was dressed as one when she had the mental breakdown), she hangs herself. Then, for the first time, the young couple copulate next to the young girl's dead body. After that, they both flee to Spain and meet Sir Edmund. Together they witness a bullfight, performed by a young matador, Granero, who is killed by the bull. Following that, they go to a Catholic church, and the culmination of this short novel takes place there –

³⁵⁵ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 115.

³⁵⁶ Susan Sontag, *Styles of the Radical Will*, op. cit., 61–62.

³⁵⁷ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 12

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

Simone aggressively seduces a young priest, and they three celebrate a blasphemous parody of the High Mass, involving the desecration of bread and wine (they use the young priest's urine and semen to replace the sacraments). Finally, Simone strangles the priest to death during his final orgasm. At first sight, we can say that Christianity dies under the pressure of eroticism. After this murder, the trio escape to Andalusia, and Sir Edmund purchases a yacht, so they can continue their travelling and dangerous games.

Although this story appears like pornography *par excellence*, this is one of the most often interpreted and most popular of Bataille's novels. In the context of the "death of God", I see two approaches how to read the novel. The first is through analysis of symbols Bataille uses to develop the narrative. The second again revolves around Bataille's High Mass (like in the interpretation of *L'Abbe C.*) and also dwells on killing/sacrificing the priest. The symbolism of this novel is closely related to Mass, and its main symbol, i.e. the eye, is present in Bataille's both variations of the High Mass (the first is the bull-fight where Granero is killed, and the other – the assassination of the priest).

In the text there are a few interesting theological and religious symbols that can lead the reader to the subtext, i.e. to the text whereby the "death of God" concept can be easily seen and explained. Eroticism plays a greater role in the *Story of the Eye* when compared to *L'Abbe C.* Eroticism shows itself as "an insane world whose depths, far beyond its ethereal forms, are infernal".³⁵⁹ It is the most moving of realities and, at the same time, the most ignoble. In the traditional Christian understanding, there is a certain prohibition with regard to eroticism; besides, it is tragic, horrible – as Bataille proclaims – probably because it is divine.³⁶⁰ And thus even this pornographic narrative takes another, more contradictory direction. In the very heart of eroticism lies love, inasmuch as it is in the very heart of the divine. The difference between eroticism and the divine is culturally and socially constructed, and my challenge is to deconstruct this stratum and find a shared point of essence in both of them through the "death of God" concept. As Bataille himself points out, "there are two movements in eroticism. One's in harmony with nature; the other questions it. We can't do away with either. Horror and attraction intermingle."³⁶¹ Thus, eroticism in its dialectics simultaneously relates violence and love by letting one know that it is the same with the divine – love is subordinated to violence through death. Using a metaphor of human love, Bataille writes:

³⁵⁹ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 69.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 109.

The ignorance of the man who hasn't seen God *in all his glory* is profound, but more profound if God doesn't reveal to him that HE DOESN'T EXIST. Similarly, I know a woman only by loving her, but I turn away from her in the same instant if she doesn't die. And I misunderstand every object that, having not dazzled me infinitely, doesn't deceive me infinitely.³⁶²

In other words, awareness of the “death of God” subordinates love towards God and, thus, the sense of the presence of the absent God. In *Story of the Eye*, the love the couple feels towards Marcelle is kindred to this feeling. Furthermore, the “death of God” manifests in this novel also in other ways that I have already mentioned, and I will return to the issue of the “sense of presence of God's absence” in the conclusion of this doctoral thesis. Now I would like to look more closely at the symbols in this novel.

The main one is included in the title of the book, the eye – or egg. In the beginning, Simone has developed a mania for breaking eggs with her butt, when Marcelle attends their party. While the protagonists watch the bullfight in Madrid, Granero kills the first bull, and the animal is castrated. Simone then inserts these taurine testicles in her vagina, while enjoying the next fight. However, the next bull kills Granero, and the matador's face is mutilated. As the corpse of Granero is removed from the stadium, his right eye has become disengaged from its socket and is hanging – bloody and distended. In fact, there was a 20 years old matador called Granero, and he was killed by the bull in 1922. It is also a fact that his eye dangled from the socket, as the body was carried away from the arena. Bataille knew about this event from newspapers and photographs in them. The death of Granero is not only a documented detail used in the story; it is also a reference to sacrificial slaughter of bulls and, thus, to the cult of Mithra.³⁶³ It seems useful to note that Mithra was a Persian god of light, who in Hellenistic times was associated with the Greek Helios, i.e. the Sun. Bull slaughtering was performed for the sake of fertility, and keeping in mind this mythology can also reveal yet another dimension of Granero's death in the novel.³⁶⁴ Simone is fascinated with the bullfight and asks sir Edmund to get raw balls of a killed bull. She inserts one of them into her vagina, watching the death of Granero, and the narrator concludes:

Two globes of equal size and consistency had suddenly been propelled in opposite directions at once. One, the white ball, had been thrust into the “pink and dark” cunt that Simone had bared in the crowd; the other, a human eye, had spurted from Granero's head with the same force as a bundle of innards from a belly. This coincidence, tied to death and to a sort of urinary liquefaction of the sky, first brought us back to Marcelle in a moment that was so brief

³⁶² Georges Bataille, *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 103.

³⁶³ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 33.

³⁶⁴ “Mithra.” *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/386025/Mithra>, accessed on 07/02/2012.

and almost insubstantial, yet so uneasily vivid that I stepped forward like a sleepwalker as though about to touch her at eye level.³⁶⁵

The globes that the narrator speaks about, in my opinion, could as well be the globes of experience – Simone has an eye as a symbol to inner experience, and as such it belongs to the realm of the absolute, while Granero’s eye is violently thrown out of the realm where it belongs to, i.e. from the human body. Although being involved in the sacrificial ritual, the roles of the sacrificer (matador) and the sacrifice (bull) have been changed and, thus, Granero belongs to the realm of the project because of his death. Simultaneously, Granero’s innards are out, his inside has become the outside at the moment of death; probably here emerges a transition between the worlds that cannot happen in a normal process of sacrifice. Each globe represents a space of the divine (absolute) and a space of the human (project), and the moment of tearing them apart could be their separation as well as intermingling. Besides, the reference to the death of Marcelle connects the symbol of the eye with the “death of God”.

Furthermore, the interpretation of the eye as a religious symbol and its meaning in “Bataille’s system” of thinking could be of help in explaining the thesis proposed in this work. In fact, we can say that the young couple “wears an eye”: they have an eye or its equivalent (an egg, a ball of the bull) in a literal sense, and they use it in their sexual play. The symbolism of the eye is very broad; it is also a widespread religious symbol. From possible interpretations, I will choose those that fit my theme, i.e. the “death of God” concept. As an active organ of visual perception, the eye is closely linked with light and, thus, with intellectual perception and discovery of truth – the eye knows because it sees.³⁶⁶ Does the young couple know something that others do not? What is the sense of their brutality and perversion? The day of Granero’s death is a hot one, and sun shines – is there a possibility that the hotness of the day as well as the two globes propelling in opposite directions hint to the presence of the divine?

As the sun in some cultures is the eye of the supreme God, i.e. an attribute of the divine. It reveals moral and religious values, justice and righteousness. It seeks to discover and see everything, and so it becomes a symbol for a superior being who sees everything and takes vengeance. It sees everything that belongs to the past, present and future at once. The same could be said about the “inner eye” as a symbol for knowledge and understanding. In the Christian symbolism, it designates the believer’s awareness that God opens to knowledge of his law and, therefore, of good and evil. God sees all and everything, and no one can escape his gaze. It is also the eye of the “good” Providence, who sees the pious ones and

³⁶⁵ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 30.

³⁶⁶ “The Eye”, Lindsey Jones, ed. in chief, op. cit., Vol. 5: 2940.

listens to their prayers – thus it becomes a symbol for inner purity. The human eye, in contrast, causes scandal and sin (Mt. 6:22-23). For this reason, it must be plucked out and thrown away – as Granero’s eye, literally. Mystics point out that the “eye of the heart” is bound with faith, and it is the place where the divine meets the human.³⁶⁷

In addition to the history of the religious symbolism of the eye, one must ask a question, is there any “Batailleian” symbolism of the eye, or can this interpretation go on, using religious meaning of the symbols? Yes and no, as for Bataille, the eye is a metaphor of the circle of knowing and nonknowing. The ocular sphere has a blind spot that makes vision possible (exactly like not-knowing, which makes knowing possible).³⁶⁸ The blind spot of understanding is similar to the structure of the eye. Keeping in mind that in understanding one sees oneself or “an exploration of what is possible to the being”, the blind spot becomes a knowledge which loses itself therein. So clarified, the eye also symbolises the ultimate possibility for nonknowledge to be knowledge.³⁶⁹ This spot is in the basis of vision and guarantees it. However, when vision gazes back at itself and considers its own act of vision (when vision sees itself), it sees only the blind spot – and it loses itself in that blindness. Similarly, when understanding understands itself, “sees” itself, the circle is broken, because it sees its “blind spot” of not-knowing.³⁷⁰ It is both a place of non-being (it cannot generate an image of its own) and a site where the power of vision is consolidated (where the elements of image are condensed). When the stores of knowledge are released, the blind spot of the eye is dilated. Knowledge in it is absorbed into the night of nonknowledge – the intersection of rays open violently to the catastrophe.³⁷¹ The eyes referred to throughout the *Story of the Eye*, and the symbols that point to the eye, are all somewhat mutable and deformed. At the same time, the only eye towards which the story is directed is that of the reader – this eye sees the actual surface of the text.³⁷² Therefore, as the book is called the *Story of the Eye*, the text may also be understood as reflecting the meaning of literature and language within the context of the “death of God” and human capability to rethink and retold the story of the “death of God.” The upturned or deformed eye hints to the ecstasy which is closely related to the awareness of the “death of God”:

The upturned eye discovers the bond that links language with its limits; it indicates the moment when language, reaching its bounds, overreaches itself, explodes and radically

³⁶⁷ “The Eye”, Lindsey Jones, ed. in chief, op. cit., Vol. 5:2941–2943.

³⁶⁸ Alan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual. Commitment, Subjectivity, and the Performative in the Twentieth Century French Tradition* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 288.

³⁶⁹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 110-111.

³⁷⁰ Alan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual. Commitment, Subjectivity, and the Performative in the Twentieth Century French Tradition*, op. cit., 288.

³⁷¹ Leslie Anne Boldt, “Translator’s Introduction”, op. cit., xviii-xix.

³⁷² Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 58.

challenges itself in laughter, tears and ecstasy. For Bataille, the enucleated or rolled-back eye marks the zone of the philosophical language, the void into which it pours and loses itself but in which it never stops talking. According to Foucault, the eye in Bataille delineates the zone shared by language and death, the place where language discovers its being in the crossing of its limits: the non-dialectical form of philosophical language. The eye establishes the connection between the death of God and the experience of finitude. Perhaps in the movement that carries it toward total night, the experience of transgression brings to light this relationship of finitude to being, this moment of the limit, that anthropological thought, since Kant, could designate only from a distance and from inside through the language of dialectics.³⁷³

From this point of view, the *Story of the Eye* can as well be interpreted as a farce, as not taking life seriously, although it contains descriptions of transgression in various senses: such as losing virginity and violating religion in the person of the priest. In other words, the eye, as it is used in the plot, is a symbol of the mind; it becomes a mind through action (being present in the act of copulation, for instance).³⁷⁴ Transgression takes place also in the assassination of the priest (I will return to this later). As a novel which contains a lot of violence, the *Story of the Eye* can as well be characterised as the anatomy of the trauma which forms the individual self; violence integrates the individual and the society.³⁷⁵ As such, the concept of trauma is related with transgression and thus also with the death of God.

The assassination of the priest is also of great importance. If we regard the priest as a representative of the divine, the murder has a much clearer message than in *L'Abbe C*. In this case, God is violated – in fact, raped – before he dies. The trace is simple – as a couple who “have an eye”, Simone and her suitor know something others cannot know. Sir Edmund, who takes the role of an observer (voyeur) of their actions, is passive, and his function is to empower the young ones (even if he fulfils his mission as an older pervert). In fact, the young couple breaks taboos: one is the prohibition of eroticism and another – the prohibition to kill. Thus, they transcend the traditional (Christian) moral attitude towards these two, and, consequently, violence wins and thus becomes unconquerable.³⁷⁶ Sir Edmund's mass differs from the High Mass in *L'Abbe C*. There are only four of them witnessing the mass, and the reference to Christianity is erotic. When they have already raped the priest, Don Aminado, Sir Edmund finds a key of the tabernacle and opens it. Simone says that hosts smell like sperm, and Sir Edmund agrees:

The hosts, as you see, are nothing other than Christ's sperm in the form of small white biscuits. And as for the wine they put in the chalice, the ecclesiastics say it is the blood of

³⁷³ Roberto Nigro, op. cit., 258–259.

³⁷⁴ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 118.

³⁷⁵ Jonathan Boulter, “The Negative Way of Trauma: George Bataille's *Story of the Eye*”, *Cultural Critique*, No. 46, The Trauma and Its Cultural Aftereffects (Autumn 2000), 154. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354412>, accessed on: 26/03/2011

³⁷⁶ More about death and eroticism as taboos – see George Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 40–48.

Christ, but they are obviously mistaken. If they really thought it was the blood, they would use red wine, but since they employ only white wine, they are showing that at the bottom of their hearts they are quite aware that this is urine.³⁷⁷

In fact, in the assassination of the priest, there is God in three persons, a God who reliefs himself by urinating and copulating with the dead priest's eye put in the vagina. In such an interpretation, the priest is only a symbol of religion. The death of God is accomplished by killing religion, by violating the taboo "you shall not kill" and thus overcoming humanity's attitude towards death, reversing it.³⁷⁸ The negativity thus reveals itself during the Catholic Mass where the finitude of sensible tokens passes into the interior worship of the reformed spirit; the cruelty of the sacrifice reveals itself, seeing the sacrifice of one's own or, more precisely, nothing.³⁷⁹ It is extremely important to remember that the nothing which may reveal itself through the text as a farce, for Bataille, could also be called "God".

For a fly fallen in ink, the universe is a fly fallen in ink, but, for the universe, the fly is the absence of the universe, a small cavity deaf to the universe in which the universe is lost to itself. Would a fly be to God what the hole in a tickled ass is to the voluptuary? Who conceals it from what it *is*? Leaves it open and faltering?³⁸⁰

Thus, the dialectics between religion and the absence of God is unavoidable. At the same time, a being (a fly, e.g.) is, like sacrifice, nothing in itself, without attention from the universe or God. If there is a possibility that God could covet a being, then the lust of God (or the Trinity, in this case – Simone, Sir Edmund and the narrator) is the urge towards love as well as the urge towards death.³⁸¹ Only that the trio as a symbol of the Trinity can be misleading. Even if Sir Edmund could be taken to represent the Holy Ghost, Simone – Jesus Christ, and the narrator – God the Father, even if there were any clues to such an interpretation in the text (except the trio itself and the order in which the reader is introduced with the characters), then Marcelle would stay out of the interpretation (except the case if she were interpreted as the Virgin Mary). In a way, she embodies the death of God herself. The couple meet the priest in the midst of his church service and duties; they tempt him and kill him – in the act of their bizarre love. The narrative shows how God is murdered, using the High Mass as a crime scene – once again the action takes place in a church; only in this case, the congregation is missing, God is left alone and is forced to assume the responsibility for his rejection. In fact, the young couple kills the "concept of God" because they are legitimate gods themselves.

³⁷⁷ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 35.

³⁷⁸ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 42.

³⁷⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Unsacrificiable", *Yale French Studies*, No. 79, *Literature and the Ethical Question* (1991), pp. 20-38, 24-25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2930245>, accessed on 24/07/2008

³⁸⁰ Georges Bataille, *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 104.

³⁸¹ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 42.

Another keyword for *Story of the Eye* could be love, which connects the “death of God” concept with Marcelle. The protagonists claim to love each other, and, even more, they both have loved Marcelle because of her absence from the world, living in some other realm, that of the divine or madness. They both know who actually killed Marcelle – it was God, a Christian God in his rage for lust and eroticism. Thus, the divine rises up against itself. Is it a suicide again? – I will return to this below. Meanwhile I would like to note that in this murder God becomes the symbol of the opposite, of corruption, while purity, symbolised by Marcelle, embodies lust and love. Simone and the narrator are like eyes, as they bring about scandal and sin, and, therefore, they must be plucked out and thrown away – as the eye of Granero. And yet, as humans they possess the will to life (and lust) and, hence, are stronger than God as they see him. In *Eroticism* Bataille shortly explains the Christian attitude with regard to this subject:

It goes without saying that the development of eroticism is in no respect foreign to the domain of religion, but in fact Christianity sets its face against eroticism and thereby condemns most religions. In one sense, the Christian religion is possibly the least religious of them all.³⁸²

The brightest characteristic mark of Marcelle is “an unusual lack of will power”.³⁸³ I would also relate this phrase to Nietzsche’s notorious *Wille zur Macht*, which is widely interpreted and mostly seen as a quality of humankind, a driving element of all life. To Nietzsche it goes hand-in-hand with denigrating life instead of affirming it.³⁸⁴ The sovereign life is reduced through the cost of lies and captivity in norms. Real suffering frees life from norms and secularism with the help of aestheticism (literature, for example). If there is real suffering, there is also a possibility to see that there is no smaller thing as “the truth of the self”.³⁸⁵

Marcelle cannot resist the temptation of the couple; yet, she does not choose to be a part of their games – she only takes the events as they come. In other words, in this non-resisting to life, she is impotent of the action, which leads her to the recourse of the divine authority.³⁸⁶ Like the text itself, Marcelle lacks a goal, she is “telosless”.

Bataille gives us the effects of behaviours on bodies. Brimming with arms, hands, blood, eyes, head, urine, dirt, ejaculations, and eggs, these are stories of bodies and fluids and very odd, very queer, pleasures. Bizarre acts seem to multiply possibilities endlessly, exceeding the law of desire and its coding of the body: genitalia, that which the law of utility deems the proper site of sexuality, are merely one more among this onslaught of objects. [...] There are not pleasures derived as the teleological satisfaction of desires. They are irreducible to the prior

³⁸² Georges Bataille, *Eroticism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 32.

³⁸³ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 6.

³⁸⁴ See, for example: Carol Diethe, op. cit., 224-225.

³⁸⁵ Alfred Glaesser, *Religionskritik, Glaubensbegruendung und interreligioeser Dialog. Vom deutschen Idealismus zu Nietzsche und zur Postmoderne* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2000), 347.

³⁸⁶ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 110.

determining logics of desire. There is nothing satisfying in these texts – and, certainly, nothing useful (in the scenes themselves or in our acts of reading them). Nothing useful and perhaps not even anything meaningful or legible or sensible at all. There is no guiding *telos*.³⁸⁷

The “teloslessness” of Marcelle makes her similar to the text which has no meaning, because, if it had any meaning, it would have become useful and, as such, a project. Marcelle wants to leave the party of the adolescents, but, after Simone’s collapse, she changes her mind and wants to take her dress off. After Marcelle’s collapse, probably because of shame, and after Marcelle attacks her mother, the couple cannot imagine themselves making love without the presence of Marcelle: “And her cunt would not open to me unless Marcelle’s ghost, raging, reddening, frenzied, came to make her brazenness overwhelming and far-reaching, as if the sacrilege were to render everything generally dreadful and infamous.”³⁸⁸ The presence of Marcelle is needed for the couple, although Marcelle is not obliged to take part in their copulating. When the couple becomes obsessed with the girl, it turns out that she is in the madhouse (the fact which could as well be interpreted as a reference to the Madman). In a way, Marcelle even died because she felt eroticism as a “sin”; it was something the Cardinal, one of her tempters, condemned. After masturbating, she asks the narrator: “Now we can get married, can’t we?”³⁸⁹ After escaping from the madhouse, she soon commits suicide by hanging herself in the wardrobe. A possible motif could be the anxiety that Marcelle feels when she meets the Cardinal, i.e. if Marcelle could be interpreted as God who commits suicide, then religion is the reason. After the death of Marcelle, Simone loses her virginity at last. The couple has sex near the girl’s dead corpse and, after the act, the narrator realises that Marcelle has become a total stranger, and so has Simone.

We were perfectly calm, all three of us, and that was the most hopeless part of it. Any boredom in the world is linked, for me, to that moment and, above all, to an obstacle as ridiculous as death. [...] Basically, the lack of excitement made everything far more absurd, and thus Marcelle was closer to me dead than in her lifetime, inasmuch as absurd existence, so I imagine, has all the prerogatives.³⁹⁰

The absurdity of Marcelle’s life and death is also a link to her divinity. There is nothing explainable or rational in the divinity, for Bataille, quite the opposite, the divine is the divine because of the absurdity. Non-being is rooted in nonknowing. This is why Christianity is an egoistic religion – it concentrates on the self and relates “humankind to that in man which denies nature (to idea).”³⁹¹ Marcelle has been withdrawn from the world – “if she was still

³⁸⁷ Shannon Winnubst, “Bataille’s Queer Pleasures: The Universe as Spider or Spit”, in Shannon Winnubst, ed., op. cit., 89f.

³⁸⁸ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 11.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 44.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 24.

³⁹¹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 115.

attached to the world, then purely by way of orgasms.”³⁹² This is the reason why her death does not include a tragic note – rather, it is the consciousness of one’s eternal strangeness (Simone’s as well as Marcelle’s, when looked from the perspective of the narrator). In the end, it turns out that Marcelle’s presence in spite of her death has become unavoidable – after the assassination of the priest, the narrator contemplates the priest’s eye in Simone’s vagina:

Now I stood up and, while Simone lay on her side, I drew her thighs apart, and found myself facing something I imagine I had been waiting for in the same way that a guillotine waits for a neck to slice. I even felt as if my eyes were bulging from my head, erectile with horror; in Simone’s hairy vagina, I saw the wan blue eye of Marcelle, gazing at me through tears of urine.³⁹³

This is also the place in the novel where the story of the eye – or of the “death of God” – comes to an end. The eye, the central object of the story, has been used in the transgression, and it becomes clear that, within the situation of the “death of God”, the new revelation which could bring a new knowledge becomes impossible.³⁹⁴ The game with the eye has occurred to be a sovereign operation which “reconfigures meaning by marking its limits within an excessive field of chance, nonsense, play and nonknowledge. [...] In the sovereign operation meaning becomes a function of play and nonknowledge.”³⁹⁵ Thus, transgression shows that there is nothing to oppose and nothing to violate but the human, the interior, the inner experience, which is “throughout an experience of the *impossible* (the impossible being both that which we experience and that which constitutes the experience). The death of God is not merely an ‘event’ that gave shape to contemporary experience as we now know it: it continues tracing indefinitely its great skeletal outline.”³⁹⁶ Thus, with the death of God, the infinity of interpretation becomes the limit of its own.³⁹⁷ Yet there is a possibility to overcome the absence of God and thus also overcome the infinity of interpretation, which is communication meaning to kill God in order not only “to liberate life from this existence that limits it, but also to bring it back to those limits that are annulled by limitless existence – as a sacrifice.”³⁹⁸

As the novel clearly shows, the lack of *telos* leads to the transgression without any meaning or knowledge. To overcome the absence of God means to kill God, as he has already been killed historically, in the history of thinking, to kill the God of the Church and violate

³⁹² Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 25.

³⁹³ Ibid., 40.

³⁹⁴ Susan Sontag, *Styles of the Radical Will*, op. cit., 65.

³⁹⁵ Luois Kaplan, “Unknowing Susan Sontag’s Regarding: Recutting with Georges Bataille”, <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.109/19.2kaplan.txt>, accessed on 18/04/2012.

³⁹⁶ Michael Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression”, op. cit., 32.

³⁹⁷ Peter Bebergal, “A Meditation on Transgression. Foucault, Bataille and the Retrieval of the Limit”, <http://www.docin.com/p-112372235.html>, accessed on 13/05/2012.

³⁹⁸ Michael Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression”, op. cit., 32.

everything that is sacred in order to free it from the system and knowledge, because, for Bataille, God is the nothingness where a human meets the solitude through his/her own death. God is the impossibility “to know”, the nonknowledge. While putting God to death means to communicate, any attempt to “make God alive” means to put God in the frame of human knowledge: the situation analysed in the character of the Count in the next novel.

3. 4. Dealing with the dead God after the “death of God” concept has fulfilled itself: *The Dead Man*

This novel was published after Bataille’s death and can be taken for one of his last works. Author’s own commentaries are also available, but they say almost nothing about the possibility to read the “death of God” in the novel, and this is the reason why I do not use them for the interpretation. Bataille is still exquisite in his pornographic details, while the emphasis on action is not so pronounced in this novel. The key element in the narrative of *The Dead Man* is presence. Notably, it is the presence of a dead man, not of a living one, and it is shown through the lens of Marie, who was the dead man’s lover and knows that she herself would soon die. Thus it can be said that the “death of God” within this novel can be interpreted through the lens of the human’s awareness of the death of her/his own. This novel is very short; yet, it is full of tension. Comparing its content with that of the two novels analysed so far, this novel is marked by an enormous sense of presence of God’s absence which is unavoidable. Has this sense something to do with overcoming reason? Are there any other symbols in the text which illustrate the overcoming of reason?

Yes and no – from my point of view, the text contains at least three symbols of the “dead God”, at least if Bataille’s symbolism is considered within the context of modern popculture. I will explain this consideration in the first step of my analysis of the novel and meanwhile just name the symbols. The first symbol is a dying God, the second symbol is an absent God and the third one is that of a God who is between the dead and the living. Let me start from the beginning and explore the narrative of the novel, while sketching out these three possible interpretations of the text.

In the beginning of the novel, Marie remains alone with Edouard, who is dead. Before dying, he has asked her to take off her clothes. She enters in the inn, wearing only a coat, and gets dead drunk. After waking, the only word she says is “dawn”, but no one understands it. Then one man, Pierrot, who is drinking in the inn, sucks her after the dance. Then comes something Bataille calls “Marie’s Crisis” (he has left notes under this text): she calls for Edouard, but no one can understand, as her voice becomes one with the wind wailing in a

“mad-woman’s call”³⁹⁹. Soon after that, she resumes, explaining the first saying: “I am going to die at dawn.”⁴⁰⁰ Her call for the dead man is ghastly, desperate and imperious at once – and the irony (or logic?) of it is that he comes as a ghost – soon after the dwarf-sized Count arrives, asking who is Edouard. Marie answers: “You don’t know who you are anymore.”⁴⁰¹ She remarks that the Count looks like a tombstone and admits she is afraid of him. Pierrot satisfies the Count with his hand, while Marie pisses on the Count (because she wants him to go away, she is still afraid of this passive man), and he gets erected. The perversion begins, which recalls “the slaughtering of a pig or the laying to rest of a god”.⁴⁰² Pierrot makes love with Marie, and others look at them. Then Marie returns to her senses – the dawn has come. She feels “cold, gripped by an icy happiness, suspended in an unintelligible emptiness.”⁴⁰³ The Count asks Marie to accompany him to her house, and she asks if he is a devil, because he wants her to go to her house. A moment ago, she saw the insistence of death in his face. When they are in the bedroom, the Count gets undressed and Marie as well. At the same time, the bedroom is full of the presence of the dead man. Then, she breaks an ampoule and falls; probably, it is a suicide. At the end of the novel, the Count sees two hearses proceeding slowly to the cemetery, and then he accidentally slips into the canal and drowns.

There are at least three ways how to interpret the novel from the perspective of the “death of God”. At first, there are *two* dead men – and both of them are present, both compete in the presence, but one of them, the Count, is still walking – he is a “dead man walking” (and is still ready to have sex). The other, Edouard, seems more powerful – Marie is bound to her words to die at dawn, and two hearses are ready, even if only symbolically. In fact, there are even three dead bodies – the Count falls into the canal, so it could be him who is left outside of the hearse; he probably dies, but he is not to be buried. Bataille indicates that there is a close link, affinity between eroticism and religion; they are both monstrous if judged from the perspective of common sense. They are both “closed books if we do not locate them firmly in the realm of inner experience.”⁴⁰⁴ Between the death of Edouard and the death of Marie, an orgy occurs, and the Count participates in it – as a reminder of the unbearable presence of the dead man. In fact, Marie has brought her eroticism (and religion, if I subjectively narrow the narrative of this novel) out of the inner experience. The inn is a public place, and there is no “clear sight” of the death of God. Instead of that, the reader is introduced to an orgy and copulation. The Count is passive, like death itself, and he is watching as Marie makes love

³⁹⁹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 180.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 182–183.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁰³ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 189.

⁴⁰⁴ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit. 37.

with Pierrot, wanting to have her himself. The representation of the sacred is missing – no priests, only the Count and memories of Edouard. Has the sacred changed its representative into the opposite? Or, perhaps, has the sacred changed its usual form and should be looked for in other symbols in contradiction to the ways humankind has used to think about it? In a symbolic manner, one of the keys to the interpretation of the novel in the context of Bataille’s concept of the “death of God” can possibly be found in the image of the Count or the “the dead man walking”, or zombie, to use modern popular language.

a) The dead God as “a dead man walking”: the dead God as a zombie

Interpretation of the image of the “dead God” as a zombie may be useful and very interesting when used in explaining the “concept” of the “death of God” within the context of modern popculture.⁴⁰⁵ As I have already pointed out, the symbols of Bataille’s fiction and elements of modern popculture can be seen as commensurable values. The reason for this consideration is very simple – to point out that ideas of philosophy of religion, such as that of the “death of God”, can be explained not only in the narrow field of this discipline itself but also in popular terms. Analysing literature from theological perspective, it is worth to highlight those symbols that appear comparable with some other symbols well-known in contemporary culture. Although the figure of the zombie is quite ancient (African mythology), it is only recently that it has taken the vivid form of a walking corpse. I believe that theology should be able to address the contemporary world, and it can be done, where fitting, by referring to a telling example in the popular culture that can help render the idea that the theologian wants to promulgate..

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger in his lecture *Nietzsche’s Word: “God is Dead”* thinks that with the “God is dead” exclamation the essential time begins, the last period in the history of metaphysics, because with it metaphysics becomes *Unwesen* (un-being).⁴⁰⁶ The “death of God” concept changes the usual order of the world. It does not mean to wake up one day in a godless world – *God has been here*, but he was killed, “we” have put him into the form and killed him.⁴⁰⁷ Thus, it is impossible to talk about the God of some philosophical concept or theological system, as the systems and concepts have destroyed the

⁴⁰⁵ There are many movies, where zombies are remarkable characters, and even such books as Max Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide. Complete Protection from the Living Dead* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003). Thanks to the image of a zombie, interesting parallels between the phenomenon of the “living dead” (which in certain aspects has developed from the voodoo zombies, a phenomenon that can be found in some African religions) and the Christian concept of resurrection can be drawn. Albeit, such analysis does not have much to do with the direct aim of my doctoral thesis, which is why I only mention the possibility here.

⁴⁰⁶ Martin Heidegger, op. cit., 193.

⁴⁰⁷ In his essay, Heidegger talks about Section 125 of Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*.

“living God”. Does the “death of God” concept mean that there is no God anymore? Does anything still have meaning? In fact, the awareness of this concept is a call to step outside the comfort, system and theological conceptions, and the language of Christianity, staying inside the world as it is.⁴⁰⁸ An attempt to return to the comfort of the system and to go on with making new theological conceptions would be an attempt to call the “old God” back to life, an attempt to restore the usual world order and thus make a new paradox where God is not only dead but also called back to life, a kind of a zombie, a “dead man walking”. The Count in this novel is an accurate picture of the “dead man walking”: he is passive, his presence is invincible; besides, he is the one who tries to get eroticism back in the bedroom, which could be symbolically interpreted as a caricature of the inner experience. He is the “old God” – his death at the end of the novel is nonsensical, but the fact remains – the living dead becomes the dead man after the death of a woman whom he desired. Bataille points out – what we call death, is in the first place the consciousness we have of it:

We perceive the transition from the living state to the corpse, that is, to the tormenting object that the corpse of one man is for another. For each man who regards it with awe, the corpse is the image of his destiny. It bears witness of violence which destroys not one man alone but all men in the end. The taboo which lays hold on the others at the sight of a corpse is the distance they put between themselves and violence, by which they cut themselves off from violence.⁴⁰⁹

In fact, the Count symbolises the absent God who is not conscious of his own absence, the God who “thinks” he is present. The Count is not conscious of his own death, it is “yet another death”, when the old God dies in the end of the novel, and there is nothing tragic in this death – he simply falls into water, in contrast to the tragic which can be discerned in Edouard’s or Marie’s deaths.

Notably, the Count has stuck in-between the states of the living and the dead; he is a *difference* himself, he is a symbol of Marie’s destiny, a witness to violence (quite literal). In a way, he is a passive violence, not the overcoming of reason. He is still in the process, as an unaccomplished link between the “definitive death” and the “little death”. As such, the Count is also somewhere between the moments of time – being unconscious of his death, he cannot be fully conscious of his living as well. It is also seen in Marie’s feelings towards the Count that I will analyse closer. Firstly, when the Count enters, Marie screams the name of Edouard and feels anguish – those two, Edouard and the Count, have something in common. She feels frightened. Secondly, she points out that the Count is the ghost of Edouard.⁴¹⁰ Thirdly, answering Count’s question as to who is Edouard, she answers that the Count does not know

⁴⁰⁸ Martin Heidegger, op. cit., 193.

⁴⁰⁹ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 44.

⁴¹⁰ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 180–182.

who he is anymore.⁴¹¹ Besides, the Count looks like a tombstone to Marie: he is a reminder of Edouard, and, simultaneously, he is a distant caricature of the ghost of Marie's lover. In this situation the Count reminds of the concept of the eternal return, explained by Nietzsche. The philosopher speaks about it in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as well as in *The Gay Science*. It is the eternal road/way from the gates of the moment backwards (*rueckwaerts*). Everything that can happen has already happened; even the moment itself. Simultaneously, everything that can happen still is going to happen; every happening has to go forwards and backwards at the same time.⁴¹² The "concept" of the eternal return has been interpreted as a possibility of speaking about consciousness "in time" through the reading of Nietzsche's *Will to Power*.⁴¹³ As I have already pointed out, Pierre Klossowski related the "death of God" with the eternal return, explaining it as an ecstatic moment where the "death of God" opens up itself to all its possible identities.⁴¹⁴ For Bataille himself, the eternal return is a concept which frees life of ends, unmotivates the moment and pushes a human being into solitude, where each moment is unmotivated, thus destroying life itself.⁴¹⁵ In *The Gay Science*, put in the mouth of a "demon", the eternal return is described in a more existential way:

This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!⁴¹⁶

Nietzsche continues with offering two possibilities: for the one who hears the spoken text of the demon, such words may appear either terrible, like a curse, or divine. This can also be related with the image of the Count, who himself is like a demon and at the same time the one who hears what the demon speaks. It seems that the image of the "dead man walking" also includes the very existential question Nietzsche asks further in this paragraph: "The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?"⁴¹⁷ In a way, the question can be interpreted also as an excuse for the life of the libertine, as well as the Christian examination of conscience.

Also, the "situation" of the eternal return is in fact where the Count finds himself: being already dead (as the ghost of the dead God, which reveals himself for the reader in the symbol

⁴¹¹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 183.

⁴¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, op. cit., 176–177.

⁴¹³ Carol Diethe, op. cit., 92–93.

⁴¹⁴ Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, op. cit., 57.

⁴¹⁵ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., xxix.

⁴¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op. cit., 273.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

of Edouard's absence), he is still alive and, as such, still embodies the possibility to become dead. The question of time and the moment is of great importance here – being an observer, the Count lacks activity which links him with the world of the absolute outside the consciousness of the Count himself. It seems like the Count is situated between two moments in time – he has little consciousness of the moment; he becomes the ghost of Edouard, and, simultaneously, he experiences ecstasy while observing Marie and Pierrot making love. He is like a link between the world of the project and the world of the absolute. In other words, he is like a voodoo sacrificer, trying to imagine the sacred but not being capable of such imagination.⁴¹⁸ Marie sees that the Count is the dead one, while he himself thinks he is still alive, like a zombie. The Count is stuck between what “has happened” and what “is going to happen”; he is himself an eternal return putting human beings in their solitude, in the realm where nothingness makes the rules. From the one side, from the viewpoint of his own, the Count represents the world of the order, but the meaning of his image cannot be accomplished without the viewpoint of Marie. As such, the Count is the difference which gives meaning to the ghost of Edouard in the context of Marie's grief.

The Count changes his state through the initiation, where Marie functions as a priest and the Count is the initiate. The chain of events where Marie is pissing on him, face-sits him and finally gets her teeth into his cock can also be interpreted as transformation – not only of the state of Marie (from passive to active; see also the third step of the interpretation) but also of the Count: he becomes alive, is born again from the cunt of a woman without a direct sexual act but rather through the violence of his “manhood”. Still, the Count remains passive until the moment when they both are leaving the inn, when his face suddenly embodies the “insistence of death”, expressing “only an infinite disenchantment, rendered cynical by a frightful obsession.”⁴¹⁹ When Marie wakes up, the Count is the one who arrives at a decision to go to Marie's house. By this activity, as Marie says, he becomes a devil. The meaning of the Count as a symbol of the “death of God” becomes clear: being a monster, he embodied not only the “death of God” but also the evil of humanity. To explain this evil, one can recall Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of humankind, so being killed by humans (according to the Christian myth). With the death on the Cross, the communication between humanity and the divine becomes possible. In other words, the divine was captured in the realm of possibility, in the realm of activity. As the Count symbolises the event of Christ as interpreted in Christianity, he is first of all a walking dead, a caricature of the absolute, as it can “be”. At the same time, being himself an eternal return, the Count is also a *moment* of the Crucifixion,

⁴¹⁸ Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, op. cit., 185, 199.

⁴¹⁹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 190.

the exact moment when the only Christian (and with him also Christianity) dies on the cross.⁴²⁰ Yet, he desires Marie who, from her side, knows what exactly she owes to the sunrise – her own death. Thus, the Count, in fact, desires the impossible, also becoming a symbol of Bataille’s atheology or “hermeneutics of the death of God”.⁴²¹ As such, the symbol clearly speaks to modern humankind, showing that, from this point of view, it is not God that modern humanity misses – it is the awareness of the “death of God”.

b) The God of a powerful absence

Another possibility how to interpret the “death of God” in *The Dead Man* is through the idea of the absent God, the one of whom the Count is a symbol, a reversed caricature, i.e. Edouard who “acts” in the novel only thanks to the love of Marie. Edouard is a ghost, and therefore his presence is ghostly. To recall the *Story of the Eye* and the narrator who saw a ghost of Marcelle in his obsession with that girl, can we concede a possibility that this might be the way Bataille interprets an obsessive love – through the image of ghost. Marie sees the ghost of Edouard and then goes mad. Does it mean that Edouard’s presence symbolises the presence of the divine love which has ended? Although this dead man is motionless, he has part in the violence – he is its victim (because his life has come abruptly to an end, and Marie craves for him frantically). In mythological thinking, anything coming too near a dead body is threatened by the destruction. Death presents a contrast between an unfamiliar region and everyday world; it is a danger for those left behind.⁴²² As for Marie, it really becomes a danger, but it is her choice at the same time – she *chooses* not to live in the world where presence has become absence, where the only possible way to see God is to look at the “old God” who is just a link, a process, not the divine itself. Choosing death, Marie chooses to overcome reason and, thus, be aware of the absence of the sacred, of the death of God. Death becomes for her the *unio mystica*, the way how she can be united with [her] God. After the death of Marie, the existence of the Count is not necessary anymore – she has chosen to die together with her “real God”, not to live with a caricature of God, the dead man walking.

So, as I see it, this novel is about a “death of God” after the “death of God” – and, in overcoming this absence, the “death of God” has become a presence. Marie’s living with the consciousness of Edouard’s death may represent that the conceptual, Christian God has to die

⁴²⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Twilight of Idols*, op. cit., 35

⁴²¹ Jeffry Kosky, “Georges Bataille’s Religion without Religion: a Review of the Possibilities Opened by the Publication of *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*”, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (January 2004), 78, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/379028>, accessed on 26/03/2011

⁴²² Georges Bataille, *Eroticism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 46.

naturally as well. As a result, the divine absence becomes present. Nietzsche illustrates this absence in his *Gay Science*:

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: “What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?”⁴²³

The madman preaches the death of God, emphasising the vanity of the Christian tradition: there is no God anymore, and churches have become horrifying monuments for the divine presence. Yet, he is the only one who feels this absence of the divine – God *has been there*, but has been killed by now. Space which was meant to be sacred is now full of the presence of the divine absence.

For Bataille, this presence is dreadful, like a feeling you cannot avoid when being near a dead body. Edouard differs from the Count because it is the presence of Edouard which gives anguish to Marie as Count enters into the inn. Her voice becomes one with the wind, which could also be a sign of the finitude of the human being – the wind is, and, before you can fix it, it is gone. So it is with the human. Unlike the Count, Marie is fully aware of the possibility of the death of her own, and she is bound by the promise to die at dawn. The Count as a symbol for the “death of God” concept signifies death in process. The will to power is weak in him, as it was in Marcelle. The Count is not pious, and he is not innocent, quite the opposite – he has seen lots of perversions and is corrupt. In the same way as the Christian God has been killed and resurrected by Christians – he is a God of the system, concept and threat. Besides, the Count is weaker than the other dead man. His erection fails in the presence of Edouard in Marie’s bedroom, when he realises that Marie is really going to die. Marie is ready to follow her dead lover to the grave, and she does so. The function of the Count is to embody the Edouard as a “real” dead God, thus outgrowing the myth of Edouard and making his absence a real presence for everyone in the inn (everyone is interested to know who was Edouard, and nobody answers that but Marie, and the answer can as well be interpreted in a way that Edouard is the one who does not know who he is anymore. Thus, with Edouard being totally dead, even in this sense he is stronger compared to the Count. God who is really dead and whose presence has turned into absence is much stronger for the devoted Marie than the God who seems alive, yet is just a zombie. Although they both seem to represent the “death of God”, Edouard’s death in the beginning of the novel makes him a dead God in a deeper sense than the Count is – the Count can be seen and touched, he can get erection and thus is present in the life of Marie who is in the centre of this novel. Edouard is

⁴²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, op. cit., 182.

absent to his self and thus indicates the death of God as a sense of presence of the absence of God: “The *absence of God* is no longer a closure: it is opening up to the infinite. The absence of God is greater, and more divine than God (in the process I am no longer myself, but an absence of myself).”⁴²⁴ In the symbol of the absent Edouard and the sense of presence of his absence, this novel touches the very heart of a devoted believer; it is Hamlet’s question – to be or not to be – existential, and also philosophical, and metaphysical. As a symbol, the absence of Edouard resembles the necessity to be aware of the death of one’s own in order to ask the question about God’s possibility to choose between life or death from the hand of a human being.

c) Bataille’s Good Friday: dying God within the body of the woman

No doubt that the main character of the novel is Marie. The novel concentrates on her experience, typically for Bataille, putting at least one of the symbols of the “death of God” within the character of a woman. Let us trace the development of Marie from the beginning to the orgy which is the transformation of herself. The novel begins with her awareness of being desperate because of Edouard’s death. This, I would say, is quite Christian, if we take the death of God as a wound between God and humanity, a wound which makes communication possible.⁴²⁵ Besides, she is naked, as she was born recently or was herself going to die; even more – she is out of her mind, out of control, and as such she is a stranger to herself. The courage she lacks to enter into the inn marks her transition from personal to public space (the inn, like a market place, is a public place, of course). The decision is made through the thought: “I shall go in. [...] They shall see me naked.”⁴²⁶ Knowing of the entering makes Marie trembling; she weeps before entering; she does not want to go; yet, she must. Her crying, when seen from a Christian perspective, reminds of Jesus’ tears in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42). Like Jesus, she is bound by the divine promise to die (as a sacrifice). The limits of Marie’s self are violated through the death of Edouard. She is able to recognise herself completely. She has overcome the limits of conscious contemplation, and thus the possibility of the impossible sacrifice or “simulacrum of death” becomes possible.⁴²⁷ After entering the inn, her state is changed – she claims she’s here to have some fun and drinks, acting opposite the weeping just a moment before, although there is despair in the way she acts and drinks.⁴²⁸ If sobbing is a signifier of the breakdown of communication, Marie must

⁴²⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth. Writing on Surrealism*, op. cit., 48.

⁴²⁵ See: Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 18–19.

⁴²⁶ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 170.

⁴²⁷ Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, op. cit., 92–93.

⁴²⁸ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 172.

be aware that there is no God anymore with whom to communicate. The wound has reached its end. She is aware of herself, situated in a public place, and the only possibility for her is to laugh in order to destroy the transcendence caused by the lack of the wound.⁴²⁹ She *knows* she has seen the death of God. She knows that the communication with God she used to know is not possible anymore. What she does not know is that she has become a “dead God” herself in order to be sacrificed. So she drinks and dances, thus becoming the kind of God Nietzsche would believe in. She remembers her promise – she murmurs the word “dawn” before being sucked by Pierrot. In the inn both “the moment of destructive potential and that of the radical release of energy”⁴³⁰ unite, and this union makes one think about a sacrifice where Marie could be the sacrificer and the sacrifice, simultaneously standing in both sacred and secular moments of time. Although she may appear to be a loser in time and space, almost like the Count, she is much stronger and more clearly the “dying God” when compared to the Count. Her sobbing, sweating, crying, groaning and moving also reminds of the Good Friday. So, I think that Marie can be interpreted as Christ, thus representing the Christian understanding of the “death of God”.⁴³¹ At the same time, Marie marks a transition of the woman from the state of the “thing” determined by the patriarchal viewpoint to no-thing or nothing, i.e. nothingness or the sense of the presence of the absent God. The woman has been “the Other”, but was never associated with the divine; moreover, the woman has not been associated even with a “self” because of the identification of the man with the male God.⁴³² Thus, the title of the novel, *The Dead Man (Le Mort, not La Morte)*, becomes ironical within the context of Western Christianity – the male God has died, and yet the divinity returns through the sacrifice of a female God. Of course, one could perceive this interpretation as too narrow, but it is important here to stress the feministic aspect of the interpretation of Bataille’s novels, because his works suffer from false interpretation where misogyny and “tales of an obscene, alien and crazed femininity”⁴³³ is reproached to the author (as we saw in the interpretation of the *Story of the Eye*). As such, Marie’s orgies embody the transgression which I will analyse in the fourth part of the doctoral thesis. To conclude the third step in the interpretation of this novel, I should add that eroticism, as it manifests in the case of Marie, is a “question of losing oneself knowingly”.⁴³⁴ Taking point that, for Bataille, in Christianity the initial moment of

⁴²⁹ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 54-55.

⁴³⁰ Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, “Sacrifice and Violence in Bataille’s Fiction”, op. cit., 93.

⁴³¹ Hans-Juergen Heinrichs, *Der Wunsch nach einer souveränen Existenz. Georges Bataille: Philosoph, Dichter, Kunsttheoretiker, Anthropologe* (Graz: Literaturverlag Droschl, 1999), 63.

⁴³² See, for example: Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 13–15.

⁴³³ See, for example, Ashley Tauchert, *Against Transgression* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 69.

⁴³⁴ Suzanne Guerlac, “‘Recognition’ by a Woman!: A Reading of Bataille’s *L’Erotisme*” in Allan Stoekl, ed., *On Bataille. Yale French Studies No 78* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1990), 91.

transgression was steered towards “the vision of violence transcended and transformed into its opposite,”⁴³⁵ *The Dead Man* can also be interpreted as a rehabilitation of Christianity, on condition that its God must be absent in order to become adorable.

3. 5. Dead God as the Absolute Nothing: *Madame Edwarda*

Two novels of Bataille – *Madame Edwarda* and *My Mother* – are probably the most relevant ones in the context of the “death of God”. They were both intended to be a part of a larger work *Divinus Deus*, which Bataille never fully finished, leaving just notes and drafts after his death. Still, both novels are more or less completed (it cannot be truly said about *My Mother*).⁴³⁶ There is no direct death in *Madame Edwarda*; nevertheless, it reflects the existence of human being which is perhaps even worse than death.

For Bataille, the absolute has both creative and destructive qualities, as I will show in further analysis. The method of telling this narrative recalls the English poet William Blake and his language of poetry. Blake said that God is the “essence” from which the individuals or “identities” proceed. A human being does not perceive God immediately, instead perceiving divine aspects in other individuals. This means that one individual recognises a divine aspect in another individual by using imagination. There is just one possible way how to think about a perfect God, and this is a perfect development of one’s imagination, using it as a life force.⁴³⁷

Perfect or, at least, almost perfect development of imagination is something to keep in mind when reflecting on Bataille’s method, which is literary narrative. Imagination is used as a creative force not only by the author of the text but also by his characters. At the same time, the reader’s imagination is developed using an uncharacteristic method for fiction, of which I will give a limited explanation later. I call this method simply as it appears in the text, namely, *text in brackets*. Such texts contain explanations or reflections on the foregoing. The same tension as it appears in the text is kept, i.e. the one who explains is the narrator himself. Such approach helps to build the image of the narrator – he is the one who acts and *is* the very existence as an individual, and simultaneously he is the one who reflects on this existence, is an observer of it.

I will divide the analysis of this novel into three parts. In the first part I will delineate the plot, including reflections in it. In the second part I will provide a compendium of

⁴³⁵ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 118.

⁴³⁶ See Publisher’s Note to Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., n. p.

⁴³⁷ Northrop Frye, “The Religious Feeling of William Blake”, Thomas Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 20–21, 26–27.

reflections from brackets. Third part will be devoted to Bataille as a mystic of sorts. I think that it is possible to speak about “Bataille’s mysticism”, which differs from Western Christian mysticism. *Madame Edwarda* can be perceived as a mystical novel, as in the subtext the author interprets his own mystical experience. Amy Hollywood has researched Bataille’s possible mysticism, and she points out that, when written in the first person, the text speaks more often as God than to God. This is a characteristic mark for the texts of Christian mystics (such as Augustine, Theresa of Avila or Mechthild of Magdeburg). The moments when the soul is shown as speaking to God are usually put in the third person’s allegorical and dramatic form, thereby achieving a distancing effect and undercutting the text’s autobiographical form. Mechthild of Magdeburg takes her subordination as a woman to its limit, negating herself so fully that the self is lost and becomes that place in and through which God speaks. Paradoxically, Mechthild’s work attains divine authority in her very act of self-denial.⁴³⁸

Self-denial as abandonment from awareness and consciousness and, thus, from reason is important for Bataille as well. This is his way how to achieve the nothingness. In *Guilty* he asserts that consciousness is the condition of a death that is achieved. One dies to the degree one is aware of dying. And, as death takes consciousness away, one is not just aware of one’s death: death is taking away this awareness.⁴³⁹ The deaths Pierre Angélique describes are complicated in their character. This novel reveals a possibility of talking about *inner death* and, even more important, about inner experience. I will explain these in detail in the process of outlining the plot of *Madame Edwarda*.

a) Observing God-the-Absolute within the framework of human existence: the plot

The author of this novel is Pierre Angélique (Bataille’s pseudonym), and it contains a foreword written by Bataille. It seems that by using a pseudonym and text in brackets Bataille intends the annihilation of writing. As I have already pointed out, Bataille speaks a lot about this necessity in another novel, *L’Abbe C*, pointing out that writing can be completed only if it is annihilated, if it is understood as a force which is simultaneously creative and destructive.⁴⁴⁰ In a way, Angélique does annihilate writing. The reflective notes tend to be philosophical. It seems that, using philosophy itself as a weapon, Angélique wages war to philosophy as a constructed system of thought. He explains the God-absolute, as far as it is

⁴³⁸ Amy Hollywood, “Bataille and Mysticism: A ‘Dazzling Dissolution’”, *Diacritics* 26.2, Summer 1996:79.

⁴³⁹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 7.

⁴⁴⁰ Georges Bataille, *L’Abbe C*, op. cit., 128

possible through literary narrative, not as a construction, but as a place where thinking and imagination develop and gain meaning.⁴⁴¹

Thus explained, the plot gains another dimension – the annihilation of writing and perhaps also a certain annihilation of existence along with that. In various works Bataille explains and emphasises his urge to write. Writing for him is a personal involvement in history, the effect of passion (another very important concept for Bataille, which will not be analysed in this paper). At the same time, the writer is very much on his own, and he or she must be a person who reveals to the solitude of everyone an intangible part which no one will ever enslave.⁴⁴² Literature is dangerous – it cannot be independent from the collective necessity for order, it is not ethical, nor does it pretend to function as a moral law. Thus, the “task of authentic literature is nevertheless only conceivable in terms of desire for a fundamental communication with the reader.”⁴⁴³ This position is seen in *Madame Edwarda* as well, especially when the author writes about the fragile tie between God and a human being as an existential entity.

The reason for the fragility of this tie is that God is hidden from the creation, and the only way how to reach him is through the moment of awareness of anguish of one’s existence (or non-being). In other words, God gains identity from two sides, or more precisely, between them: the author creates text, and this is the first identity of God, which is constituted by the symbols and language the author has chosen to describe God. The second identity emerges in the interaction between the text and the reader which depends on various conditions: such as reader’s education, personality, historical context, etc. From this point of view, the identity of God, created by the author of the novel can never be finished; it continues to develop with each new reader. God *is* in the author’s intentional text, and God *is not* in the reader’s “response”, because it can vary. The reader will never be able to find out what was the author’s intention and purpose in choosing this or that image, symbol or even narrative.

Madame Edwarda begins with an epigraph that could be used as a key in searching for the meaning of this novel and in describing the way how the narrative progresses.

Anguish only is sovereign absolute. The sovereign is a king no more: it dwells low-hiding in big cities. It knits itself up in silence, obscuring its sorrow. Crouching thick-wrapped, there it waits, lies waiting for the advent of him who shall strike a general terror; but meanwhile and even so its sorrow scornfully mocks at all that comes to pass, at all there is.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, op. cit., 11.

⁴⁴² Jean-Michael Besnier, “Bataille, the Emotive Intellectual”, op. cit., 16.

⁴⁴³ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 25.

⁴⁴⁴ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 147.

The first thing which is obvious about this passage – it becomes clear for the reader that this novel deals with the absolute which, although fallen from its grace, is still sovereign and makes beings (everything there is) suffer. Does the absolute suffer itself? By losing its sovereignty, the God-absolute has been drawn out from its divine space, has been unfettered from its kingdom. In a way, the God-absolute has been freed from its divinity and hides, as God hides for those twentieth-century atheologians who accented the silence or hiddenness of God, but failed to affirm the reality of God in spite of God’s absence.

A short introduction into the thought of an American radical theologian (or “death of God” theologian) Thomas Altizer and his confederate William Hamilton would be useful here. They asserted that the sense of God’s absence is subordinate to the total disappearance of God. Altizer’s way of formulating this feeling was to say that we are not talking about the absence of the experience of God, but about the experience of the absence of God. The “death of God” theology of these authors asserts that the only possible thing to do in the situation of the *death of God* is to wait. Other radical theologians from that time (1960s) maintained that God is still hidden and thus turned to the experience of an absent divine.⁴⁴⁵ The “death of God” theologians also use the concept of the “Other”, mainly concentrating their attention to crucifixion that marks the end of the historical idea that “God is here”. If God was alive, they say, it would be possible for humankind to find him in their society or culture. This approach does not destroy theology. It just proposes a new understanding of God and tries to construct a new “concept” of God by redefining the culture and “writing God in it”.⁴⁴⁶ Thus, the main problem of the “death of God” theology concerns the bordering redefinition of God, and it is impossible to leave linguistics out of sight. In other words, a theologian must set a border to a new definition of God: he/she can tell either what God is or use the negative approach, telling what God is not. In either case, the language used for such redefinition will still be human language. It is not possible to define God, because each definition also has to conform with the ideological needs of those who make the definition.⁴⁴⁷ For example, the fact that Christianity has so far been sexist and anti-Semitic is undeniable, but atheologians hope that their approach could probably cure the consequences of this “illness” by refusing the definitions of God who is a sexist and anti-Semite. This God must be killed, leaving the question whether and where is the place for the “new God” open. Thus the “death of God” is a consequence of Christianity, and atheology is the possibility to soften these consequences.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ Daniel J. Peterson, “Speaking of God After the Death of God”, *Dialog: The Journal of Theology*, 44.3 (fall 2005), 207.

⁴⁴⁶ Douglas, J. D., ed., op. cit., Harvey, Charlotte Bruce, op. cit.

⁴⁴⁷ Hamilton, W., “Death of God Theology”, Raschke C., “Deconstructionism”, op. cit.

⁴⁴⁸ Bruce Ellis Benson, op. cit., 113.

One of the fundamentals of Altizer's theology is Hegel's dialectics – God's reality is involved in a dialectical process, where faith in God impacts humankind, and humankind impacts thinking of what God "is" by meditating on the crucifixion. Thus God's transcendent "otherness" is lost in the divine incarnation of Christ and in historical society. By creation and incarnation God has become concrete and emptied himself, losing his transcendence and former withdrawnness from the world. In fact, God has become part of the world, and with this point history begins as a permanent movement. The death of God means overcoming the unknown transcendent God because God in Christ (and crucifixion) is everything.⁴⁴⁹

Another essential way how to explain the "death of God" is through the concept of nothingness. Altizer explains that nothingness has been present in the Western theological thinking since Augustine.⁴⁵⁰ Thus, the task of the theologian becomes to attack every idolatrous presence. This "crisis theology" initially approached the great modern atheistic prophets as theological allies, for the death of God could be greeted as a way to the original ground and reality of faith.⁴⁵¹ Altizer also explains that nothingness appears in a truly universal theological language (such as Blake's and Nietzsche's), i.e. the language that occurs in every domain – as the "absolute No" which is the origin of every repression in every darkness, and a darkness which is finally the darkness of God, or the darkness of that Godhead which is beyond God. Only Nietzsche and Blake knew a wholly fallen Godhead which is the absolutely alien Nihil, whereas the full reversal of that Nihil is apocalypse itself, the apocalypse which is absolute joy, and Nietzsche and Blake are those writers who have evoked that joy most.⁴⁵² Speaking about the novel *Madame Edwarda*, the same could be attributed to Bataille.⁴⁵³

Waiting is of great importance also in the epigraph cited above. Is this waiting for the dead God to appear? It could be so, but one must keep in mind that waiting involves hesitation and fear, and this is why God-the-absolute strikes general terror. It seems that we are talking about God whose reality cannot be affirmed by theological arguments. There is, of course, a possibility that Bataille talks about the absent divine in this book, as Altizer and Hamilton did in their "death of God" theology. The awareness of the total absence of God seems to pervade the text, showing itself up in the human being's vain search for the absolute.

⁴⁴⁹ James C. Livingston, Francis Schuessler Fiorenza with Sarah Coakley and James H. Evans, Jr., *Modern Christian Thought. Twentieth Century*, vol. 2. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 502–503.

⁴⁵⁰ Thomas J. Altizer, *Godhead and the Nothing* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), ix-x.

⁴⁵¹ Thomas J. Altizer, *Godhead and the Nothing*, op. cit., 4.

⁴⁵² Ibid., xiii.

⁴⁵³ Although Altizer does not speak about Bataille in his works, for a careful reader the text reveals that both of them, thinking about the "death of God" as a ground of theology (or thinking about God), go in one direction, and their ideas can supplement each other.

The plot begins when the narrator starts telling about his decision to get drunk that night. The narrator is one of Bataille's typical characters, and I would call him a libertine – the desperate one who seeks satisfaction with all of his being and hopes to reach something through ecstasy and drunkenness. Such characters are, as we have already seen, the twins in *L'Abbe C*, the narrator and Sir Edmund in the *Story of the Eye* and, of course, the Count in the *Dead Man*.

The narrator starts with slipping off his pants and going ahead, holding his *straight-risen sex* in his hand, but then decides to avoid trouble, gets back into his pants and takes his way to the parlour house *Mirrors*. He is rushed by the desire for fusion, for communication, because one's nakedness makes one to be aware of the otherness of oneself.⁴⁵⁴

Mirrors is quite a significant name for a whorehouse, especially when re-thought in the content of other novels. I suppose that this is the turning-point in the development of the image of the human, – in this image, the involved parties mirror each other and are united in this way. The human is a mirror for another human. United in the name of whom? Besides, mirrors in the parlour house are meant for the enjoyment of the nakedness of bodies in an act of love-making.⁴⁵⁵

Here one can discern two more concepts of Bataille's thinking known to the reader from other novels. The first one is mirroring as a process that symbolises two opposites which in fact are the same (and only something insignificant, for example, a cassock, can make these opposites different). The second is mirror as a tool for observing the nakedness of oneself, i.e. the mirror becomes divine, because of making possible the consciousness of one's nakedness, as if in the presence of the divine observer, who is absent after the death of God.

Another essential point in the context of this novel is associated with Bataille's assertion in *Guilty*: "My true church is a whorehouse – the only one that gives me true satisfaction."⁴⁵⁶ This sentence is explained with Bataille's attitude towards eroticism and nakedness, but I will take it step by step while analysing the novel.

Because of the narrator's nakedness, this desire is erotic one, a conscious searching for the end.⁴⁵⁷ The desire as such is both erotic and religious, as human beings in this way achieve the consciousness of the end, i.e. the totality of their being. In a way, the narrator is ready to make a sacrifice of himself or at least devote himself to sex. Sex, for him, is a means

⁴⁵⁴ Craig James, "Voices of Desire: The Erotic Other in Georges Bataille", *Atlas Serials*, 21.

⁴⁵⁵ Joana Brewis and Stephen Linstead, *Sex, Work and Sex Work. Eroticizing Organization* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁵⁶ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 12.

⁴⁵⁷ Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, op. cit., 44.

that makes him aware of his very being reaching the midpoint where the human being is not human anymore and not divine yet. Eroticism is without purpose, except to fulfil the desire, and as such it is a risk to sacrifice, to step over all boundaries, including the one between being and non-being.⁴⁵⁸ The narrator in *Madame Edwarda* craves for the fulfilment of his erotic desire, for a boundary where pain is not pain and death is not the horror of death, for a boundary where these feelings have stopped short before becoming realities.⁴⁵⁹

The narrator chooses Edwarda, one of the prostitutes, because she is naked and looks bored to death.⁴⁶⁰ The only way toward the fulfilment is to have someone who can *mirror* the narrator in his sense of the state of being, which at this point of the novel is a desire for the sake of desire. In his search for the fulfilment of the desire, the narrator craves for a naked body, for an act which can seemingly free him from his being. He craves for a tangible experience without logical explanation. In other words, he wants to face the impossible.⁴⁶¹

The means for this satisfaction is the prostitute who must be like him and at the same time different from him. If he wants someone to mirror him, he must become a mirror himself, and here the notion of God-the-absolute appears: the narrator remembers his desire for infamy and squeezes Edwarda in his arms, suddenly feeling unhappy and painfully forsaken, “as one when in the presence of God”.⁴⁶² This embrace whereby two human bodies meet in the idea of an imminent lust seems to be a symbol for desire and desire itself.

Still, this feeling is worse and more of a letdown than drunkenness.⁴⁶³ Does it signify the consciousness of one’s sinfulness? Or is it connected with the feeling of guilt? In the presence of the prostitute the narrator feels unbearable sadness and becomes painfully aware that this very grandeur descending upon him withers away the pleasure he hopes to have. This idea of the fulfilment of erotic desire is sin and always guilty.⁴⁶⁴

This seems to be the reason why the awareness of desire is unbearably sad. The only sin of the narrator is that he is still alive, active in his existence – and this is the reason for this feeling of guilt for living, for being. He is on his way to reach the goal (satisfy his desire); yet, the world around him has lost its sense and is empty.

The possible reason for sadness could be waiting as well – waiting is sometimes accompanied by terror, as is eroticism in its force to destroy the profane order.⁴⁶⁵ He uses the word “grandeur” to signify the mixed feelings of letdown and unbearable sadness which a

⁴⁵⁸ Craig James, op. cit., 21.

⁴⁵⁹ J. M. Lo Duca, “Georges Bataille, from afar...” in Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, op. cit., 4–5.

⁴⁶⁰ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 149.

⁴⁶¹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 33.

⁴⁶² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 149.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Craiges James, op. cit., 21.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

human feels in the presence of the divine. There is a possibility to make parallels with Nietzsche's term *Ungeheure* for the word "grandeur". This is an indescribable "feeling" of the necessity of the divine in one's life. It is like Nietzsche's Dionysian attitude towards the colossal course of life itself. This course is a power that lurks before and under civilization. It is an essential dimension of the colossal power that both threatens and allures.⁴⁶⁶ The narrator has these feelings in the moment when he holds Edwarda, in the moment when two human bodies meet in the anticipation of lust. Does this feeling, which is worse and more of a letdown than drunkenness, signify the consciousness of man's sinfulness? Is it connected with the feeling of guilt? If it is awareness of one's sinfulness, then it is clear that we have to deal with the Christian God, with the one who is alive only in dogmatics, the one who is rather a caricature of God, as was Count in the *Dead Man*. If this feeling has something to do with guilt, why should the narrator feel guilty? This despair has nothing to do with the hierarchic and systemic Christianity. The reason for sadness must be sought deeper in conscience.

The protagonists still have not exchanged a word; the narrator feels anger and pain, and he faints. It seems that, for Bataille, fainting is a stage of change, as we will see later in the context of Edwarda as well. After he comes to his senses, a change of the state of being begins to take place – Madame Edwarda has become an active agent from passive mirroring; she proclaims herself to be God and asks the narrator to kiss her genitals. This is a kind of religious rite, a Communion where the believer kisses the Host. Edwarda's genitals have become divine because of her divinity. Both of them continue the rite and go deeper into the sanctuary (whorehouse), to the bedroom with traditional mirrors of the whorehouse.⁴⁶⁷ In addition to the previous mention of the mirrors, it can be said that mirror can also be interpreted as a symbol of consciousness of oneself. Simultaneously, it embodies sexual desire as an irresistible urge that leads closer and closer to the very fact that both of them, the narrator and Edwarda, are subject to the violence of eroticism.

After her proclamation Edwarda wants to copulate in front of all people in the inn, and the narrator seems to choke, but he is still breathing – in the process of mirroring Edwarda, he must lose and gain something, too. The narrator is choking as the one who has seen suffering, who feels sympathy for other person. He has noticed a rasp in her breath and now he chokes. As a process essential for living (and being), this problem with breath can symbolise a transition to the awareness of the divine, and Edwarda's declaration seems to affirm it. But in the context of Nietzsche and his interpreter Michael Haar, sentimentality (and thus the

⁴⁶⁶ Ruediger Safranski, op. cit., 66–67.

⁴⁶⁷ Allan Stoekl, "Recognition in *Madame Edwarda*" in Carolyn Bailey Gill, op. cit., 82.

choking Bataille describes) can as well be associated with sympathy, with feeling guilty when suffering of the other is seen. A question I could ask regarding this train of thinking is: Why does the “other”, Madame Edwarda, suffer; what is the source for her suffering? And there is just one possible answer – the same as for the narrator: Edwarda feels guilty for her living, she is tired of her life. In all probability, considering this weariness in a broader sense, she feels that her life has no meaning, nor does any other life of another person.⁴⁶⁸

Furthermore, this paragraph can also be interpreted in a more psychological way: Madame Edwarda is ready to die. Seduction, power and sovereignty are necessary for a self who dies; one must be a god in order to die.⁴⁶⁹ This is a meeting with death where the human recognises oneself “as he/she is”. Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons use Klossowski’s term “simulacrum of death” to characterise such situation:

Klossowski’s term ‘simulacrum of death’ is, I believe, an appropriate designation of the impossible sacrifice to which Bataille aspires in his erotic fiction, for it is caught between the two extremes of radical loss (death beyond the simulacrum) and profit (consciousness of death, this side of the simulacrum). The ‘accord with one’s self’, the ‘simulacrum of death’, are able to designate, at the limit of notional language, that loss of self is neither fully lost nor gained in an experience of the *impossible*. Such an accord [...] requires and assumes violence in various forms and degrees of intensity.⁴⁷⁰

Thus, it can be said that the absolute tortures a human being, using “being” as a rack. Torturing causes suffering which, clarified through Bataille’s own lens, offers one possible answer – eroticism. Unsatisfied sexual need completes suffering. Eroticism, as awareness of absence, is too heavy a burden for human strength. In the desire for a naked body, one is most aware of one’s being, and this knowledge becomes unbearable.⁴⁷¹ As such, eroticism can be explained as a mirror for the suffering caused by being itself.

Besides, Edwarda’s suggestion to make love in public show parallels with the notion of public space (or the marketplace where the death of God is declared), as it appears in other novels as well. However, they do not do that, instead going into a room full of mirrors, and for the narrator “this vulgar ritual of the ‘lady going up’ with the man who wants her in a tow, was, at that moment, nothing short of an hallucinating solemnity [...]”⁴⁷² In fact, by going deeper into the whorehouse, according to Bataille, they come closer to themselves. In a way, it is dangerous and risky to meet oneself eye to eye. Is a human capable of this sight?

⁴⁶⁸ Compare: Carol Diethel, op. cit., 179, and Michael Haar, op. cit., 136.

⁴⁶⁹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 71.

⁴⁷⁰ Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, “Sacrifice and Violence in Bataille’s Fiction”, op. cit., 93.

⁴⁷¹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 12–13.

⁴⁷² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 151.

Making love liberates the couple – or so it seems. At least, they are aware of their nakedness and long for a moment where they are both unfettered from the state of being.⁴⁷³ Delirious joy of being naked possesses Edwarda. She, the newborn God, then gets dressed, all black-and-white, tears off from the narrator and suggests going out, without explaining the route and destination. The narrator follows her as a devout believer. Outside she runs, and in the race she becomes somewhat alien, different from the narrator. There is a point in this race when she really becomes *other*.⁴⁷⁴

When she stops at last, waiting for the man under the arch, he understands that she is really a God. This revelation makes the narrator feel lost in a lifeless, hollow solitude, as if he was free of Edwarda, absolutely alone, lost in solitude.⁴⁷⁵ The narrator has remained himself; he is alone in the presence of Edwarda, who has become something absolute, and he sees the essence of the ultimate being, “what in all this world is most barren, most bleak”.⁴⁷⁶

In her race Edwarda has ascended to the sphere of God-the-absolute, simultaneously symbolising it and taking part therein. The fulfilment of erotic desire has changed the profane order and has become chaos, where the human being is not human anymore, and the mirroring becomes impossible. This world is ruled by anguish and estrangement. As the narrator tries to approach her, he feels anguish that warns him not to go further, and Madame Edwarda slips away. What is this anguish?

The anguish referred to above could be the quintessential consciousness of a human being, a fatal solitude which shows itself up when the fulfilment of erotic desire has proved to be an illusion. Sex was meant to free them from the burden of being, while the result was the opposite because of the absolute. Now they both are more aware of their being, but there is no mirror around – the mirroring has become impossible. Now they are distinctly separate units, and therefore their state of being is solitude.

Importantly, this is the feeling of the narrator – he is aware of the divine as something unattainable to his being. The narrator is free of her, who has proclaimed herself God.⁴⁷⁷ He has come closer to the consciousness of the absence of God-the-absolute. He has met someone who is beyond his own existential categories. God-the-absolute, on its part, is present through its own absence. This anguish is the awareness of death, making the narrator

⁴⁷³ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 151.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 152.

feel like he is going through agony. The narrator has faced the night of the universe, and he now discovers its parts and, in doing so, discovers himself.⁴⁷⁸

Everything has become different. In this difference and isolation, an agony begins inside him, and he becomes conscious of his readiness to suffer; he longs for suffering, and he *must have* this awareness of the total absence of the divine. The narrator craves for the *emptiness itself* where he could be destroyed, turned into nothing, and thus become absent to his very existence.⁴⁷⁹

The cynical impossibility of his existence has reached its peak, and now, it seems, he wants to become free from his humanity, to become one with the (absent) divine. As in mysticism, where the mystic passes over to a different state or vanishes altogether, the narrator craves for a *unio mystica* through the awareness of the absence – of both God-the-absolute and himself. He must transcend not only himself but also any particular reality. The need for the absence of himself makes him feel the absolute absence of the divine, and, paradoxically, the divine is absolute only in this absence – a colossal power of non-being and non-existence in contrast to being and definable, understandable existence.

Edwarda begins to act like a lunatic, pushes the narrator down and then flees again. It seems that there is something human-all-too-human in this newborn God. This humanity tries to find peace by fleeing.⁴⁸⁰ At the same time, as a personification of the absolute, Edwarda has become outrageous – and violence of some kind is a recurring motif in Bataille's novels. The reason of Edwarda's anger can be explained by the narrator's vanity. The narrator was ready to imagine that he could be one with God, as the mystics can; yet, there is nothing to be one with – God flees from him and hides, probably because this God-the-absolute that the narrator has imagined for his *unio mystica* is all-too-human. Edwarda is just a shadow, a sign of God-the-absolute, and it is this consciousness (which is closely linked to reason) that makes the narrator feel lost again.

Having returned, Edwarda proclaims that the narrator is a fake priest. The narrator has lost his fight with God; he has proved to be too arrogant, thinking he could follow the divine as a devout believer, as equal to God, as God-like. Humanity in God has turned out an illusion. The solitude of the narrator is absolute because of Edwarda's otherness – even her nakedness has gained another meaning.⁴⁸¹

Edwarda collapses, and the narrator notices her nakedness through her clothes. Now this nakedness has lost the absence of meaning and has simultaneously gained the

⁴⁷⁸ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 24.

⁴⁷⁹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 153.

⁴⁸⁰ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 37.

⁴⁸¹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 154.

overabundant meaning of death-shrouds.⁴⁸² To be sure, Edwarda has become a God; however, even a newborn God must die for the sake of her divinity. Edwarda is simultaneously absent and present. She has fainted. In ancient cultures fainting was frequently mistaken for death. This is a logical point in the narrative if we bear in mind that, according to Bataille, the urge towards love (i.e. the divine in the Western and also in mystical thinking), pushed to its limit, is the urge towards death.⁴⁸³

Edwarda's weakness makes the narrator feel like a fugitive, fleeing from anguish. In a way it seems that he is ready to accept himself as a being, belonging to the laws of life and death; he sees himself apart from God and, in this feeling of a fugitive, comprehends his humanity, the very heart of his existence.

God-the-absolute here manifests as a destructive and creative force. Humanity can be explained in its incompleteness and awareness of guilt, when encountering the absent God-absolute face to face. Suddenly, the narrator feels the power which can be his on condition that he agrees to hate himself. He has suddenly lost himself, his ego, and this is probably the only possible way how to reach the other of humanity, how to overcome one's being and get closer to God-the-absolute. This mystical way differs from the previous, which was probably too Christian for Bataille. The narrator does not deny himself at his own will – actually, he has no other choice. It is the violence of God-the-absolute that effects his denial, as it is too strong and too pre-eminent. Through the feeling of anguish, the narrator is destroyed by the sense of the presence of the absent God.

After Edwarda's collapse, the narrator finds himself in a situation where he himself is incomplete; he is lost in the absence of Edwarda. He has lost himself like the mystics do, and in the very process of losing, heaven has opened to him. However, surprisingly, what he sees in heaven is nothing.⁴⁸⁴ His experience is passing. Lost, torn out of his solitude, he finds himself in a situation when he himself is absent, and so is Madame as a symbol of the divine, and so is the God who had to be there, in heaven.

It seems that the subsequent events confirm this assumption. When the crisis subsides, they both get into a taxi. Edwarda undresses, and her nakedness results in an act of physical love with the taxi driver. This time the narrator is an observer of the process – an absent human being who suddenly becomes conscious of the presence of the absent God-the-absolute.⁴⁸⁵ Observation is another significant characteristic mark in Bataille's novels. There is an observer almost in every novel: Sir Edmund in the *Story of the Eye*, Count in the *Dead*

⁴⁸² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 155

⁴⁸³ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 42.

⁴⁸⁴ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 26-27.

⁴⁸⁵ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 157.

Man, Robert in *L'Abbe C*. All of them are passive and present agents whose function is to stress alienation from the process they are observing (usually it is lovemaking). For Bataille, the observer serves as a catalyst between consciousness and reason and direct experience of the absence of God-the-absolute.

In the process Edwarda's eyes are glided white – at this moment the narrator understands she is drifting home from the *impossible*.⁴⁸⁶ The absence of God-the-absolute is as impossible as its presence when seen in the context of human existence. It is impossible to describe these things; still, it is possible to observe them through the consciousness of another human being's anguish. Madame cries, and, according to Bataille, tears are the manifestation of participation, of consciousness.⁴⁸⁷ There is no divine love; it is replaced by the consciousness of death of a similar intensity. Desire has been used as a divine weapon for the human being's consciousness of his or her state of being. Edwarda and the narrator are both aware of their ignorance, and they feel joy as equivalent to suffering, two hardly distinguishable states of one's soul.⁴⁸⁸

The tears of Madame Edwarda signify her mystical experience, awareness of her own absence.⁴⁸⁹ Madame Edwarda and the narrator are both united in their human vulnerability. Both have followed their greatest desire, which is “a wounded person's need for another wound”.⁴⁹⁰ In this state, they are both alone, both wounded by one's own and the other's loneliness, both dedicated to their own ruin, both conscious of their absolute ignorance, both injured by erotic desire. Yet they have found themselves face to face with the universe as a completed whole. This whole is too unbearable for human knowledge, historical and conceptual thinking, for reason, which requires logical explanations for everything. The absolute, God, reveals itself as anything that might happen, taken as a whole.⁴⁹¹

As he observes Edwarda's tears, the narrator says: “Love was dead in those eyes; they contained a daybreak aureate chill, a transparence wherein I read death's letters.”⁴⁹² There is no divine love; it is replaced by the consciousness of death in a similar intensity. The narrator still feels anguish, and it resists the pleasure he ought to have sought. He has a feeling that he is witnessing a miracle, when seeing Edwarda's copulation with the taxi-driver. And the narrator's desolation is still there, and he is stricken with an icy silence.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁶ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 157.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁰ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 31.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 158.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

The novel comes to its end abruptly. Edwarda, the narrator and the taxi-driver all three fall into slumber and awake – and “the rest is irony, long, weary waiting for death”.⁴⁹⁴ Eroticism has reached its limits, and the narrator realises that eroticism and death are closely related in the realm of the God-the-absolute. In fact, it is eroticism that drives human longing for continuity and the infinite, for the unattainable and absent God-the-absolute.⁴⁹⁵ At the same time, eroticism is the consciousness of one’s existence and totality. Through the lens of an illusion of the fulfilled desire, God-the-absolute can be seen as nothing, as the dead one that, paradoxically, could be reached only by observing the consciousness of its absence.

b) Compendium of reflections in the brackets

In trying to understand the very heart of this novel, I must take a look at the “subtext” in the brackets. It seems that two parallel plots are evolving, and the second explains the first one. Of course, the distance between the author and the text also appears here.

The first text in brackets appears at the very beginning of the novel – after the narrator has undressed himself. In this text, the author emphasises the pain he feels in connection with telling this story. Besides, he points out that there is no beginning by scuttling in sidewise.⁴⁹⁶ It is the essential feeling of fatality that strikes the human being, the impossibility to avoid, let us say, the inner experience. The next passage that keeps the reader’s attention is a range of dots when Madame Edwarda and the narrator go into the room of mirrors – and after the dots, after a pause, he continues by telling that their hearts strain wide open to welcome the emptiness of heaven.⁴⁹⁷

Once heaven is empty, it seems that nothing divine takes part in this process; the divine is not present. Thanks to the erotic desire, they both feel the absence of the divine through their human bodies, feelings, and their being human. They are absolutely alone and united in this act – there is no one else there; there is no God, no sin, no sense of guilt anymore, and no need for atonement. There is nothing except Edwarda as a self-proclaimed newborn God, and the feeling of human nothingness turns into that of the presence of God-the-absolute. Besides, emptiness in the heaven can be compared to the sight of the naked body. It can be seen without interest, and Bataille draws a mystical parallel between the emptiness of heaven and the emptiness of naked body in sex play:

⁴⁹⁴ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 158.

⁴⁹⁵ Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, op. cit., 20.

⁴⁹⁶ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 148.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 151.

In serene or brooding sky I can open a wound that I'll cling to as to woman's nudity. The cause of man's sexual ecstasy, in sex with a woman, is delight in her coolness. So, too, in the emptiness of space and in open depths of the universe, the strangeness of this meditation reaches a cause that frees me.⁴⁹⁸

The next brackets contain a direct reflection on Madame Edwarda as God. It is irony, the narrator says. The nonsense of philosophy shows itself through his assertion that God has appeared as a public whore and gone crazy. This fact is nonsense when viewed through the lens of philosophy.⁴⁹⁹ And here we are back in the Nietzschean marketplace, where the madman proclaims the death of God in public.⁵⁰⁰ And if so, God dies along with the human – as the latter turns into a devoted believer, a mystic or a disciple of rites, liturgy and dogmas. He stops thinking, he lives in a vain try to avoid sin and thus becomes moral. Such a believer reflects on himself as a *total human being*, which he is not. There is no awareness of God-the-absolute, or of its absence, except that of the madman. There is no place for inner experience, nor presence or absence of the sacred – once again God has been made a caricature, as the rope-dancer in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. And this God bears another sign which can become important because of its honesty – the crucifixion is a wound by which believers communicate with God.⁵⁰¹ Even more – the crucifixion has a potential to make a human being aware of his/her own death, because meditating on death while one is still alive can help human to reveal oneself ultimately to oneself.⁵⁰² The madman differs from the devoted believer because of the awareness of guilt. Proclaiming the death of God, he knows that *we* have killed him. The devoted believer described above lacks such awareness. The irony of a prostitute becoming God means to break the borders of hierarchical Christianity, to reverse the usual order of the world, to change thinking into the disorder, to escape from dogmas and *knowing*, and follow the desire of nonknowledge in order to try to reach the absolute or nothingness. As Bataille said, “God and woman who is loved are parallel. Contrasted to them would be nothingness and woman's nakedness (irrespective to any particular woman).”⁵⁰³ The prostitute has the seal of nakedness; as such she is nothingness itself, out of the order, in the realm of the desire which is closer to the realm of the absolute than the realm of the project. Still, escaping from the world of the project causes suffering. Suffering also is important part of such change. The divine has deadly wounded both the narrator and Edwarda, making them realise the totality of their human existence. However, through their wound they are capable

⁴⁹⁸ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 19-20.

⁴⁹⁹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 155.

⁵⁰⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, op. cit., 181–182.

⁵⁰¹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 31.

⁵⁰² Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, transl. Jonathan Straus, in Allan Stoekl, ed., *On Bataille*, op. cit., 19.

⁵⁰³ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 58.

to deal with the consciousness of the absent God-the-absolute. Thus, on the one hand, the subject is destroyed in meditation and, on the other hand, the object also turns out to be a dying victim. In this meditation or awareness of the universe, the subject and the object wound and destroy each other.⁵⁰⁴ Thus, the duality of the desire of inner experience becomes possible and, through that – the consciousness of the absent God-the-absolute.

As I have already pointed out, the brackets in the text annihilate it, annihilate writing. Writing is a work and as such belongs to the realm of the project, because it has been tied to the production of the meaning.⁵⁰⁵ The moment when writing becomes absurd, when text communicates itself, the author escapes from his book, becoming a stranger for it, and vice versa, the book becomes “almost completely like a forgotten name: I am too lazy to look for it but the obscure feeling of forget fills me with anguish. [...] Strange way of invading the impossible!”⁵⁰⁶ With this, as with the brackets in *Madame Edwarda*, the perpetual undoing of meaning is achieved, because “to write [...] is to make words continuously empty themselves of meaning in a work constantly restarted, constituted by the impossibility of completion, endlessly beginning again.”⁵⁰⁷

The consciousness of overcoming the absent God is a destructive and creative force. Still, it remains human. It is not possible to speak about the absent God, as the language is absent as well. The text in the last brackets, which contain a reflection on language, seems to make this assumption. There is no possibility to go on with the story.⁵⁰⁸ Just as in writing, destruction or annihilation is not the opposite of imagination as a life force – only taken together they make absolute completeness. Then the only possibility for the human being is silence. And if so, God-the-absolute cannot be an object or target of this silence; it must become part of it.

This is how God-the-absolute reveals itself in a text, because it is a creative and destructive power at once; it destroys itself and thus tends to the absolute meaning that can be explained only through silence (that includes many dots, endless variations of symbols and directions of narrative). At the same time, such a text can be used as an eternal link to nothing, which itself becomes absolute. The assumption that a human being can be free of the sin of his or her existence is absurd when reflected in the context of *Madame Edwarda*. Even if the human being is aware of the totality of his existence and vainly keeps longing for the Absolute (God), he is also forced to follow his desire and fulfil it. Setting the fulfilment of the

⁵⁰⁴ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 45.

⁵⁰⁵ Peter Tracey Connor, op. cit., 66.

⁵⁰⁶ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 57-58.

⁵⁰⁷ Peter Tracey Connor, op. cit., 69.

⁵⁰⁸ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 159.

desire as an aim, the human chooses to reach it. This is why each moment that leads closer to the fulfilment seems useful. Thus, one's time becomes a march toward the goal – as it is for the libertine at the beginning of the novel, when he chooses to visit the *Mirrors*. As Bataille puts it, such an action makes existence fragmentary. The possibility to keep one's existence whole or unbroken is to refuse to act.⁵⁰⁹

Refusal to act is clearly seen in the observation, which is passive and thus closely related to the consciousness of God-the-absolute. Passivity, refusing to act, provokes one's non-being, if reflected from the perspective of the goal. The awareness of the impossibility of satisfying the desire creates anguish that is closely related to the absence of God-the-absolute as well. Thus, for Bataille-Angélique, there are two ways for reaching the consciousness of God-the-absolute – which is absent – and these ways can also overlap. First, this consciousness can be reached through the awareness of one's own non-being and, second – through the anguish caused by this consciousness.

c) Bataille as an anarchistic mystic

To understand whether Bataille can be called a “mystic” and, even more, an anarchistic one, I should at first take a short look into Western (Christian) mysticism and define this term from the perspective of this doctoral thesis.

Perhaps the most popular view of what mysticism is can be found in the history of Western Christian mysticism. By that, direct relationship between God and human is meant. Thus, mysticism becomes an attempt to express the consciousness of direct presence of God.⁵¹⁰ This approach emphasises that human relationship with God can develop in two directions. First, it is a (Christian) community, where like-minded people come together and submit to God their wishes and needs through prayer. Each person prays individually, but they are together as a group of Christians. The second direction takes place at a personal level, when one is conscious about direct, most sacred relationship with God and devotes oneself to his will.⁵¹¹ Of course, the “ideal situation” for Christian mysticism is where praying souls come together, developing both individual and collective relationship with the divine. The direct, personal and individual contact is developed through prayers and meditation. In this way, the dialogue between the soul and God is constructed, endlessly remembering the idea of the whole.⁵¹² The stages of this phenomenon can be constructed as well (purification,

⁵⁰⁹ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., xxiv.

⁵¹⁰ Karl Rahner, *Opportunities of Faith. Elements of a Modern Spirituality*, transl. E. Quinn (New York: Seabury, 1974), 123.

⁵¹¹ Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 165.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

enlightenment and the *unio*). Purification has a lot to do with human character and detachment from earthly interests. It is the first step towards spiritual life. It is the beginning of genuine contemplation and involves painful struggles and obscurities.⁵¹³ One characteristic trait of mysticism is also the contact (or confluence) of the soul with God-the-absolute.⁵¹⁴ Thus mysticism can be explained as an individual religious experience which is, of course, subjective and mostly does not submit to objective verification. It can also be ecstatic because of the awareness of being “close to God”. Then mysticism is “the practice of religious ecstasies (religious experiences, alternate-states of consciousness), together with whatever ideologies, ethics, rites, myths, legends and magic may be related to them.”⁵¹⁵

Furthermore, the way of thinking and explaining the phenomenon of mysticism has changed since the beginning of studies in Christian mysticism. In the situation of the end of metaphysics, we encounter phenomena that, logically considered, cannot appear; yet, they do appear. These phenomena, such as mystical experience, are above and beyond meanings that we would ever be able to assign to them. The existence of these phenomena ultimately defies all possibility and impossibility, since they do not conform with the conditions of possibility of our finite experience, but imposes themselves on these conditions and contradict to what we would expect from our experience. One of the leading French philosophers of our time, Jean-Luc Marion calls these phenomena “paradoxes or counterphenomena”.⁵¹⁶ Marion offers four types of these phenomena. I will mention two of them that could be relevant in explaining Bataille’s possible mysticism:

There is our own body, our own flesh, which is giving us an interrupted intuition, which is so rich and so overwhelming that we need new words – literature and poetry – to make sense out of it. And there is the face of the other that imposes to me an ever re-newed stream of intuition, challenging any attempt to master it.⁵¹⁷

Further, Marion emphasises that we are in the situation after the “death of God”. Our metaphysical concepts may outline the ultimate possible pattern of the intellectual and the real worlds. We should not avoid the hypothesis, he writes, that, in the case of God, we could question our set of concepts and consider the impossibility of any knowledge of God, not as failure of our inquiry, but as positive opportunity for questioning metaphysical concepts. The impossibility of knowing God according to metaphysical concepts looks less as an evidence

⁵¹³ Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism* (London: A Grey Arrow, 1960), 28.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66

⁵¹⁵ Mysticism. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. <http://britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/400861/mysticism>, accessed on 16/07/2012.

⁵¹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, “Introduction: What Do We Mean by ‘Mystic’?”, transl. Gareth Gollard in *Mystics. Presence and Aporia* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3.

⁵¹⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *op. cit.*, 3–4.

of God being out of picture than as the suggestion that our metaphysical concepts can and should be questioned.⁵¹⁸

Maurice Blanchot has spoken of “communication diurne” and “communication nocturne” in Bataille’s writing. *Madame Edwarda* belongs to the nocturnal category. As Bataille explained later, it is the work without which the central section of his major philosophical work, *Inner Experience*, could not be properly understood.⁵¹⁹ This assertion may lead to a thesis that, for Bataille, mysticism is related with the concept of the “dark night of the soul” which I will describe later in the chapter.

Bataille defines inner experience as the experience that usually could be called mystical experience: the states of ecstasy, of rapture, at least of mediated emotions. He points out that this experience is laid bare, free of ties and origin, of any confession whatever. This is a state where experience responds to the necessity in which one finds oneself (i.e. human existence) of challenging everything, of putting everything in question. Experience attains in the end the fusion of object and subject, being nonknowledge as the subject and the unknown as the object.⁵²⁰

One important “concept” which lends towards mysticism and is used in *Madame Edwarda* is anguish. As Bataille writes in *Guilty*, this phenomenon is not a possibility for humans; anguish is impossibility in the sense that the impossible defines “me”.⁵²¹

Anguish arises when the narrator goes closer to Madame Edwarda after they have escaped from the whorehouse and Madame Edwarda has become God.⁵²² What is this anguish? Is it caused by the awareness of the quintessence of human being – the fatal solitude? Or is this stimulation of anguish an awareness of the absence of the divine, as “beneath the garment enfolding her, she was mindless: rapt, absent”.⁵²³ Or is it the awareness of death that makes narrator feel like he is going through agony? Everything is different. Edwarda represents absence, and she is beyond the possibility of any laughter. Erotic game has become seriousness. It is not a situation where a man simply buys a prostitute for his own lust.⁵²⁴ When pleasure wears an ascetic’s face, when self-torment is naïve and innocent – what you are dealing with can be found in the sky or the night, or the cold, but not in literary

⁵¹⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, op. cit., 4.

⁵¹⁹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, “Bataille in the Street. The Search for Virility in the 1930” in Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed., op. cit., 27–28.

⁵²⁰ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 3, 9.

⁵²¹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 7.

⁵²² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 152.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ See: Georges Bataille, “Preface”. In Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 138.

history. Besides, “there is the universe – and in the dead of its night, you discover its parts and in doing so discover yourself.”⁵²⁵

This is precisely the environment Bataille is picturing, quite literally. They are both alone in the night under the sky. The narrator feels a difference and isolation of agony when recognising that he is ready to suffer. In a certain way, he longs for suffering, he *must have* this awareness of the presence of the divine. He desires to reach the emptiness itself, where he could be stricken, destroyed. “I knew, I wanted that nothing, for I lusted after her secret and did not for one instant doubt that it was death’s kingdom.”⁵²⁶ What the narrator searches for in his personal “dark night” is the nothing, negativity, which has the force to cast a man into the movement of history, thus realising the totality of reality.⁵²⁷ The search is for the man, not for God, nor even for the absolute as an object. Firstly, putting it in Christian language, the search could be interpreted as searching (as an unfinished process) for “me” who is good enough to communicate with God. Secondly, for Bataille, this can be the search for the possibility to overcome the realm of the project, the reason, and make one step closer to the realm of the absolute.

This is an important aspect. As Bataille points out in *Inner Experience*, one reason that fills man with anguish is doubt; the other is awareness of being nothing but man, which makes existence intolerable. Anguish which turns to delight is still anguish. It is not delight, not hope; it is anguish which is painful and perhaps decomposes. He who does not die from being merely a man will never be other than man. (I have analysed this point in the beginning).⁵²⁸

Furthermore, doubt is closely related not only with consciousness of one’s existence but with experience as well. Anguish is not learned. If someone admits of having anguish, it is necessary to show the inexistence of his reasons. For example, one imagines the way out for his torments – if he had more money, a woman, another life... The foolishness of such anguish is infinite, and this is not the explanation of anguish in *Madame Edwarda*.

In this text, Bataille speaks of anguish as a chance: one is *chosen* in accordance with his *forebodings*. Thus one is obliged to go to the depths of his anguish, not to flee from it.⁵²⁹ Anguish is, of course, suffering, and here both protagonists suffer from the very state of their existence – Edwarda has a kind of tantrum, she suffers, and the narrator feels her pain:

⁵²⁵ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 22–24.

⁵²⁶ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 153.

⁵²⁷ Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, op. cit., 11-13.

⁵²⁸ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 35.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.-

[T]he quick truth of arrow: one knows it will pierce the heart, but death will ride in with it. [...] Edwarda's convulsions snatched me away from my own self, they cast my life into a desert waste 'beyond', they cast it there carelessly, callously, the way one flings a living body to the hangman.⁵³⁰

The narrator feels like a fugitive, fleeing from anguish. As Bataille points out, such fleeing makes one suffer much and humiliate oneself; one becomes stupid, false and superficial in escaping from anguish. As he says, "[a]nguish, once evaded, makes of a man an agitated Jesuit, but agitated to emptiness".⁵³¹ Thus, the narrator is driven to make a choice – to take the anguish as impossibility and himself as a fact, as a being belonging to the laws of life and death, or to refuse and escape. His choice becomes clearer, probably because of Edwarda's weakness; he feels a power which can be his on condition that he agrees to hate himself:

The vertiginous sliding which was tipping me into ruin had opened up a prospect of indifference, of concerns, of desires there was no longer any question: at this point, the fever's desiccating ecstasy was issuing out of my utter inability to check myself.⁵³²

The narrator loses himself, his ego – he stops in never ending backing away from "possible" to "possible" and makes into the night of existence. "To tremble, to despair, in the cold of solitude, in the eternal silence of man (foolishness of all sentences, illusory answers for sentences, only the insane silence of night answers)."⁵³³ Functioning as a destructive force, God (Edwarda) leaves him no choice – she does *nothing*, but this is probably the most powerful violence of all. The narrator is trapped in this night of solitude of his own, as were Christian mystics when they entered into the "dark night of the soul" – this is a metaphor which derives from Christian mysticism and can be described as grief and torment. It is the "moment" when God inflows the soul and purges it from its ignorance and imperfection. The divine wisdom, entering into the soul, is also affliction and torment, because of the height of the Divine Wisdom, which transcends the soul and makes the soul "feel" its impurity and vileness.⁵³⁴ Thus, the dark night of the soul can be described as a moment when the divine meets the human and the latter becomes aware of his sinfulness and imperfection. It is a state of absolute loneliness and despair, when one is aware of his/her individual vileness at the same time being unaware and uncertain about the existence of the divine. Nevertheless, the divine is within this soul, thus having become impossible. Bataille calls this moment a "night of nonknowledge":

⁵³⁰ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 155.

⁵³¹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 35.

⁵³² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 156.

⁵³³ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 36.

⁵³⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, transl. and ed. by E. Allison Peers (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1959), 100.

The recourse to the desire not to die, except for the humiliation before God, even habitual means are together almost missing in the writing of Saint John of the Cross who, falling into the night of non-knowledge, touches upon the extreme limit of the possible.⁵³⁵

The “concept” of nonknowledge is an essential part of Bataille’s “mysticism”. Nonknowledge belongs to the realm of the project, because it consists of thousands of unanswered (and unanswerable) questions, while knowing belongs to the world of action. If the premise is that society (and, thus, also each individual) knows everything, it can be seen as a perfect society. Writing as a religious and mystical process is tied to the history as a project, which has an aim and a future, a *meaning*.⁵³⁶ The *self*, essentially a barrier in the Christian mysticism as well as of Bataille’s, is capable to make a difference between the project and the absolute. The self has a goal, and it is: to escape from the death of its own and go into the world where nothing “bad” could happen. This is a characteristic mark of all Western religiosity: the fear of death. For Bataille, the fear of death is not a goal; this fear is a meditation of the death of his own; it is a mirror where personal death reflects the death of God, a movement towards and backwards between dying and not-dying, a moment like the one of the eternal return, and, for Bataille, it can be identified with the “desire that unites sacrifice with eroticism, and eroticism with mysticism.”⁵³⁷

Unlike “ordinary” mystics, Bataille calls for sinking into the “night of existence”, not to seek for God within it and try to use it as a tool of purification. Bataille’s “mystical way” is the despair of one’s existence and torment that is caused by this consciousness of one’s own. In the world of the project, the self becomes a substitute of God, although the “circular absolute knowing is definitive not-knowing. Even supposing that I were to attain it, I know that I would know nothing more than what I know now.”⁵³⁸ Being the completion of circular, absolute knowing, the self can still ask the why-question which forms nonknowledge. Why does the necessity for knowledge exist? This question marks the “heterogeneous self” who breaks the “closed circle of knowing”.⁵³⁹

At the summit of the pyramid of existence, there is God, who dies; like the *ipse* beings that are always “insufficient” in relation to the larger grouping, God at the summit becomes the very principle of insufficiency. This lack in being is repeated by the man (or by the victim) in his necessary but impossible independence from that larger grouping of *ipse* beings, society.⁵⁴⁰

The nonknowledge marks such an insufficiency, the why-question which cannot be answered; also, it marks the necessity to be aware of one’s death as well as consciousness of the “death

⁵³⁵ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 12.

⁵³⁶ Allan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual*, op. cit., 286.

⁵³⁷ Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 161.

⁵³⁸ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 108.

⁵³⁹ Allan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual*, op. cit., 287.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

of God”. The desperate need for solitude and necessity to avoid it also marks the impossibility of a human self. This could somehow explain the libertine character, so favoured in Bataille’s novel. As he himself points out: “To give up my sexual habits would mean I’d have to discover some other means of tormenting myself, though this torture would have to be as intoxicating as alcohol.”⁵⁴¹ Existence is torment because of unsatisfied desire. Like an unsatisfied sexual need, it completes suffering. Eroticism as desire for fulfilment and risk to be conscious of one’s being is too heavy a burden for human strength to bear, as is the human existence in face of God-the-absolute. Thus, it can be said that *Madame Edwarda* tells us about search for God in eroticism. One “‘rediscovers’ God in excess, in ecstasy, in the ‘identity of extreme pleasure and extreme pain, the identity of being and death’– the ‘little death’ (*petite morte*), that is – a moment in which one feels oneself to be dying.”⁵⁴² In the desire for a naked body, one knows the best that one is. This knowledge can become unbearable.⁵⁴³ Initially, it becomes unbearable because of the mirror in oneself and in another human being. Then, it becomes unbearable as the awareness of mortality and at the same time craving for the fulfilment of the desire to reach God-the-absolute. This could be Bataille’s *mystical way*. Thus, liberation from individuality is a way how to try to reach God.⁵⁴⁴ In fact, the narrator loses himself, his ego, and this is probably the only possible way how to reach the Other, how to get closer to God-the-absolute. It not that he refuses himself; actually, he has no choice. God-the-absolute is too strong and too pre-eminent, and the narrator is destroyed by the sense of God’s absence.

This experience differs from that of the Christian mystics. In Christianity mystic is the one who not only believes in God and Christ but perceives the divine as living “fact” from his own immediate experience. Thus, mysticism for the (Christian) mystic becomes life that is based in conscious union with God. The narrator contemplates on his consciousness as well, and this could make him a mystic. However, his consciousness has nothing to do with union with God. In fact, like the mystic, he has tried to get out of the state of being alone, hating his egotism, and tried to lose himself ecstatically in an act of love with Madame Edwarda. By her collapse, he finds himself in a situation where he himself is incomplete; in fact, he is lost in the presence of Edwarda. He has lost himself like mystics do. Nevertheless, in the process of losing, heavens have opened to him. And, as I have already pointed out, what he sees in heaven is nothing. His experience is immediate, but, unlike mystics, he finds himself face to face with nothing. Lost, torn out of his solitude, he has ended up in a situation when he

⁵⁴¹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 22.

⁵⁴² Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 205.

⁵⁴³ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 12-13.

⁵⁴⁴ Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 206.

himself is absent, and so is Madame. What does a human being feel finding himself in a situation where everything is absent except the absence of God? Fear, anguish:

...fear... yes, fear, that only boundless thought can reach... fear, yes, but what of...?
The answer fills the universe and the universe in me:
- very clearly, of NOTHING.⁵⁴⁵

Edwarda's race into the night can be interpreted metaphorically as a race within the dark night of the soul. The character of Madame Edwarda thus stands for Bataille's "concept" of the "death of God" – she is a human herself, identified with God, and thus represents God's transcendence. Later on, she reveals God's "transparent absence", while being present herself as a symbol of God.⁵⁴⁶ Suffering is part of this revelation. The divine has deadly wounded the narrator, and this wound has to do with consciousness of the absent God. The idea of an individual existence is conducive to setting up an object the contemplation of which could lead towards ecstasy. This means, according to Bataille himself, that the subject is destroyed in meditation, whereas the object of the meditation, in turn, becomes a dying victim – i.e., the "truth" that the subject has found through the meditation is that God is dead, that the object of the meditation is dead because of the act of meditation. In fact, in the correlation of meditation or awareness of the universe, subject and object wound and destroy each other.⁵⁴⁷ This estrangement ends when the possibility to communicate has reached its end, when both the narrator and Edwarda are thrown into the realm of silence, "of sovereign indifference to self and silence [where] we encounter God."⁵⁴⁸ Also, the silent watching of Madame Edwarda copulating with the taxi-driver reminds of contemplation in the Catholic tradition. I will return to a more precise characterisation of Bataille's "mysticism" in the context of his atheology in the last chapter of the doctoral thesis, as his "mysticism" cannot be appropriately described within the framework of one novel. The overall context and characteristic marks of all novels are needed for such task. In the meantime it could be said that the "mysticism" of Bataille can be explained as the inner experience of the self, which could mirror the realm of the absolute, while staying out of direct language, and thus staying in silence. It is also important that *Madame Edwarda* reveals the portrait of the libertine character: it is a self whose true church is a whorehouse, because it is the place where one can contemplate on nakedness that, being a symbol for nonknowledge and the "why-question", is also a path in trying to reach the "dead God" who is also the absolute as nothingness.

⁵⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 6.

⁵⁴⁶ Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 206.

⁵⁴⁷ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 45.

⁵⁴⁸ Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 207.

3. 6. Dead God as the end of personal history: *Blue of Noon*

This novel could be deemed the most “historical” and the most “political” of Bataille’s novels. *Blue of Noon* seems to be the only one which could also be interpreted politically. However, this is not my interest, so I will look through its narrative and concentrate attention to its symbols and typical characters that have also been mentioned in other novels as well as explore the plot to find a possible thread of Bataille’s concept of the “death of God”. In the context of Bataille’s writing, it is worth noting the name of the main character – Henri Troppmann, and so one can ask if the name is an accident, keeping in mind what Bataille mentions in *W.C.*: “I gave the author of *W.C.* the pseudonym of Troppmann.”⁵⁴⁹ *W.C.* or the preface to *The Story of the Eye* from another text by Bataille, called *Le Petit (The Small One)*, was written in 1943, while *Blue of Noon* was written in 1935, “through the fire” of significant events of the world history – the World War II and the Spanish Civil War. The *Zeitgeist* of the time of writing the novel was marked by the most essential questions related to the very existence of a human being – the war forces oneself to re-estimate the values, the ground one is standing on, as well as transforms one’s attitude towards one’s work.⁵⁵⁰ Besides, one’s attitude towards religion and violence can change (and changes, in Bataille’s case) during the war, and this can be especially attributed to the World War II. The civil war is more local and as such more personal for individuals, as it appears throughout the novel. It can be said that the civil war has everything to do with one’s very existence, especially if people from one nation are waging the war on both sides.

The *Blue of Noon* tells about a young man, Henri Troppmann, and his three ladies during the Spanish Civil War. Troppmann could be called a “could-be libertine” (or “wannabe libertine”) – he drinks a lot, he has three women at the same time, but, still, he is not capable of making love with any one of them. He undergoes a crisis – political, sexual and existential – throughout the novel.⁵⁵¹ Troppmann goes from Paris, where he is sick and nurtured by Xenie (the first woman), to Barcelona in time to witness the first general strike of the Catalans against the Spaniards. Lazare, the second of his women, is a Marxist Jew and political activist, who is ready to suffer torture and martyrdom if troops of General Francisco Franco gets her, a type of strong “iron lady”, uncharacteristic to Bataille. She is also near Troppmann when he receives a letter from his wife, wherein she informs him about the divorce. Notably, Lazare has a name which could be interpreted through the lens of the Bible. Although this is an interesting coincidence, I will not try to put it in the frame of my interpretation. Because of

⁵⁴⁹ Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, op. cit., 45.

⁵⁵⁰ Hans-Juergen Heinrichs, op. cit., 56.

⁵⁵¹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, “Bataille in the Street”, Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed., op. cit., 28.

the necessity to narrow my interpretation, neither will I provide a deeper analysis of Lazare's stepfather, who is Jewish and also an interesting figure. Still, I will keep both the virgin Lazare as well as her stepfather in mind throughout the fourth part of my thesis. Both characters may be useful for the extension and systematization of my interpretation in the context of other novels. Although Troppmann narrates all his life to Lazare, which can also be interpreted as a confession, the strongest character of all women is Dirty, the third and probably the only one whom Troppmann loves. Dirty is an incontinent sluttish alcoholic, and during the conversation about Troppmann's impotence and desire for a dead woman, Lazare suggests for Dirty to play the role of the dead woman. All three arrive to Barcelona almost at the same time, and Troppmann is forced to make a choice.

Like it is in other novels, also in this the woman is situated in the very centre of the narrative (like Eponine in *L'Abbe C*, Simone/Marcelle in the *Story of the Eye*, Edwarda in *Madame Edwarda*, Marie in *The Dead Man*, and the mother of the narrator in *My Mother*). All these women function like an inclination of the desire, and the goal is to evoke the laughter, absurdity, loss, and lust. They also have a function of meditating eroticism.⁵⁵² Yet, there is another possibility – that Dirty, as well as Edwarda, is a God. Being Edwarda's "elder sister", Dirty also represents the divine in its march towards liberation, towards redemption. While Dirty prefers and loves being in this world, Edwarda has been obsessed with the life of a prostitute. Dirty could also be interpreted as for a precursor of Edwarda. In any case, in my view, both of them represent God. The difference between the two is marked by anonymity, the creativity of which is stolen by the destiny (Dirty), and heroism which moves the destiny, becoming the destiny itself (Edwarda).⁵⁵³

Thus, although there are some "typically Batailleian" traits in this novel, the prostitute and the "direct" image of the libertine are missing. One important aspect is that both Dirty and Troppmann are ill, and their weakness shows up the possibilities of various liquids of human body. It is worth to keep in mind that Bataille knew very well what it meant to be ill – not only because of the illness of his father but also because he himself had a pulmonary disease. As Bataille most of his life could not breathe freely, he surely knew what he was talking about when pointing out that a human being is just a frail, physical animal.⁵⁵⁴ The same could be said about Troppmann and Dirty – they are both persistently in the shadow of death – because of illness and alcoholism. The weakness caused by illness, hangover and massive drinking marks all the text of *Blue of Noon*, manifesting as a human desire to belong to the realm of the

⁵⁵² Julia Kristeva, *Polylogue*, transl. Bernd Mattheus. Cited in: Hans-Juergen Heinrichs, op. cit., 58.

⁵⁵³ Marguerite Duras, "Apropos Georges Bataille" in Georges Bataille, *Das Blau des Himmels* (Muenchen: Matthes & Seitz Verlag, 1990), xiii-xiv.

⁵⁵⁴ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 22.

absolute and “the comical appearing to be not authority, but one who, though desiring it, does not manage in his efforts to submit to it.”⁵⁵⁵ In this state, the duet represents the realm of the project, or reason in its vain effort to answer as God would do – to give satisfaction.⁵⁵⁶ At the same time, the impossibility of fulfilling the desire and the passiveness of the couple connects them with the realm of the absolute. In other words, it seems that they live in a continuous moment of the “death of God”. Also, a short look at the characteristic and not so characteristic symbols of the novel could be of help in exploring the situation of the “death of God” in *Blue of Noon*.

In the very beginning, Troppmann introduces the reader with the duet of himself and Dirty, characterising it: “The scene that preceded nauseous carnival – afterwards, rats must have come crawling over the floor round the two sprawled bodies – was in every way worthy of Dostoevsky.”⁵⁵⁷ The mentioning of Dostoevsky is also interesting, but more in an existential, not religious context, so I will not analyse it here. Although the rats seems to be a reference to Dostoevsky, it is a symbol that Bataille himself also used, even naming one of his works *A Story of Rats*. It is written after the *Blue of Noon* and consists of notes, telling about a broken love-story between A. and B. It is considered that the

namesake of the story comes from an incident in the novel where a man orchestrates a very particular scenario in order to achieve sexual release. The narrative described in this text comes from the biography of Marcel Proust. Through Troppmann's repeated telling of this necrophilic incident, Bataille is attempting to perpetuate some sort of sexual deviation myth for himself, so that he, like Sade and Proust, will be remembered not only for his literature, but for his personal strives towards transgression.⁵⁵⁸

The assertion that Bataille created a myth about himself is not so undeniable, of course, keeping in mind his attitude towards an individual. Still, the reference to Marcel Proust could be of a greater importance, as well as references to the “death of God” in Bataille’s *Story of Rats* (see also part 3.7 for more detailed analysis of this text). Keeping in mind the possible connections between these two books (and the possibility of influence from Marcel Proust), I will first give a short insight into other symbols that appear in the text. The first one, which could as well be without any meaning, is a mirror, although it can also serve as a link to other novels, especially if reflected in the context of Troppmann’s personality.

⁵⁵⁵ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 14.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁵⁷ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, transl. Harry Mathews (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1979), 12.

⁵⁵⁸ “Discursive Bodies: The Corpses in the Bataille’s *Blue of Noon*”, <http://www.intercaste.com/text/batcorpse.htm>, accessed on 09/02/2012.

I went into the bathroom. I was very pale. For no reason at all I looked at myself in the mirror for a long time; I was horribly unkempt, almost coarse, with swollen features that were not even ugly, and the rank look of a man just out of bed.⁵⁵⁹

There is no other reflection on mirror in this novel, and in the first pages the narrator positions himself as far from being the nicest man in the world. It seems that something has occurred that has destroyed the possibility of beauty in him. If there is any sense in this destruction of beauty, it could be in the mirroring, as in other novels, especially Madame Edwarda. Mirror is used as a tool to stress Troppmann's existential and mental state. Thus, the mirror is a more reflective element of the narrative – it helps Troppmann to understand his miserable state at the very beginning of the novel. He simultaneously craves for both, for the project and the absolute, i.e. for a “normal life” and for becoming the “prey for the absolute.”⁵⁶⁰ The mirror shows everything in reverse (when one raises the right hand, the reflection in the mirror raises the left hand etc.), and it could also be attributed to the concept – when the realm of the project looks at itself in the mirror, it sees or may see a distant image of the realm of the absolute. Thus, the concept may undergo a destruction of itself because of the bilateral opposite.⁵⁶¹ It is true at least in Troppmann's case that looking in the mirror has helped him to be aware of death, i.e. of the death of his own. The awareness of one's death could be explained as follows:

Facing my death in the light of the possible annihilation of everything else means precisely that all of my life along, with all whom I know, along with my and our order of preferences and hierarchy of values, may be extinguished. It means that with the extinction of my individual essence, there is the possibility that all agents of manifestation and, as well, the very of the world itself as the correlate of agents of manifestation can become annihilated.⁵⁶²

In Bataille's context, this could also be the point where the novel takes a more mystically-atheistic turn – being aware of one's own death (as it is when a person is ageing or in the middle of the war) could be a first step to recognize the situation where God himself is dead. After all, the World War II was a crucial point which made Bataille to write his mystical-atheistic works (*Summa Atheologica*).⁵⁶³ Supposing that it is not possible to be fully aware of the death of one's own, the awareness of the situation where God is dead is even more impossible. One must keep in mind Bataille's attitude towards literature and the main task of writing – it is a desire to say the impossible. As such this novel also fits into the “Sadean

⁵⁵⁹ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 13.

⁵⁶⁰ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 21.

⁵⁶¹ Nick Land, *Thirst for the Annihilation. Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism (an Essay on Atheistic Religion)*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), op. cit., 13.

⁵⁶² James G. Hart, *Who One Is. Book 2. Existenz and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Springer, 2009), 60.

⁵⁶³ “Georges Bataille”, Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist, eds., *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 28.

corpus” of Bataille’s writing.⁵⁶⁴ Just as most of de Sade’s characters, Troppmann also is “lost on inaccessible heights. In an endless and relentless tornado, the objects of desire are invariably propelled towards torture and death. The only conceivable end is possible desire of the executioner to be the victim of torture itself.”⁵⁶⁵ This acknowledgement leads the interpretation towards two theses: (1) as a character of the novel, Troppmann embodies, for Bataille, the desire to say the impossible (i.e. the state of his illness as well as the look in the mirror and the consequent self-characterisation); (2) as far as love towards Dirty tortures Troppmann in a way uncharacteristic to Bataille (i.e. they do not copulate in the main part of the novel, although she spends a lot of the narrative naked), Troppmann could be interpreted as a victim (a human), while Dirty, being herself God, shares the desire with Troppmann, thus approaching her suicide.

They make love at least in the end of the novel, on All Souls Day (*le jour des morts*) in mud above a cemetery in Germany. Still, this frantic lovemaking above the tombs seems more like an exception than the attainment of a new norm – a sudden surge of power, not a steady stream.⁵⁶⁶ I will return to this love-making later, in the conclusion of the interpretation, before that taking a closer look at Troppmann’s attitude towards Dirty: “She gave me a feeling of purity nonetheless. Even in her debauchery, there was such a candor in her that I sometimes wanted to grovel at her feet. I was afraid of her.”⁵⁶⁷

Like many of Bataille’s libertines, Troppmann is afraid of the woman he loves. It seems that fear and love goes sometimes hand-in-hand for Bataille (it is obvious that Robert is afraid of Eponine in *L’Abbe C*; the narrator is afraid of Edwarda in *Madame Edwarda*, and the narrator is afraid of his mother in *My Mother*). The phenomenon I would like to point out here is the very fact of fear. It seems that Bataille has not been influenced by Søren Kierkegaard directly; however, he knew Kierkegaard’s works (he makes a reference to Kierkegaard in *Inner Experience*) and main lines of thinking.⁵⁶⁸ There is also an assertion that Bataille has studied Kierkegaard’s works since the time of developing interest in philosophy.⁵⁶⁹ More specifically, Bataille’s understanding of sacrifice was also influenced by de Sade, Nietzsche, as well as Kierkegaard, Don Juan and Dionysus.⁵⁷⁰ As Troppmann is a victim of Dirty-God, he knows he has to be sacrificed, and thus is forced to try to be aware of his own death which

⁵⁶⁴ Hans-Juergen Heinrichs, *Der Wunsch nach einer souveränen Existenz*, op. cit., 65.

⁵⁶⁵ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 116.

⁵⁶⁶ Susan Rubin Suleiman, “Bataille in the Street” in Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed., op. cit., 29.

⁵⁶⁷ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 14.

⁵⁶⁸ Michael Surya, op. cit., 506 (note 2).

⁵⁶⁹ Michael Richardson, op. cit., 20.

⁵⁷⁰ Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, transl. Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 131–132.

explains his fear. The sacrifice of Abraham comes to mind here, especially if bearing in mind Kierkegaard's influence on Pierre Klossowski, Bataille's "Christian friend". *Acéphale*, a periodical under the editorship of Bataille, praised "Karl Jaspers's study, published in German in 1936, which interpreted Nietzsche in the light of Kierkegaard, showing that both had broken once and for all with the philosophy of objective rationality."⁵⁷¹ Along with the sacrifice of Abraham, it seems very interesting to compare fear, as we know it from Kierkegaard, with that of Bataille. As I have already pointed out several times, this must not be considered an appropriate interpretation or clarification of Kierkegaard's difficult thinking; rather, I will give a short interpretative introduction as far as the concept of fear and Abraham's sacrifice can be related to the *Blue of Noon*.

It seems that this book about the Civil War can be read as the book about fear in general. The war comes closer; it can be felt in the air, friends talk about it in whispers. Fear is very important for Kierkegaard, first of all in religious context, and it seems that Bataille has also given a meaning to this concept. It is possible to link Bataille's understanding of fear to Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety (or dread); moreover, to do it "in such a way that it has in mind and before its eye the dogma of original sin."⁵⁷² The original sin and salvation are constants of theological anthropology for most Christians. Here anxiety manifests as fear of breaking the Law and thus becomes an ethical question.⁵⁷³ Of course, this interpretation is far too Christian for Bataille, but it is possible to presume that fear from breaking the Law is closely connected with fear from God; this is the thesis I will keep in mind while analysing Bataille's *Blue of Noon* as a "book of fear".

Minerva appears in Troppmann's dreadful nightmare during his fever. "She was gigantic. [...] I had now grown small. When she saw me, she realized that I was afraid. My fear attracted her."⁵⁷⁴ Minerva was a Roman goddess, protector of manual and intellectual skills, a counterpart of Greek Athena – a patroness of war heroes, gods and palladium (a token of invincibility).⁵⁷⁵ The image of Minerva functions like a reflection in a mirror, though this time not for Troppmann, but for Dirty. Besides, Dirty is dead in Troppmann's dream:

I quickly grasped that, in this dream, Dirty (now both insane and dead) had assumed the garb and likeness of the *Commandore*. In this unrecognizable guise, she was rushing at me in order to annihilate me.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷¹ Elisabeth Roudinesco, op. cit., 133.

⁵⁷² Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, no transl.

<http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/kierkegaard.htm>, accessed on 05. 02. 2011

⁵⁷³ Bastian Strinz, "Das Obszöne Werk von Georges Bataille" in *Kritische Ausgabe*, 31. 01. 2011.

<http://www.kritische-ausgabe.de/index/php/archiv/4349>, accessed on 05/02/2011

⁵⁷⁴ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 56–57.

⁵⁷⁵ "Minerva", Lindsey Jones, ed. in chief, op. cit., Vol. 9:6043.

⁵⁷⁶ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 57.

Of course, the symbol in the book about revolution seems quite clear – the war is near, and Troppmann is afraid of his life, and the goddess of war seems to be pleased with this awareness of mortality (which, I suppose, is the reason for this fear). With respect to my thesis about fear as the fear of God, this interpretation is, of course, too straight. The key word is mortality. In the presence of the divine Troppmann realises his mortality, even if in a dream. The world is not a safe place (not only because of the military actions, if I stick to the narrative, but also because of the “death of God” – God has lost his mind and is dead now, while still acting within the dream). Applying a more Christian interpretation, it is possible to use the concept of sin. God can destroy a human life if a person has committed a sin. Moreover, God can destroy the person even if the sin has not been committed. For example, God can act through war, using other humans as a weapon. The world is not a safe place because of the condition of mortality. Is this world without God? Has the world become a more dangerous place because of the absence of God?

At the same time, God is not only the judge; he has also been a comfort and a hope for a human being. Now, with God being dead, the human is left alone; he must live on his own. The dream torments Troppmann for several days; his state of illness worsens, and his life becomes a “sickly hallucination”.⁵⁷⁷ The illness also is the possibility of being aware of God’s absence, since:

That God could arise from feelings of being miserable puts a bad light on the human condition. We can’t bear distress. The feeling of God’s absence is linked to disgust with beatitude.⁵⁷⁸

The doctor comes and examines Troppmann. From the way he speaks, Troppmann understands that he might be dying.⁵⁷⁹ The fear of death could as well be related to the feeling of wasting one’s time; the feverishness may be the way how anguish comes out from human being.⁵⁸⁰ Notably, the name of the protagonist, Henri Troppmann, when pronounced in French, could be helpful in the encounter with anguish: Henri (*on rit*) as the one who laughs and Troppmann as the one who flows over the edge (*Mann/man de trop*) or is excessive (*Mann/man en trop*). His very being is situated somewhere between impotence and panic.⁵⁸¹

Quite soon Troppmann is sure he is going to die and makes Xenie make his death even fouler by asking her to undress near his sickbed. Xenie threatens that she will jump out of the

⁵⁷⁷ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 57.

⁵⁷⁸ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 96.

⁵⁷⁹ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 65.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 97.

⁵⁸¹ Bernd Mattheus, “Koinzidenzen” in Georges Bataille, *Der Blau des Himmels*, uebersetzt. Sigrid von Massenbach (Muenchen: Matthes und Seitz, 1990) , 217.

window and her movement causes pain to Troppmann and fear as well – “fear of falling to everything that was already giving way inside me.”⁵⁸² This, in my view, is the place in the novel where mortality of the other is grasped. Thus, the possibility of loss and unpleasant experience by observing the death of someone is made feasible. Also, this can also be interpreted as a mode of expression for anguish, which could be characterised as approaching to the “death of God”.⁵⁸³ Later Troppmann acknowledges directly: “I’m afraid of dying. All my life I’ve been obsessed with the fear of death, and now – I can’t stand seeing that window open any longer, it’s making me dizzy.”⁵⁸⁴ By imagining Xenie’s possible experience of suicide, Troppmann becomes aware of his obsession with the other that could be an indication of ecstasy which develops further in the plot and reaches its peak in Troppmann’s and Dirty’s act in the graveyard.⁵⁸⁵

After this short interpretation of the dream, I would like to return to Kierkegaard. For him, fear that is connected with breaking the Law is the truthfulness of freedom and a possibility for possibility. The possibility does not take a specific form; it remains nothing. This is the point where Bataille develops his aesthetics. The truthfulness of freedom breaks the borders. He is interested in the intensity of individual’s emotions. To endanger a human life means breaking the commandment “Thou shalt not kill”. In fact, this means breaking the taboo. On the one hand, taboo means a prohibition, something unchaste. On the other hand, it is something attractive, even sacral; it has something of the divine.⁵⁸⁶ According to Bataille, “the two primary taboos affect, firstly, death, and, secondly, sexual functions.”⁵⁸⁷ In the novel, both of them are violated. This is for Bataille the “risk of the possible” that emerges through sexual obsession of the protagonists in the situation of the war. Taboos are constructed by heterogeneous elements and also function as the prohibition of lust.⁵⁸⁸

Keeping in mind this “risk of the possible” of breaking a taboo, I offer a Christian interpretation of Troppmann’s case, comparing him to Abraham in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*. I will not analyse the ethical aspect of Abraham’s choice, but fear about his faith. It is obvious that there is nothing written about Abraham’s feelings or thoughts in the story about sacrificing Isaac. In Genesis 22:14 Abraham gives a name for Moriah (‘*erec hammorijja* – “the earth that is chosen/singled out by YHWH”⁵⁸⁹). What is essential for

⁵⁸² Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 77-78.

⁵⁸³ Nick Land, op. cit., 76.

⁵⁸⁴ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 83.

⁵⁸⁵ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 59.

⁵⁸⁶ Bastian Strinz, op. cit.

⁵⁸⁷ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 42.

⁵⁸⁸ Bastian Strinz, op. cit.

⁵⁸⁹ Wenham, G. J. (1998). *Vol. 2: Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16-50* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Word Biblical Commentary (Ge 22:3). Dallas: Word, Incorporated. Accessed on 10. 03. 2011.

Kierkegaard is that this “chosen earth” is a place where faith and a relationship with God can take place. Thus, keeping in mind both Abraham’s story and Kierkegaard’s interpretation of it, the concept of the place is crystallised where a devoted believer in YHWH (in this case) can proceed and pull through his very existence. This is the place where fear and trembling inside human mind takes place, where all his existence, his faith is questioned by the object of faith (remember four versions of Abraham’s fate in *Fear and Trembling*).

God promised Abraham that Isaac would become the continuator of his nation and simultaneously demanded a sacrifice. Kierkegaard probably was too devoted to personal faith, taking Abraham as the father of faith. Yet, I think that Abraham can be considered a non-believer. He did not believe in either of the two cases. He did not believe that Isaac would be saved, nor he believed that his nation would develop from Isaac. In the moment when Isaac’s sacrifice was stopped, Abraham was saved – but for what price? My interest is not a purely Christian interpretation of this passage, so I will not deal with Abraham’s salvation. For me an essential point is Moriah – it could be said that Moriah symbolises man’s situation in Bataille’s perspective as well: man (Abraham in this case) is absolutely alone (as is Troppmann in the *Blue of Noon*) and abandoned for his choice. It is he who must decide. No one else can do it and no one can help him in his solitude, in the torture caused by the need to make a decision.

Thus Abraham is actually impotent in his faith, as is Troppmann in his desire for Dirty; the fear of becoming a sacrifice has made him impotent. Both of them will never get what they crave for. Troppmann, like Abraham, is stuck in his existence, between the willing to act and not being able to act. Derrida found in Kierkegaard that “God is the name of the possibility I have of keeping a secret that is visible from the interior but not from exterior [...] the structure of invisible interiority that is called, in Kierkegaard’s sense, subjectivity.”⁵⁹⁰ The subjectivity, in this case, means that the concept of God stays within the borders of subjectivity, constructed by the human. This subjectivity encompasses each and every idea the human constructs, and it stays within the limits of everything that constructs the human existence (such as linear time, history, etc.). As a result, one gains the world where there is “a history of God and of the name of God as the history of secrecy, a history that is at the same time secret and without any secrets. Such a history is also an economy.”⁵⁹¹ For Bataille, the concept of economy is related not only with socialist (Marxist) economy but also with solar (general) economy.⁵⁹² Solar economy is a concept with several meanings, in which the duality

⁵⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, transl. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 108.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁹² Benjamin Nouys, *op. cit.*, 112.

of moral judgement is stressed, arguing that in ancient societies (before Christianity) the value was assigned to the unproductive glory, while in the period of Christianity it was measured in terms of production.⁵⁹³ The general economy assumes “that with the limitless energy of the sun as the driving motor, there is always more energy produced than can be dealt with rationally.”⁵⁹⁴ In this way the energy which is produced cannot be used up, only lost without aim, without meaning. From this point the concepts of homogeneity and heterogeneity are also developed, where homogeneity means commensurability of various elements, while heterogeneity includes everything which results from unproductiveness.⁵⁹⁵ One of the phenomena which illustrate heterogeneity is war, making heterogeneity the outer world by being a logic that dictates the turn from “community” to “impossible individuality”.⁵⁹⁶ The symbol of the impossible individuality is *acephale*, a headless man who expresses not only the sovereignty committed to destruction and death of God but also “the lie of signification, grammar, authority and any notion of the elevated ‘human’”.⁵⁹⁷ As such, the desire of Troppmann, just as the desire of Abraham, is waste of energy, i.e. it craves without any particular aim, and both reach out for the impossible individuality, both of them long for the satisfaction impossible to gain. In Troppmann’s case, the impossibility is illustrated by his impotence. I will return to these concepts in the last part of my doctoral thesis, analysing them in the context of other novels. For now, it will suffice to point out that the individual impossibility cannot be reached through activity, which is left for the Hegelian slave.

As I have already pointed out, Troppmann longs for a satisfaction with Dirty, like Abraham wants to fulfil the will of God. Still, a lasting satisfaction is not possible. The result of this impossibility is that the only conceivable good consists in “never being still, and not in fighting the obstacles to the final reconciliation. [...] One has reason never to be satisfied and one has reason also to abandon the illusion that there could be a remedy for this situation.”⁵⁹⁸

Both Abraham and Troppmann suffer from it and, paradoxically, these sufferings (if we trust Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Abraham’s inner experience) are related to their *Weltanschauung*. What is most important, both of them are subject to fear about their very existence. For Kierkegaard, the interpretation of Abraham conveyed “a new emphasis on faith as a way of life. This emphasis is meant to replace the centuries-old understanding of faith as merely an acceptance of dogmatic truths. [...] The emphasis on willing and acting rather than

⁵⁹³ Georges Bataille, *Accursed Share*, op. cit., 28-29

⁵⁹⁴ Eleanor Kaufman, *The Delirium of Praise*. Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault, Klossowski (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 120.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Allan Stoekl, *The Agonies of the Intellectual. Commitment, Subjectivity and the Performative in the Twentieth-Century French Tradition*, op. cit., 265.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 265-266.

⁵⁹⁸ Jean-Michel Besnier, “Bataille, the Emotive Intellectual”, op. cit., 21.

thinking and reasoning is also highlighted by the sheer irrationality of Abraham's faith, his belief 'by virtue of the absurd' that he will get Isaac back."⁵⁹⁹

God has deceived Abraham and therefore is not the same God whom Abraham has believed in. He has doubts about the correctness of his decision, is afraid of being in the wrong by misunderstanding one or another command of God. Thus, Abraham's religious experience is fear and solitude – God has forsaken him. In this moment of choice, God is dead for Abraham.

Using this analogy, Dirty could be considered a "dead God", at least for Troppmann. There are some similarities in her with the women who function as "a means" to the consciousness of the absent God in other novels (almost all of them can be judged as "morally dirty", with an exception of Marcelle). Sexually she remains nothing to him but the source of torture, as for Abraham – God remains nothing but the source of fear of breaking the Law. Both of them are subject to violence: during the narrative, Troppmann is not capable to explain his feelings to Dirty, as Abraham is not capable to find an explanation for God's will. They have both come to the realm of absurd and total solitude. Both are in a desperate situation. Abraham cannot refuse from sacrificing and cannot choose to do it; Troppmann, on his part, cannot make love to Dirty and cannot escape it. Dirty embodies his fear of death, as strong and as absurd as Abraham's faith:

I was waiting for Dirty, I was waiting for Dorothea the way a man waits for death. The dying man suddenly realizes that it's all over: what will shortly happen, however, is the one thing in the world that ever mattered.⁶⁰⁰

For Troppmann, everything is going to end by Dirty's arrival, as the world has gained a new meaning because of Dirty's absence. Kierkegaard's move towards the absurd can also be of great importance in Bataille's context because of the impossibility to rely on anything:

Kierkegaard moved in a world where it becomes impossible to rely on anything, where irony is free. This is possible because of his dint of going to the end of the possible, and to the point of the absurd.⁶⁰¹

The absurdity in Troppmann's waiting for Dirty can also be explained as the impossibility of being aware of the experience of one's own death. This waiting may symbolise the absurd trying to be aware of a personal death as a happening and frame a possibility for human imagination to avoid the possibility for such awareness. This also connects the second name of Troppmann with *Don Juan* or the figure of the *Commandeur* whom Troppmann has seen

⁵⁹⁹ Ronald M. Green, "'Developing' *Fear and Trembling*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay & Gordon D. Marino (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 259.

⁶⁰⁰ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 128.

⁶⁰¹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 12.

in a dream about the dead God. The figure reveals an important aspect which explains Troppmann's impotence – the figure of Don Giovanni is also a figure of his father, and he hopes his blind anger towards his father will exorcise his corpse.⁶⁰² Since Freud, the figure of the father is also associated with God the Father. Although for Kierkegaard Don Giovanni embodied “desire as the principle” which is not connected with my interpretation here, anxiety is present in the life of Kierkegaard's Don Giovanni.⁶⁰³ In some sense it goes together with Troppmann's feeling, which could also be characterised by Bataille's words attributed to human existence:

I will die in hideous conditions.
I take pleasure today in being the object of disgust for the sole being to whom destiny links my life.
I solicit everything negative that a laughing man can experience.
The exhausted head in which “I” find myself has become so timid, so eager, that death alone could satisfy it.⁶⁰⁴

Soliciting everything negative that a laughing man can experience resembles Troppmann's necrophilia, which is also the reason why he was not capable of having sex with Dirty.⁶⁰⁵ If the figure of God the Father is added to this interpretation, it appears that Troppmann still has a Freudian hatred towards it. The figure of the father in this novel (likewise in *The Impossible*) is symbolized by the image of Commandetore.

Later on, Troppmann tells about a nightmare where he struggles with the (dead) Commandetore and confesses:

Facing him, I started to tremble. Facing him, I became derelict.
[...] Since that day, I have been doomed to a solitude that I reject and no longer have the heart to endure. [...] Born of disreputable pain, the insolence that persists in spite of everything, started growing again: slowly at first, then in a sudden burst that has blinded and transfigured me with a happiness that defies all reason.⁶⁰⁶

The war brings the image of Commandetore into reality. It links the world of unconscious (dreams) with reality. In this way, war is a means that tends to bring the inner experience “out”, makes it a “reality”, withdrawing Troppmann from the summit of inner experience.⁶⁰⁷ When Dirty comes at last, it turns out she is ill and fatigued – life seems to have forsaken her, but she acknowledges that pain has made her happy.⁶⁰⁸ It is like she is a symbol of the possibility to be aware of the death of one's own. Later, already in the hotel, Troppmann

⁶⁰² Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 121.

⁶⁰³ George Pattison, “Art in an Age of Reflection” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, op. cit., 82-83.

⁶⁰⁴ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 79.

⁶⁰⁵ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 122.

⁶⁰⁶ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 24.

⁶⁰⁷ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 44.

⁶⁰⁸ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 131.

realises that what he loves in this woman is the impulse to violence, hatred, her sudden ugliness, that has stamped on her features.⁶⁰⁹

After the period of war and militarisation, Troppmann's fear of his own death ends up in making love with Dirty, and it happens in the graveyard. Dirty's eroticism is similar to that of a grave – "her naked cleft lay open to me like a freshly dug grave".⁶¹⁰ She has been away again for some time and, returning, she confesses she went to church. When Troppmann confesses he cannot understand her going to the church, Dirty answers that she could gravel at God's feet if she believed he does not exist. When he repeats the question, she simply turns back to him, thus, her answer is silence. It seems that through silence she is trying to return to the summit of the inner experience, by being alone (she asks Troppmann to leave) Like Troppmann, she has realised that every action makes the existence fragmentary. Simultaneously, you cannot keep off acting. So, human existence is cursed in a vain try to reach the impossible.⁶¹¹ The love-making in the graveyard takes place in a Sunday morning, in November, and it is cold. Troppmann is finally capable to make love with her. It seems that at least he has an erection.

The erection, however, does not have the sense of a military stiffness; human bodies are erect on the ground like a challenge to Earth, to the mud which engenders them and which they are happy to send back to nothingness.

Nature giving birth to man was a dying mother: she gave "being" to the one whose coming into the world was her own death sentence.⁶¹²

When combined with this citation of *Inner Experience*, the scene of love-making in the graveyard seems to incorporate everything that has happened before: they make love on a rock over graves, which is a strong symbol of war, and at the point of ecstasy they begin to slide down the sloping ground. Also, Troppmann's erection ends the military stiffness which is nothingness of the environment human lives in. The scene in the graveyard turns the death sentence to which the humans have condemned the earth into a death sentence of the human. The nakedness has faced death at last, and desire has fulfilled itself. Has it become a project because of the action of Troppmann and Dirty? Yes and no – they are falling into the night, which can be read as a symbol of nothingness. Striving towards nothingness remains unconscious. It also remains accidental. It has nothing to do with the need to master one's own life (aggravated by the war). Troppmann is able to do what Abraham could not – he can avoid making a decision, he can avoid acting, and thus just let his life flow. The eternal return

⁶⁰⁹ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 131.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 144.

⁶¹¹ See also: Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., xxiv.

⁶¹² Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 78.

also occurs after the love-making, as Dirty recalls for Troppmann the soldiers “who fought the war in muddy trenches.”⁶¹³ On the one hand, Dirty has ceased being herself. On the other hand, she is convinced that there will be war again soon. She wants war because of graves, as the ecstasy in the graveyard caused her a sense of presence irreducible to any kind of notion.⁶¹⁴

To sum up, the dead God in the *Blue of Noon* symbolically appears in a woman’s body, just like in the *Dead Man*. Troppmann, who represents humanity, is depicted as one who desires to say/do the impossible and thus is tended towards it. Furthermore, a human is a victim for God who tends to commit suicide. Thus, the core of human existence becomes a fear to be a victim of God and to be dead together with God. Likewise, the image of Commandetore symbolises the dead God of Christianity (dead God as Father’s figure). The main function of Commandetore as a symbol is to cause fear and draw attention to the image of the dead God (symbolised by Dirty). This fear means breaking the taboo (of not-killing), which is constructed of heterogeneous elements. In this way, the dead God becomes constrained to Bataille’s view of solar economy, where there is no necessity for God being useful (or “to be” at all). When interpreted in this way, it turns out that, for a human being, God is a torturer. But God also suffers, and suffering is the point where deconstruction of the “mainstream Christianity” becomes possible, where the dead God contains the possibility to become the sun of a solar economy, without productiveness, without “being useful”, without “being” at all. It means, that the “suffering of God”, which can result in his death, is also a possibility for God to be saved from Christianity and thus also from the usefulness where God is someone who should answer the prayers and thus give something to other beings. God’s suffering may release him from being through anguish and inner experience. In this case – not human’s but God’s. Unlike Kierkegaard, Bataille leaves a space for God’s own decision “to be or not to be”, and, within this space, he also leaves for the human being a possibility for a vain try to reach the impossible.

3. 7. Three “false incarnations” and the “genuine” dead God: *My Mother*

Like the previous one, this novel is also difficult, and “death of God” in it, in my interpretation, appears in at least two ways. Written in 1966, this is also the only work of Bataille that has ever been cinematized (in 2004 by director Christophe Honoré). The film is

⁶¹³ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 145.

⁶¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 18.

an independent artwork that does not fully match the novel. For this reason, I will use it only occasionally, where it can give another twist in the interpretation.

Although Bataille plays psychological games in several of his novels, here the use of psychology is most evident. As most of Bataille's characters, those of this novel are all psychologically "wrong", and psychological analyses of some of them would also be a very interesting challenge which could possibly give new insights into Bataille's "religiosity", especially because of some circumstances characterised further. However, I will not dwell on psychological issues in my thesis. In any case, as far as it can be inferred from the plot, this novel presents a preposterous account of the classical concept of psychoanalysis, the Oedipus complex, also in its distorting form.⁶¹⁵

The main character, Pierre, loves his mother as much as he hates his father, who is an atheist or anti-clericalist. Pierre is going to become a Catholic priest and thinks that his mother is a victim of his father. After the death of his father, he decides to live with his mother, longing to become a perfect knight for her. Besides, his mother is not a victim – just the opposite, this aspect has been somehow reversed in her relationship with Pierre's father. Pierre's mother Hélène has a habit of secret drinking, and she makes love with women. She introduces her son to her lifestyle, and Pierre becomes someone mirroring his mother; his inner struggle with himself is well-described. In the end, the mother commits suicide and – as far as she is a seducer, who tempts the reader toward God and breaking all moral rules – becomes a dead God herself.⁶¹⁶ Of course, this is just one, "an external" interpretation of the story. In this chapter I propose three interpretations of the novel: the first is based on the story about three substitutes of the mother (God); the second concerns the mother and her death; the third is shorter, and it is devoted to some aspects of legitimation of literature, as far as the analysis includes mottos of the chapters that give another meaning to the whole text.

Speaking about the second interpretation of the text, it is interesting to keep in mind another detail from the biography of Bataille – that Sylvia Bataille, his wife, left Bataille to become a wife of the famous French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), a friend of Bataille and, inter alia, the man who proposed a "theory of mirrors" in development psychology. Lacan wrote about "the mirror stage as formative of the function of the 'I' which analyses the origin of the human subject through mirroring effect of the mother's look."⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁵ The Oedipus complex in psychoanalysis means "a desire for sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex and concomitant sense of rivalry with the parent of the same sex" (see: "Oedipus complex", *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/425451/Oedipus-complex>, accessed 27/08/2012) The "distorting Oedipus complex" in the context of this novel is understood as parent's desire for sexual involvement with children of the opposite sex.

⁶¹⁶ Yukio Mishima, "Georges Bataille and Divinus Deus", op. cit., 19.

⁶¹⁷ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 32.

Thus, the mirror stage is identification and transformation that takes place when the “I” assumes an image. The function of this transformation is to stabilise relation between the “inner” and “outer” worlds (or, as Lacan himself puts it, *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*).⁶¹⁸ Although Lacan admitted his influences from Bataille (especially for the interpretation of Nietzsche’s and de Sade’s thought), it is considered that Bataille was not influenced by Lacan. However, it is certain that Bataille was a great reader of Freud.⁶¹⁹ Be that as it may, mirrors appear almost in every novel of Georges Bataille, and this is why it is interesting to see if Lacan’s theory (or, a small part of it) could be helpful for understanding the “death of God” as mirroring one’s parents.⁶²⁰

Interpreting the stabilising transformation outside the area of psychoanalysis, there is a possibility to see Pierre as a mirror image of his mother, as an urge to identify with her and become like her (he decides to live as she does; he also sleeps with his mother’s mistresses). Furthermore, as we will see further, Hansi also is a mirror of Pierre’s mother Héléne. It seems that almost every character in this novel mirrors Héléne in some way. She is really like a God who mirrors herself in everyone whom she meets. Thus, it can be said that Héléne symbolises transformation in this novel. Her transformative nature is also shown at the end of the novel, when she dies. The other women characters in *My Mother* are more like her than Pierre; sometimes they seem to be her incarnations.

a) Three “false” incarnations of the mother

In some sense, there is a contradiction in Pierre’s feelings towards his mother and his father; he adores his mother so much that he even has not realised that his mother drinks. When he realises at last, Pierre says that, besides laughing and drinking, his mother never stops going away.⁶²¹ As it turns out further in the narrative, the mother has a few female lovers, and she introduces them to Pierre. Both of them, Rhea and Hansi, become the lovers of Pierre as well, and he falls in love with Hansi while living with her and her mistress Lulu. The latter also has an important role: it seems that all three women somehow become substitutes for Pierre’s mother, as if she was a highest being, who is incarnated in several bodies. Let us turn to these “incarnations” of Pierre’s mother step by step.

⁶¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 1-3.

⁶¹⁹ Elisabeth Roudinesco, *op.cit.*, 131–132.

⁶²⁰ It is also interesting to point out that Lacan did not accept Freud’s theory of Oedipal complex, and the mirror theory can be seen as an alternative view.

⁶²¹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, *op. cit.*, 29.

The first one is Rhea. She appears after Pierre has already used to new turns in his life: the fact that his father is dead and that his mother has turned the life of his father into a hell. He feels abandoned, sad and lost in his solitude, when the mother introduces him to Rhea – a young, pretty dancer who loves drinking as much as his mother. The mother makes arrangements that Pierre meets with Rhea, and it becomes clear to him that his shelter, the system of Christianity, is going to collapse. As his mother explains, the mission for Rhea is to wake Pierre up to the facts of life.⁶²² After the dinner with his mother and Rhea, Pierre decides to continue drinking and live like they do. Rhea reveals the secret of H  l  ne to her son by telling him that Pierre destroys his mother by keeping her from laughing.⁶²³ Thus, she becomes a messenger, a weird voice. In other words, Rhea becomes the one who interprets H  l  ne. If, as I see it, H  l  ne symbolises God, then Rhea becomes a pastor or priestess of this God, and she stays with her God until the very end. She makes H  l  ne laugh by making an obscene proposition to Pierre in a public place. They laugh, as a secret sect of laughter, and thus become estranged to other people. She seems to serve as a mediator between God and people, and, indeed, the laughter “opens for the worst, preserving in the worst (death) a weightless feeling of wonder (at the devil, God, at blasphemies, or transcendence!)”⁶²⁴ Thus Rhea introduces the events that are yet to come: the death of God as a transgression of sin which H  l  ne later explains to her son.

Hansi is the second “incarnation”, and she is introduced to Pierre when his mother leaves. She also becomes a substitute of the mother. As it appears in the narrative, she also has a function of drawing God near to the faithful – she is a mistress of Pierre’s mother and Pierre himself, thus becoming an agent for the awareness of the mother’s absence for both Pierre as well as herself. Thus, being a substitute of God, she is actually an idol, an image of God, as it is shown in a few scenes with Lulu and Pierre. Pierre’s first perception of Hansi is in a mirror (also a symbolic aspect in the context of the above-mentioned mutual mirroring), and he immediately falls in love with her. One of the conversations they have is essential for interpreting Hansi as God’s substitute (who also has the potentiality to die – that has not been actualised yet). During the conversation, Hansi asks Pierre to turn away, and while she is talking behind his back, he sees the divan surrounded by mirrors:

“I am so unhappy,” I said to her, “to have to kill you. Am I not obliged to be unhappy?”
 “You are as unhappy as all that?”
 “I dream of not killing you.”
 “Maybe, but you are laughing.”
 “I dream of being happy – in spite of everything.”

⁶²² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 59.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶²⁴ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 58.

“What if I were in love with you?”

“What if this enchantment I am in were never fade away?”

“My thought in coming here was to please you, to amuse you and amuse myself. I was excited, I still am. But I did not know I would fall in love with you. Turn around.” [...]

“I am afraid of not being all a young girl is supposed to be and of having the butcher’s block – what a block it is! – in front of my eyes. And yet I desire you. [...] I wish my memory was not so filled with images but if I did not like making love, would I be here? Only one thing I beg of you and it is not to touch me now. [...] Tell me that you are suffering and that you are on fire. I want to come alive through my suffering – and to feed on yours. It doesn’t matter so long as you know I am yours entirely. I was from the first, since I came here.”⁶²⁵

In the conversation, Hansi appears as a substitute of God who is alive. The relationship between the couple symbolises the relationship between a human and God; the human dreams of “not killing God”, but there is no other way of leaving the world of the project. God, in turn, is afraid of “not-being” God enough, while being connected to the human through the overcoming of love, which tends to be absolute because of God’s option to choose between living and dying. In this conversation, dying reveals a relationship where God is afraid to be useless for the human. She mentions sin again (“I wish my memory...”), still unrevealed, but, as it seems, it could be the same sin that Rhea spoke about. What is this sin to which even God is brought under? Or – who is this God who can be endangered by sin? The key here is Hansi’s confession: “I desire you.” Desire as one of the leading motifs of the “death of God” concept in Bataille’s novels emerges also here, thus possibly deliberating God from the status of an idol. Even God has a desire which is in endless motion to fulfil itself. The desire Hansi speaks about has an object, and this is why she can be related to the image of God, which is an idol, not the “real one”. Furthermore, Hansi herself must be analysed in the context of Héléne. The interpretation of Hansi as a “God of the Church” is also facilitated by her abstractness – she promises Pierre that he will find an interest in life again if he loves her. She also says that the only vice of her is a beautiful maid; no other vices.

The “beautiful maid” or the vice of Hansi is the third woman, Lulu. She is a double-faced false incarnation of God. First she was a substitute of Pierre’s mother for Hansi. She has been a mistress of Hansi since childhood. As Hansi tells to Pierre, Lulu has a violent character, and she imposed her will to Hansi, similarly like the God of Israel imposes his will on his people. Now they are both involved in a carnival game: Hansi is a mistress, and Lulu – a servant, although in reality things are reversed. If Hansi is a reflection of God in a mirror and thus deserves love from the devotee, Lulu, in turn, is a constructed personality, and the carnival clothes seem to emphasise this. It is as if all three of them – Rhea, Hansi and Lulu – were three visible, “false” incarnations of God, all mirroring Héléne somehow, but none of them being real. One of William Blake’s most radical claims was that God who acts in the

⁶²⁵ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 98.

Bible is just a fragment of the highest and most complicated eternal being. It could be said that the God who acts in the Bible is a fragmented psyche of the highest being, because “God”, also represented by Christianity, is situated in a moral duality between holiness and sinfulness.⁶²⁶ This “god of the heavens”, Urizen, is associated with rationalism, literalism and materialism. He is simultaneously tyrannical, heroic, weak and pathetic.⁶²⁷ Thus, Rhea can be seen as a God of the Bible, of the “word”, because she keeps her word and interprets the “word” (and deeds) of Héléne to others, while Hansi and Lulu are more like Urizen, because they are both weak and pathetic, the same as Héléne. In the next step of the analysis, I will follow the development of Héléne, turning attention to concepts characteristic to Bataille’s thinking and atheology included in her “word” (i.e. speech and letters).

b) Leaving, return and death of the mother

It is quite easy to draw parallels between the mother’s acting in the novel and God who is “fully God and fully human”. At first, Pierre *returns* to his mother as the one who returns to faith in Christ as the Saviour through baptism. Then his mother *leaves* – like Jesus died on the cross – and no one knows where she is; only Hansi receives some letters (i.e. “word/scripture”) from her. To concede, this correspondence makes her a more difficult character, as Hansi also shares the role of the “priest” with Rhea, although she is not so devoted to God. Then, they receive a note about the mother’s *arrival*, and Hansi warns Lulu that their relationship is over because of Héléne’s return. Asked about the time of the mother’s return, she answers: “We don’t know, but madness has already taken over the house. The worse you behave the better you will satisfy what ails us.”⁶²⁸ Later on, Hansi confesses that the mother’s return is the only possibility for her to become happy again.

They wait for the mother to come back, but they only hear a knock in the middle of the night, and two women wearing *masks* come in the house. Initially Pierre does not recognise them, but later he says about himself that at “once that one must be my mother, Rhea the other; and that if they avoided speaking, it was to heighten my distress, if that was possible.”⁶²⁹ Later on, he finds himself right in front of his mother. She has taken off the mask, and proclaims that the son has never known her. He protests, and the mother asks him to kiss her and stop himself thinking. She continues:

⁶²⁶ Robert Ryan, “Blake and Religion” in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 154-155.

⁶²⁷ Alexander Gourlay, “A Glossary of terms, names and concepts in Blake” in *Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, op. cit., 285.

⁶²⁸ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 131.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

Put your mouth to my mouth. And now be happy for the instant, as if I had not ruined myself, as if I were not destroyed. I want to lead you in the world of death and corruption where you already sense that I am imprisoned; I always knew you would love it too. [...] I would like to drag you with me as I die. A brief instant of madness I shall give you is better, is it not, than freezing in a universe of stupidity? I want to die, I have burned my boats. Your corruption was my handiwork: I gave you what was purest and most intense of me, the desire to love that which tears the clothes off my body, and that alone.⁶³⁰

This proclamation can be interpreted *prima facie* as a proclamation of “pure faith”. From the perspective of the “death of God” theology, God has been corrupted by herself, i.e. God has been corrupted by theology and religious system made on the basis of Godself. The most intense of desires is the one that leads humans into the illusion about their immortality. Even more, the mother speaks of the desire to love, of loving as corruption. Love is possession, and it must have an object, and simultaneously love is possession of the subject, possessed by it. Thus, the opposition between subject and object is done away with, and “*the one* and *the other* have lost their separate existence”.⁶³¹ Through this desire to love, her status of the mother is annihilated. She transfers the status of “God” to Pierre, who can do nothing with it because of the mother’s approaching death. The possibility of Pierre’s incestual corruption is thus eliminated, and answers to questions concerning further existence become impossible because of this death. Pierre’s mother is obscene and, for Bataille, obscenity as “the extremity of the erotic experience is the root of vital energies.”⁶³² She is obsessed while she is alive and *vice versa*.

Then, there is a second interpretation of H el ene as a dead God – after her return she is dying. Confessing that she does not now if she is afraid of her son or loves him too much, H el ene invites Pierre to reel with her in “that joy, that certainty of destruction more complete, more violent than any desire.”⁶³³ It seems that, lying naked as most of Bataille’s women do, she says her last words to the son, and they are all about desire and destruction. It is worthy to remember that previously she has said that the desire “reduces us to pulp.”⁶³⁴ Besides, reflecting on the desire, it is worth to mention a phenomenon described by Bataille as the “Phaedra complex”.⁶³⁵ He wrote that the sacred world gains its paradoxical character by the combination of disgust and desire, “holding the one who considers it without cheating in a

⁶³⁰ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 133.

⁶³¹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 59.

⁶³² Susan Sontag, *Styles of the Radical Will*, op. cit., 61.

⁶³³ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 133.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶³⁵ Phaedra complex is “the libidinous desire of a stepmother to a stepson” (<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Phaedra+Complex>, accessed on 27/ 08/ 2012). Since H el ene is a real mother of Pierre, the complex is escalated with the taboo of the incest as well, and H el ene’s possible desire to violate this taboo.

state of anxious fascination.”⁶³⁶ It also goes together with what H el ene says to Pierre in the beginning – that she has signed a covenant with insanity, and now it is his turn; none of them can be free anymore.⁶³⁷ More than in any other novel, here also the compliance of a devoted believer with the divine occurs – Pierre never protests to his mother’s commands and does all she wants him to do. Still, there is a nuance here that it is not the mother’s lofty ethics or morals why Pierre adores H el ene. On the contrary, Pierre worships her because she is disgusting; she is sacred as she corresponds to the object of horror. He has just to overcome the resistance in the beginning, when he understands that the mother is far more corrupt than his father was. As Bataille puts it, resistance assures us of the desire’s authenticity and thus “gives it a force that comes of the certainty of its dominion.”⁶³⁸ The novel is important also because the reader is drawn into the play – by being tempted by the taboo of an incest, which never happens in the text that is cut off just before it, but still making the reader to think about it. This is also why the “ethics and morals” of Pierre’s mother are of great importance, and they are best expressed in the “word” of H el ene, i.e. in the letters as well as in her spoken word, where morals seem to be reversed. Thus, for example, she says:

Pleasure only starts once the worm has got into the fruit, to become delightful happiness must be tainted with poison. All the rest is childishness. I am pushing you, yes, and I am sorry. You would have plenty of time to find that out for yourself. There is nothing more touching, more appealing than childishness.⁶³⁹

With her attitude towards morals and also the sin, H el ene also represents de Sade’s “sovereign man” – or “sovereign woman” – if the expression can have any meaning in the context, as far as she is a symbol of the “impossible freedom”, because she seeks sovereign experience which is boundless, i.e. it is “freedom from language, discipline, utility, culture and identity”.⁶⁴⁰ The freedom H el ene has balances on the border of sin – i.e. her freedom is incestual; it is obscenity which, for Bataille, is relative. “Relative” with reference to obscenity for Bataille means that obscenity exists only as long as an “‘outrage of modesty’ exists. Such and such thing is obscene if this or that person thinks it is and says so; it is not exactly an object, but a relationship between object and mind of the person.”⁶⁴¹ The focus on obscenity is also related with Bataille’s understanding of sin, pleasure and perversity explained in this novel. The explanation can be found in the “word” of H el ene, i.e. letters she has sent to her mistress and to her son while being absent from their lives. For example, she writes to her

⁶³⁶ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share. Books II and III*, op. cit., 95.

⁶³⁷ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit. 74.

⁶³⁸ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share. Books II and III*, op. cit., 95.

⁶³⁹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 65.

⁶⁴⁰ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 10.

⁶⁴¹ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 215.

son: “Our beauty [Hansi – I.J.] is never to know that the mind’s pleasure, fouler than the body’s, is purer and the only one whose edge never dulls. Vice, in my view, is like the mind’s dark radiance, which blinds and of which I am dying. Corruption is the spiritual cancer reigning in the depths of things.”⁶⁴² The vice, or sin, is much more dangerous if it is a product of the mind (as it was for Stirner and Blake, who paid great attention to imagination in the context of the “death of God”), not if it is just a pleasure of the body. The reason of her “spiritual cancer” is perversity – violence and evil which gives the human being a momentary access to immanence.⁶⁴³ In other words, through the words of H  l  ne, Bataille points out that the perversity functions like a tool for the human being to be aware of the existence, to be “here”, yet all alone and in solitude. Pleasure gives both “the serenity of mind and the certainty”.⁶⁴⁴ As far as Pierre’s “error is to prefer pleasure to perversity”⁶⁴⁵, he is more committed to life than his mother; he is not capable to mirror her fully, although he wants to, and this is the obstacle that sketches Pierre’s attitude towards life as a tragic one. Remembering Lacan and his “theory of mirrors” describing the state of identification, it is possible to assume that, if Pierre symbolises human being, the urge which leads the human through life is the desire to be like God (here, the mother). Pierre belongs to the realm of the living (the “outer world”) and the project, because pleasure is just part of his life, not all of it. He acts and his pleasures are chosen using arguments of the mind. In contrast to that, H  l  ne belongs to the realm of the dying, because her pleasure is the vice and thus also the malady. This is why H  l  ne belongs to the realm of the absolute (the “inner world”). Previously, she writes:

Pleasure is the whole of my life. I have done no choosing and I know that without the pleasure in me I am nothing, that everything for which my life is waiting would not exist. [...] Writing to you I am made to realize how impotent words are, but I know that in a long run, despite their impotence, they will get through to you. When they do you will have an intimation of what is maddening me, driving me stark mad. What madmen say about God pales beside the cry this shattering truth wrests from me. [...] everywhere I go I shall be in the same delirium, the same whether far from you or near, for the pleasure in me depends on no one, it emanates from me alone, from the imbalance in me which perpetually frays my nerves. [...] if you are involved, if it be a question of you, then I want to be in this delirium, I want you to behold it, I want it to destroy you. Writing to you, this delirium has beset me; my whole being shrinks, my suffering shrieks inside me, it tears me loose from myself in the same way I succeeded, when I bore you, in snatching you out from inside me. [...] I am twisted by anguish and by delight as well. But it is not love’s delight, the only thing possessing me is rage. [...] I do not love you, I remain alone, but you hear this lost cry, you will hear it incessantly [...] I shall live in the expectation of that other world where I will be in ecstasies of pleasure. I belong body and soul to that other world and so do you. [...] By pleasure I mean equivocal pleasure. [...] I made you a gift of fever when

⁶⁴² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 121.

⁶⁴³ Zeynep Direk, “Erotic Experience and Sexual Difference in Bataille”, in Shannon Winnubst, ed., op. cit., 111.

⁶⁴⁴ Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 37.

⁶⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 120.

you were in my womb and it is some more of my fever I give you by urging you farther on into the mire where we are both caught together.⁶⁴⁶

The reference to madmen in this citation could also be a reference to Nietzsche's Madman, who had something important to say about God, i.e. that we have killed him. Confessing that pleasure in her is independent on no one but herself, H el ene seems to explain that the source of the extreme, of the sick pleasure, is human thought and feeling. In other words, the sick pleasure which makes one blind emerges inside the human being. She is living because of the delirium, because of her "spiritual cancer" – it is her life force, which she also wants to give to her son. However, the delirium is stronger than the proclamation of the madman, which means that the awareness of the "death of God" could even be stronger than the "death of God" itself. Therefore, H el ene can be seen as an incarnation of the dead God, who even gives a new understanding of what is sin and what it is not. She is present through the written word even during her physical absence, like God's death is present in literature (see chapter IV.3 "Legitimation of Literature"). Finally, the character of H el ene tempts the reader to remember that even mottos for chapters in this novel have not been chosen by accident. They may contain a storyline of the "death of God" as well.

c) Text that interprets itself: the novel as a whole in the light of the mottos for chapters

The mottos of several chapters in this novel seem to give a direction for interpretation. They appear to be as extracts from Bataille's nonfiction works, throwing light on his atheology. Thanks to this, the novel gets a clearer picture of what the "death of God" in it could mean and how it could be explained. For example, the first motto appears before the novel starts:

Terror unendingly renews with advancing age. Without end, it returns us to the beginning. The beginning that I glimpse on the edge of the grave is the *pig* in me which neither death nor insult can kill. Terror on the edge of the grave is divine and I sink into terror whose child I am.⁶⁴⁷

This text, especially the last sentence, has a twofold meaning: at first, with the help of a metaphor, it provides a link to Pierre's mother as divine, because she is a terror. Secondly, the terror on the edge of the grave is divine because it is the moment when one faces death, his own death within the death of God. It can also lead one to the Christian way of life, as a Christian

⁶⁴⁶ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 91–94.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

lives in the presence of Christ and this takes him outside of himself. Christ is the totality of being, and yet he is, like the 'lover', personal [...]: and suddenly – torment, agony, death. The follower of Christ is led to torment. Has led himself to torment: not to some insignificant torment, but to divine agony. Not only has he the means of attaining torment, but he could not avoid it, and this is the torment which exceeds him, which exceeds God himself – God, who is no less man and tormentable than him.⁶⁴⁸

Explained as a torment, terror is the state and simultaneously the moment when one becomes aware of the death of God and of oneself as well. This terror is connected with disgust as well as with the resistance of desire; one never knows what will come of it.

The next motto can be found after the mother has confessed she is worse than Pierre's father and Pierre has faced loneliness because of her announcement. In this indifferent state, he feels himself similar to God.⁶⁴⁹ God has betrayed Pierre, and through the loneliness and anguish, caused by this betrayal, he has become God-like himself, in other words – alone. This motto is shorter when compared to the previous one, and it goes as follows: "In the solitude I entered, the norms of this world, if they subsist, do so in order to maintain a dizzying feeling of enormity: this solitude, it is God."⁶⁵⁰ It seems like this passage illustrates the development of the main character and, simultaneously, of her mother as God as well as Pierre's awareness of her as God. The only possibility to keep on going with the existence is death, because "[e]ach person is a stranger to the universe, [and] [...] [w]hat connects existence to *all else* is death; looking at death, you stop belonging to your room, to family and friends – you're the part of heaven's free play."⁶⁵¹ For Bataille, individuals are abandoned to the world; they live in a total solitude, while God is the anguish and fear and, as such, is a dread to humankind. The next passage seems to confirm this assertion: "God is the dread in me of what was, of what is, of what will be so horrible that I must deny at all costs and with all my strength cry my denial that that was, that that is, or that that will be, but I shall be lying."⁶⁵²

God thus becomes an agent that destructs the borders of space and time and seems to symbolise the end of time for an individual. As a dread, God becomes related to anguish and terror in face of the very existence of the individual. In the realm of hopelessness of this dread, the answer is given in the next passage: "Laughter is more divine and in meaning more elusive than tears."⁶⁵³ Laughter is a concept in Bataille's thinking to which I must return all the time, and it is worth to note that Pierre's mother emphasises her need for laughter

⁶⁴⁸ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 51.

⁶⁴⁹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 35.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁵¹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 46.

⁶⁵² Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 47.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 53.

throughout the novel, even in the end, as she explains to her son why she has had sex with women. Laughter is the messenger of sex, because sex confuses humans, and, when one is confused, one laughs. In the context of this novel, that means going away from the constructs of mind and everything called “normal”. In *Guilty* Bataille draws an allusion between empty sky and sexual act. It goes closely together with the emptiness of death as well: “The thunderbolt blazing in the sky is the brightness of death itself. My mind raves in the sky. Never does the mind rave so well as in its dying.”⁶⁵⁴ This is the last motto in this novel, and “thunderbolt” seems to symbolise revelation which, in this case, is the awareness of one’s death and also of the “death of God”. Linked together, in my view, all passages constitute a separate story, which gives an insight in the understanding of what the “death of God” means for the individual in the context of *My Mother*.

3. 8. *The Impossible. A Story of Rats Followed by Dianus and The Oresteia*

The Impossible is, to my opinion, the most important of all Bataille’s novels. It somehow unifies almost everything mentioned in the interpretations of other novels in previous chapters and also speaks about the death of God directly in several places. The keyword for this novel is *the impossible*, a concept already mentioned in my doctoral thesis and connected with the realm of the absolute, the concept of anguish and thus also with inner experience and the experience of the death of God.

The Impossible consists of three parts: the first one is *A Story of Rats*, the second – *Dianus*, both in prose, and the third one – *The Oresteia*, prose mixed with poetry. Also the plot (if it can be called so) of *The Impossible* is not like those of other novels of Bataille. This is why I will try to explain it together with analysing citations which concern the concept of the “death of God” in this fiction-work. It seems that the plot of *The Impossible* develops step by step alongside the concept of the “death of God”. Firstly, the characters of this novel are anonymous – i.e., they are named by letters (for example, A., B., E., etc.). Secondly, the main character, the protagonist, goes on a journey, searching for something which is disappearing. As far as it can be understood from all three parts of the book – the object protagonist searches is the impossible, although it is named otherwise in the novel and poems. The novel is more like a mystical journey towards the impossible, and two quotes used as the epigraph seem to affirm religious tension in the understanding of the word *impossible* – the authors of the quotes both are Christian mystics: Theresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. During my

⁶⁵⁴ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. Madame Edwarda. The Dead Man*, op. cit., 84.

analysis, I will also accent the symbol of the rat, which seems to be relevant for understanding the death of God in the novel.

a) *A Story of Rats*

The Impossible begins with *First Notebook* named *A Story of Rats*. There is a man longing for a woman he loves, although he is concerned that he bores her. It seems that the woman is named B. Then the protagonist thinks of the other man – A., who belongs to the order of Jesuits (if A. is not lying). The first chapter ends with protagonist's suspicions that A. probably sleeps with B., or maybe only drinks. Reflecting on this possibility, the protagonist ends the chapter with a reference to the laughter of a madman.

The protagonist characterises his love towards B. as “*dark love* (tied to B.’s obscenity and sealed by an endless suffering – a love never violent enough, never shady enough, never close enough to death!”⁶⁵⁵ Further, he reflects on himself: “The reality of being is the naive certainty of chance, and the chance that elevates me leads me to ruination.”⁶⁵⁶ He has dinner together with the Jesuit priest (who is an atheist), and B. The protagonist hates B. laughing at A., and regrets he is not dead. He feels like B. has relationship with A., and sinks in his solitude. B. is dead for him, and his “reason of writing is to reach B.”⁶⁵⁷ It seems that the protagonist is led by desire in his attempt to reach B. For him, the obscenity with B. also means the “sickness of the desire that often makes us perceive some gap between the object imagined and the real object.”⁶⁵⁸ *A Story of Rats* concentrates very much on the development of the protagonist's desire, and this is why, as I will explain later, the egoistic desire for a beloved can also be explained as a symbol of the impossible.

Another phenomenon characteristic of Bataille's thinking and frequently mentioned in *The Impossible* is laughter. At first, there is the laughter of a madman (which I will analyse below); later, the protagonist hates B. laughing at A. While in the context of the relationship this hate could mean jealousy, it has another meaning, because reaching B. is the protagonist's motivation for writing. Laughter, for Bataille, can be explained as “passage from the known to unknowable”.⁶⁵⁹ If in the case of jealousy laughter contains a chance of deceit, in the case of writing laughter means the non-knowledge of the future. Reaching for B. becomes an on-going process, and there is no obvious result, as far as the reader can understand. B. is the

⁶⁵⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 17.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 25.

⁶⁵⁸ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 68.

⁶⁵⁹ Chris Gernerchak, op. cit., 69.

object of protagonist's love and is unreachable, while in the process of writing A. sinks into his solitude and anguish.

Later on other persons – L. N. and his wife E. – show up in some dinner, but, as it seems in the beginning, this fact is not quite important. Like other characters of Bataille have done and like Bataille himself has written in *Guilty*, the protagonist also admits: “The freedom one has only at the brothel.”⁶⁶⁰ The first part of *A Story of Rats* seems to return to the question of the madman:

I love B. so much that I love her absence, so much that in her I love my anguish.
My weakness: to burn, to laugh, to exult, but when the cold comes to lack the courage to live.
The worst: so many indefensible lives – so much vanity, ugliness, and moral emptiness. That woman with the double chin whose immense turban proclaimed the rule of error... The crowd – stupidity, failure – on the whole isn't it a mistake? the fall of being in the individual, of the individual in the crowd, isn't it, in our darkness, an 'anything rather than'? The worst would be God: rather Madame Charles exclaiming: 'My goodness, it's the love of a little darling!' – rather myself in bed with Madame Charles, but rest of the night sobbing: condemned to want the impossible. In that regard, the tortures, the pus, the sweat, the ignominy.
[.] Is this maze of helplessness (delusion on all sides) I forget the moment when *the curtain raises* (N. raising the dress, E. laughing in the mirror: I rushed over, took the mouth and the breasts sprang from the dress...).
E.'s nakedness...., B.'s nakedness, will you deliver me from anguish?
But no...
....give me more anguish.⁶⁶¹

The “fall of being into the individual” also can be related to the death of God. What the protagonist feels is the emptiness of the world around him, and for the reader it becomes clear that the emptiness is caused by the absence of B., who, to my opinion, also symbolises the dead God in the novel. For the protagonist, she is absent, while E. laughing in the mirror remains the protagonist of B. The protagonist craves for anguish, because it is a feeling that helps not to leave the process of reaching for B., although it is hopeless from the outset. Anguish could be contrasted to moral emptiness, also mentioned in the citation – the moral emptiness includes self-satisfaction, while anguish does not. Anguish is part of the erotic writing which “delineates a space of communication, between subject and object, which searches for the innermost wound”.⁶⁶² Anguish and desire are inseparable parts of such writing, trying to describe the moment “as it is”, to catch the time where it “is”, before becoming the past or future. Actually, it can be said that such writing is also the impossible, because, before one writes down the word “is”, the moment of writing has already gone. This instability can also be related with the missing God, because writing as the communication of self and other can as well be described as sacrifice. In writing, like in sacrifice, there are no

⁶⁶⁰ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 27.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 28.–29.

⁶⁶² Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 156.

entities that can be known or studied, but sovereign moments, moments of unconditional expenditure. This entails the expenditure of certainties, of any attempt to establish a transcendent, unconditioned meaning that grounds all human activity, a referent such as Man or God. Precisely because it really is unconditioned, this meaning – God, if you will – is sovereign, dependent on nothing. [...] Religion, in the orgiastic movement of the body, is the loss of transcendent meaning, the death of God as virulent force.⁶⁶³

As far as writing is sacrifice, it is meaningless, it reaches towards the unknowable. In order to come to such position, where the fall of being into an individual occurs, one becomes a madman and does not make demands about the sacred. Rather, for Bataille, an individual laughs because he knows that God is dead. This laughter of the madman is also a passage from the known to the unknowable. The madman as a symbol gives meaning to all narrative of *The Impossible*. Is there a possibility that the text includes a reference to Nietzsche's madman and thus – to the announcement that God is dead? And, if so, is there any reference to Nietzsche's madness in literal or literary sense? There is a possibility to assume that the reference to madman is somehow connected with the figure of the madman as a killer (one of the killers) of God. Madness also appears later in the narrative. Of course, madness was essential for Nietzsche as well as for Bataille. It is important to keep in mind that it has nothing to do with madness as an illness in a direct sense:

It was not for nothing that Bataille was endlessly haunted by Nietzsche's madness: it was not that this madness had the meaning needed for any thought that takes reversal as far as it can, but because the 'immeasurable victory' represented by madness is the price that must be paid to useful, effective reason if it is to be freed from subordination.⁶⁶⁴

The novel tells about a man who is obsessed with love towards a woman, although he reflects more on himself than on the one he loves. This obsession, which makes the protagonist laugh like a madman, is egoistic and self-centred. He talks about his feelings toward B. more than he talks about B., and this recalls the way Christians speak about their obsession with God and the forms of worship, not God himself. The Christian obsession can be understood as a desperate desire to control everything, to become a measure, a point of reference for everything; or, in other words, *to know* what God is and what he is not. This is why, to my opinion, this obsession can also be related to Bataille's commentary on the Christian view of life which is "related to an inevitable obsession with a *self!* Think of the monstrous immortality of the *egos* that are heaven and hell! Think of the God of *self* and the demented way he has ordered *self's* replication!"⁶⁶⁵ Concentration on the self, according to Nietzsche, is also characteristic of the Christian God, and it results in God's transformation into the thing: "Then he spun the world from out of himself again, – *sub specie Spinozae* – then he

⁶⁶³ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak*, op. cit., xvi.

⁶⁶⁴ Michael Surya, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 478.

⁶⁶⁵ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 115.

transfigured himself into something increasingly thin and pale, became ‘Ideal’, became ‘pure spirit’, became ‘*absolutum*’, became ‘thing-in-itself’... *The decline of a God*: God became the ‘thing-in-itself’...”⁶⁶⁶ It could be said that God has become a thing (and thus – an object to Bataille’s atheology) because of the love of the self, because of becoming a reference point.⁶⁶⁷

For Bataille, self-satisfaction and meditation on oneself can only be broken by the feeling of abandonment, by the feeling of solitude of a human being, and by *anguish* which always accompanies such solitude. Not that one should concentrate on the *self* when trying to think about God; rather, it is death which is the object of contemplation. As Bataille himself puts it:

In love’s impulse, love yearns for death. But yearning for death as itself an impulse to go beyond death. Going beyond death, yearning aims at the “beyond” of individuated being. This is revealed by the fusion of lovers, who confuse their love with the love each has for the other’s sex. Thus love associated with choice slips endlessly towards an impulse of nameless debauchery.

Isolate being dies in debauchery. Or, for a while, gives way to the horrible indifference of the dead.⁶⁶⁸

The yearning mentioned in the citation above in other words can be explained as a desire one feels towards the beloved: “[L]ove is extinguished in attempts to elude its nature: which has to risk love again and again.”⁶⁶⁹ As such, love one feels towards a human being can be equated to the love a human feels towards God, especially because that this kind of love asks for happiness and fulfilment which is not always possible in the relationship of love. This is what happens in the second book of *The Impossible*. The protagonist keeps longing for B. and lives in absolute solitude, where he at last defines his anguish caused by B.’s absence:

My anguish does not come solely from knowing. I am free. It requires a possible that *entices* me and frightens me at the same time. The anguish differs from a reasonable fear, in the same way as a fear of heights. The possibility of a fall is disturbing, but the anxiety redoubles if the prospect, instead of repelling, finds an involuntary complicity in the one it frightens; the fascination of vertigo is basically only a desire that is obscurely undergone.⁶⁷⁰

Of course, the romantic relationship between man and woman is always marked by sexuality in some sense, and especially it can be said about love Bataille writes about in his novels. For Bataille, human sexuality can never lead to happiness because it is connected to violence and death. This is why eroticism cannot be seen as separate from anguish, nor from madness, at

⁶⁶⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of Idols and Other Writings*, op. cit., 15.

⁶⁶⁷ In German, Nietzsche uses Kant’s term *Ding an sich*. Keeping this in mind, another interesting parallel can be made: for Kant, *Ding an sich* or “thing in itself” exists independently from a human being and it is unfiltered by the forms of sense. Therefore, “thing in itself” is not in space or time and cannot be known (see: Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, op. cit., 101). Moreover, the “thing in itself” can also be considered God, at least in some sense, as he cannot be known and is neither in space, nor in time. As such, God cannot be reached – just as Bataille’s absolute.

⁶⁶⁸ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 157.

⁶⁶⁹ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 68.

⁶⁷⁰ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 35-36.

least in the context of Bataille's thinking.⁶⁷¹ Madness associates with chaos, but in Bataille's case, near the drive to explode any systematic order, there is also a craving for that order. This is probably the reason why he is capable of combining Nietzsche's and Sade's thoughts in his works without assimilation. MacKendrick puts it aptly: "It is Bataille who breaks language apart to show us why erotic and the sacred are the same at base, wildly sacrificial and incomprehensibly joyous."⁶⁷²

Later on, after B. is gone, the protagonist remembers the attack he had experienced in the previous year. There has been someone, Little Edron, an actor whom the protagonist is calling Don Juan (besides, the Commander from the *Blue of Noon* appears later in the text – as a reference to B.'s aggressive father), and the protagonist writes:

Raised up on my hands, I watched my blood run. From my nose and lips onto the snow. I got up and pissed in the sun. I was in pain, cramped by the wounds. I was nauseous and, no longer having any means of reaching B., I entered into this darkness where, ever since, I plunge deeper every hour and lose myself a little more.⁶⁷³

If we accept that the protagonist can be seen as a devoted believer who enters into the darkness to lose himself, again, there is a possibility to make parallels with Western Christian Mysticism. Entering into darkness is a new beginning of the awareness of God's absence. As the protagonist loses himself, he becomes an absent self, outgrows himself as the dead God outgrows the living one: "*God's absence* is no longer closure: it is the opening of the infinite. God's absence is greater, it is more divine than God (I am thus no longer I, but *an absence of I*."⁶⁷⁴ Then follows an opinion (probably Commander's) that the actor (Don Juan) has loved the night, not B. The protagonist does not agree with this opinion, he writes about B. as the night herself. His life is an inkling of an object leading it into the night, and B. is the object. The narrative proceeds to the end with the protagonist wandering in the snow, drinking and wondering about the world which has given him what he loved and immediately taken it away. For him, the cold must be the impossible, that which he craves to know while breathing the cold and pondering his own death, which he takes as a possibility because of the drunkenness and cold. In the next chapter the protagonist wakes up in a bright room and feels surprised that he is still alive. As it seems, he has woken up in B.'s apartment. They talk, and B. tells the protagonist that her father is dead and that she and the Reverend (A.) had found the protagonist in the snow and carried inside. The protagonist is in the house of B.'s dead father; more precisely, it is a castle (which can also make sense when recalling Bataille's

⁶⁷¹ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 82.

⁶⁷² Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 4.

⁶⁷³ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 44.

⁶⁷⁴ Georges Bataille, "L'Absence de mythe" in *Le Surrealisme en 1947* (Paris: Maeght, 1947), n.p., cited in: Denis Hollier, "The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille" in *Yale French Studies*, op. cit., 131.

mysticism). Here it is important that the protagonist is ill (passive), like most protagonists of previously analysed novels. He is alone in his weakness, even if there are other people (A. and B.) ready to help him. Even more – although the Commander, B.’s father, is dead, another one who is ready to help the protagonist is Don Juan or Edron, who comes when he rings the bell. The protagonist thinks about a homosexual relationship Edron might have had with B.’s father. Suddenly he realises that B. must have been a victim of those two monsters when she was a child. When A. appears in the doorway, the protagonist asks himself why is he thrown back into the impossible. A. denies God, and the protagonist is all alone; he suffers deadly fear, because no one would hear his wail if there would be any.

What unimaginable force would my lamentation have had if there were God?
 ‘Think about it though. Nothing can escape you now. If God doesn’t exist, this moan, choked back in your solitude, is the extreme limit of the possible: in this sense there is no element of the universe that is not under its power! It is not subject to anything, it dominates everything and yet is formed out of an infinite awareness of impotence: *out of a sense of the impossible to be exact!*’⁶⁷⁵

In the end of the novel, the protagonist realises that Edron is a man he cannot laugh at and thinks about the knife Edron may have hidden in his jacket. Nothing happens, however, and the protagonist feels limitless joy at the height of his fear: “It no longer matters to me that my state, in the eternal absence of God, exceeds the universe itself.”⁶⁷⁶ He thinks about B., who is in the dead man’s room, thinks about her nakedness he is familiar with. Bataille concludes *The Story of Rats* with a deliberation: “Nakedness is only death and the tenderest kisses have an aftertaste of rat.”⁶⁷⁷ As I have already mentioned in the beginning, the symbol of a rat is interesting enough to analyse it closer.

Traditionally, a rat is a disgusting animal, and also the one who can survive in the most extreme conditions and environment. In Christianity, the rat is a symbol of destruction and evil.⁶⁷⁸ For Bataille, as it seems, in this novel the rat symbolises a woman. He refers to rat in the context of woman in several parts of his text. For example:

That part of the young woman between the mid-leg and the waist – which emphatically answers one’s expectations – answers like the elusive transit of a rat. What fascinates us is vertiginous: sickly smells, recesses, the sewer, have the same *illusory* essence as the void of ravine into which one is about to fall. The void also attracts me, otherwise I wouldn’t have any vertigo – but I will die if I fall, and what can I do with a void – except fall into it? If I survived the fall I would confirm the insanity of desire – as I’ve done countless times with the ‘little death.’⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 79.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁷⁸ http://www.christiansymbols.net/animals_15.php, seen on 25/07/2012

⁶⁷⁹ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 38.

Here, “the elusive transit of a rat” as well as the “little death” point to the sexual relation between man and woman. Quite naturally, as I explained earlier, it can be reflected as a beginning of a new life and thus also a reflection on death. Bataille sees human experience as an experience of limits, and death is a point of reference for these limits.⁶⁸⁰ No doubt, sexual experience is an important part of human experience, and it is connected to death: “We must never forget that the multiplication of beings goes hand in hand with death. The parents survive the birth of their offspring, but the reprieve is only temporary. [...] the appearance of the newcomers guarantees the disappearance of their predecessors.”⁶⁸¹ The rat thus not only points to sexual relation between man and woman; it is also a reminder about the human’s being abandoned in the world.⁶⁸²

Later on, the protagonist meditates about the only writer of his time, X., who has dreamed to achieve the heights of *Thousand and One Nights* and surmises how X. would go to the brothel. X. would ask the proprietress for the rats, to find out if these rats were nice and big ones. Then X. would pounce on the old prostitute. The protagonist himself also thought about the prostitute and the regret he would have after having sex with her. Thus, in this novel, the character of the prostitute appears as reflection on the possibility. As a sexual object, the prostitute also, for Bataille, is part of human experience, the experience of limits:

eroticism which is a fusion, which shifts interest away and beyond the person and his limits, is nevertheless expressed by an object. We are faced with the paradox of an object which implies the abolition of the limits of all objects, of an *erotic object*. [...] Not every woman is a potential prostitute, but prostitution (sic!) is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude. In so far as she is attractive, a woman is prey to men’s desire. [...] if she strips naked she reveals the object of a man’s desire, an individual and particular object to be prized. Nakedness as opposed to the normal state is certainly a kind of negation. [...] But although she symbolises the contrary, the negation of the object she herself is still an object. Hers is the nakedness of a limited being, even if it proclaims the imminence of her pride’s surrender in the tumultuous confusion of the sexual spasm. The potential beauty of this nakedness and its individual charm are what reveal themselves in the first place – the objective difference, in fact, between the value of one object and that of another.⁶⁸³

As far as it concerns to *The Story of Rats*, there is “the SECRET that the body abandons with the dress.”⁶⁸⁴ Prostitute is a symbol of this secret of the objective difference between the values of objects. This objective difference can be observed in Sade’s as well in Bataille’s works, although with the difference – for Sade, it is a radical fictionality, while Bataille takes it seriously, as he takes seriously the “death of God”, using this difference as an analogue to describe the feeling of the absent God:

⁶⁸⁰ Michael Richardson, op. cit., 100.

⁶⁸¹ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, op. cit., 100-101.

⁶⁸² Stuart Kendall, op. cit., 20.

⁶⁸³ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 130-131.

⁶⁸⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible*, op. cit., 80.

For Sade the death of God is ultimately a fiction, a masturbatory scenario along with all the others, whipped out of nothing because God “does not exist”; for Bataille, the death of God is a myth because God’s death is not a simple plot device, but rather an instance of a cataclysmic recognition of God’s necessity as well as his fall, his central and overwhelming “presence” as heterogeneous force of the sacred in society – precisely in his radical absence.⁶⁸⁵

The presumption that B. can be not only the symbol of rat but also the one who embodies human’s feelings toward the dead God (or, as I have characterised it elsewhere in my doctoral thesis, the feeling of the absent God), seems to be affirmed also by *The Story of Rats*. There is one paragraph which consists mainly of dots; still, there are some lines to stress (the dots are marked as [...] in this citation). This fragment seems to make the roles more clear: the protagonist is a devoted believer; A. – the priest (a theologian/philosopher), while B. is the dead God (at least, for the protagonist):

So much cold, pain, and obscenity! but that rigorous clockwork (the priest), suited for the most delicate missions, obliged to walk with his teeth chattering!...[...] oh, my sickness, what an chilling exaltation, tantamount to a murder...

...henceforth I have no more limits; what grinds in the emptiness within me is a consuming pain which there is no escape short of dying...

...B.’s cry of pain, the earth, the sky and the cold are naked like bellies in love-making...[...]

A., his teeth chattering on the threshold, hurls himself at B., strips her naked, tears off her clothes in the cold. At that moment the father arrives (not Father A., but the father of B.), the weasel-faced little man, beaming like a fool, saying softly: “I knew it, it’s a farce!” [...]

The little man, the father, creeps up, jeering, and straddles the mad couple on the threshold (spread out on the snow, and next to them – bearing in mind the cassock, and above the all *the sweat of death* – shit would look pure to me): he cups his hands (the father, his eyes glittering with spite) and cries in a low voice: “Edron!”

[...] something bald and mustached, with the crafty movements of a burglar, a soft, patently false, sweet chuckle: he calls out in a low voice: “Edron! the shotgun!”

[...] in the sleepy silence of snow, an explosion resounds.⁶⁸⁶

What we see here is the death of God – caused by a priest, commanded by the father, and accomplished by an actor, a false priest (which was also the name Jesus in Bible called the Pharisees). This is once again an experience of the murder of God. This fragment shows Christianity in the symbol of the father, by claiming that God can be and is explainable, as a tool which helps man to cope with his being, while the priest only obeys orders of the Father because *believes* in him. For a devoted believer, the protagonist, this happening reveals the truth that “every existence is threatened, is already in the Nothingness.”⁶⁸⁷ If God has once become an existence (in Jesus Christ), it means that Jesus knows nothing of himself, that all he has, is knowledge of his nothingness.⁶⁸⁸ What separates the protagonist from others acting in this fragment is that he has a desire – in contradistinction to the priest: “A.’s insanity: to be

⁶⁸⁵ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit., 25.

⁶⁸⁶ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia.*, op. cit., 49-50.

⁶⁸⁷ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 103.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

without desire (no longer to expect anything). Lucidity excludes desire (or perhaps kills it, I don't know): as for what remains, he controls it, while I..."⁶⁸⁹ The protagonist is intoxicated by the desire; his pursuit of the object of his desire has become a risk.⁶⁹⁰ Such a desire is simultaneously a feeling of the absence which makes one crave for the object and "an excess that will destroy its object."⁶⁹¹ It seems that in *The Story of Rats* Bataille separated two sides of the desire, because the lack or absence of the desire is characteristic of A., while the protagonist has his own reasons for the desire:

A.'s lucidity depends on a lack of desire. Mine is the result of an excess – undoubtedly it is also the only true lucidity. If it is only the negation of delirium, lucidity is not completely lucid, is still a bit the fear of going all the way – transposed into boredom, that is, into contempt for the object of an excessive desire. We reason with ourselves and we tell ourselves: this object doesn't have *in itself* the value the desire gives it. [...] We must see at the same time the delusion *and the truth* of the object. No doubt we have to know that we are deluding ourselves, the object is first of all what is perceived by a desireless being, but *it is* also what a desire perceives in it. B. *is* also what is only attained by the extremity of delirium and my lucidity would not exist if my delirium were not so great. Just as it would not exist if the other, ridiculous sides of B. escaped me.⁶⁹²

This passage can assist in finding the key to Bataille's "Christianity" – the object here could as well be God, and the desire (and, simultaneously, the lack of the desire, the lucidity of the desire) is of great importance here. Doubt is also of great importance. So is the fact that the object gains value through the desire. The desire seems to make a trace in the fate of a man who desires for the sacred or who lacks the desire for the sacred. Here, the desire also appears as related with the concept of anguish, the emotive state, which always accompanies the feeling of the presence of the absent God for Bataille, anguish as a "sense of loss and profusion."⁶⁹³ From this point of view, anguish presents the necessity, craving to go beyond limits, "for it is the sense that defines our existence whilst at the same time being connected with the nakedness of existence."⁶⁹⁴ The protagonist in *The Story of Rats* says it directly, connecting the intimacy with nakedness and death with the help of the rat symbol:

if now I think – at this most far away moment of a breakdown, a physical and moral disgust – of the pink tail of a rat in the snow, it seems to share *in the intimacy* of 'that which is'; a slight uneasiness clutches my heart. And certainly I know that the intimacy of M., who is dead, was like the tail of the rat, *lovely as a tail of a rat!* I knew already that the intimacy of things is death.

....and, naturally, *nakedness is death* – and the more truly 'death' the lovelier it is!⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁸⁹ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 52.

⁶⁹⁰ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 84.

⁶⁹¹ Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 6.

⁶⁹² Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 53.

⁶⁹³ Michael Richardson, op. cit., 39.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 54.

Thus, using the symbols of the “little death” and “rat”, Bataille in the first part of *The Impossible* appears to express the death of God in the form of a parable of human existence as an experience of transgressing the limits, where lack of desire goes hand in hand with the desire, causing anguish because of nakedness and, thus – intimacy, embodied by the beloved. Such existence also has something to do with writing without purpose – it is similar to gambling, not to a deliberately created project.⁶⁹⁶

Life is more mobile than language – even mad language – when the most strained language is not the most mobile (I joke endlessly with B.; we are rivals in laughing at one another: in spite of my concern with being truthful, I can’t say any more about this. I write the way a child cries: a child slowly relinquishes the reasons he has for being in tears.
Might I lose my reasons of writing?⁶⁹⁷

Writing is nakedness of the intelligence and emotions; as such, it is an intimacy between the writer and the text and also between the text and the reader, as well as between the author and the reader. As the protagonist tells us, nakedness as well as intimacy “of things is death.”⁶⁹⁸ Writing as such has no particular aim for him; he endures to lose the reasons of writing. Although he mentions that he writes in order to reach B., he never explains this reason in details; it is a reason he is not fully aware of. Such writing is led by the desire, and, like philosophy, it is rather a construction site where the never-ending development of thought is of great importance. Thus, writing can be equated with intimacy and thus also with love – one loves not the human being but “the universal aspect of that [beloved] person”.⁶⁹⁹ The protagonist is in a vain search for *what is*, for the truth. It could even be said that he searches for the “is”, which is simultaneously an affirmation of human existence and death as well as the death of God:

B.’s nakedness calls *my expectation* into question, when the expectation alone is capable of questioning *that which is* (the expectation wrenches me away from the *known*, for the lost *moment* is lost forever; under the cover of the *déjà vu*, I search avidly for what lies beyond: the *unknown*.
What does philosophy matter since it is this naive contestation: the questioning that we can only undertake when we are *appeased!* how could we be appeased if we did not rely on a whole body of presupposed knowledge? Introducing a metaphysical given at the extreme limit of thought comically reveals its essence: that of every philosophy.⁷⁰⁰

This writing lends an answer to the question why “nothing” (dead, without meaning) must be “something” (meaningful), why is death of God so important if it is death? What makes it something? Or is this all just about “being”, a vain search for *is* that has not happened yet (and

⁶⁹⁶ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 88.

⁶⁹⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 39.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁹⁹ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 69.

⁷⁰⁰ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 40.

thus *will be*), or has already gone (*was*)? The protagonist connects nakedness with being through B.'s nakedness, i.e. through the intimacy of the dead God which can never be experienced. Intimacy with the dead God (writing about dead God) is a desire that leads the human towards the death of a human being, which gives the notion of the death of God together with the need for God.

b) Dianus. Notes Drawn from the Notebooks of Monsignor Alpha

The second book of *The Impossible* is called *Dianus*. It could probably be a reference to the ancient Latin god Dianus (Janus), who in the sculpted images is seen as double-faced: as Janus-Bifrons (“with double forehead”), as Janus Biceps (two-headed) or Janus Geminus (“twin”). In Roman mythology Dianus is “original” (i.e., it has no equivalent in Greek mythology). There could be a time when Dianus was the highest God (also connected with Etruscan Anki). The functionality of this god is not so clear and differs from time to time.⁷⁰¹ Thinking about Bataille’s choice of the name *Dianus* for the second part of the book, one can surmise that it could be an allusion to the two-headed god in contrast to Acephalus, or an allusion to twins – if we remember the twin brothers in *L’Abbe C*. The protagonist of *A Story of Rats* and A. also seem to be alike. The subtitle of the second book says: *Notes Drawn from the Notebooks of Monsignor Alpha* that makes me entertain a possibility that the “author” of this part of the book is the Jesuit priest A., already mentioned in *A Story of Rats*.

This part begins with a wish to wipe out A.’s footprints. A. is in the house where funeral is going to be held (probably, the funeral of B.’s father). He talks about E., who could be Edron, but, as it seems, this E. is a woman who has been in love with the dead man. A. feels emptied and has an inner dialogue where he reflects that he is an ungodly priest who must fall. He says this feeling is painfully comical and thinks about addressing God with a false nose on his face. Later on, he reflects on the magic silence of death, and has an vision of E., naked and wearing a false nose with moustache. Also mentioning of the commander lets the reader understand that E. is Edron, and the dead man – B.’s father. Then A. goes to look at the dead man and calls him D. A. also mentions the depression which took D. after breaking up with B. He writes that it “made him decide to come end his life..., experiencing the suffocating impression” by which D. has given to A. an orgasm.⁷⁰² A. also acknowledges that he writes because of his solitude (and he has fallen in love with E.), and remembers a conversation:

⁷⁰¹ „Dianus”, Lindsey Jones, ed. in chief, op. cit., vol.7, 4778.

⁷⁰² Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 93.

D. told me one day, with laugh, that he was gripped by two obsessions (which made him ill). The first: that in no case could he bless anything (the feelings of gratitude that he had sometimes expressed had later proved to be false). The second: that the ghost of God having vanished and the guardian immensity being absent, it was necessary for him to live an immensity that no longer limited and did not protect.⁷⁰³

Relationship between A. and D. is important and interesting in the context of the “death of God”. There is no character named D. in the previous part of *The Impossible*. D. is ill, he is in the same house where A. is, and this is why the reader can presume that D. is the protagonist from the previous novel. Throughout the second part of *The Impossible* it turns out that D. could be Dianus, the two-faced god who is simultaneously an object of faith and a subject from the perspective of faith, or, in this case, non-faith. D. symbolises God who is not able to believe in himself, a God who is an atheist. The concept of God-atheist can be found in Bataille’s interpretations of the death of God:

If God really were God, not simply the product of humans demanding secure, safe enclosures that protect their Selves, God would hate himself (i.e., humanly created self) because that self would deny his own Being. For God “is” (like the world) unintelligible, illogical; he cannot believe in himself. [...] He is constituted, if that is the word (and it is not), by the gap in his own Being that moves, transfers, and translates any sense, any consistency, in the direction of the void. His “awareness” is the awareness of his own lack of awareness.⁷⁰⁴

This is why, for D. in the first part and for A. in the second, love towards the women they love (B. and E.) is illogical, maniacal. A. even compares his miserable love towards E. with the love of a devoted believer who “can’t satisfy the unpredictable whim of God.”⁷⁰⁵ Simultaneously, they both are symbols of the human who cannot “be” anymore, who needs God desperately to justify his/her existence and to help him/her to get through with the awareness of the death of their own:

I am different from D. in having that mania for *being able* which raises me up suddenly like a cat. He wept and I dissemble. But if D. and his death did not humiliate me, if I did not experience D., deep within me, *in death*, like a spell and a vexation, I no longer surrender to passionate impulses. In this humiliated transparency constituted by the distraught, but enraptured consciousness of my folly and, through it, of deathlike emanation, I might finally be able to arm myself with a whip.⁷⁰⁶

Here is the difference why A. cannot be explained as a symbol of the dead God – he is still able, while humiliated by D.’s potential death. A.’s lot is to search for peace, trying to accept existence through the *ipse* (or broken self) of D. A.’s lot is *lamma sabachtani*, a human lamentation in the moment of the death of God. D., from his part, does not have any

⁷⁰³ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 94.

⁷⁰⁴ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op.cit., 89.

⁷⁰⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, 98.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

knowledge that he could be God; for him, God is B., the object of his love and durability which is symbolised by the metaphor of the rat. Being a symbol of God, D.

knows nothing of the extent of his thirst. And just as He knows *nothing* he knows nothing of Himself. [...] He only has knowledge of His Nothingness, that is why He is an atheist, profoundly so. He would cease right away to be God (instead of his dreadful presence there would no longer be anything but an imbecilic, stupefied presence if He saw himself as such.⁷⁰⁷

This also goes together with Nietzsche's understanding of God as a "deification of the nothingness, the canonization of the will to nothingness".⁷⁰⁸ What D. has is only non-knowledge of his existence as God. A., from his part, cannot bear the existence of E., neither dead, nor alive. Thus, E. also becomes a symbol of the death of God. These symbols – A., D. and E. together make a vague vision of the dead God, and this vision includes non-belief, non-knowledge, eroticism and identification between one *ipse* and another. They all symbolise impersonal realities which, as Bataille says, is what religion is about – tending to touch the impersonal reality, transcendence, not abstract being as it is in Christianity:

Christianity has made the sacred *substantial*, but the nature of the sacred, in which today we recognize the burning existence of religion, is perhaps the most ungraspable thing that has been produced between men: the sacred is only a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled.

Such a disjunction between the sacred and transcendental substance (consequently impossible to create) suddenly opens a new field – a field perhaps of violence, perhaps of death, but the field which must be entered [...]. The fact that 'God is recognized to be dead' cannot lead to less decisive consequence; God represented the only obstacle to the human will, and freed from God this will surrenders, nude, to the passion of giving the world an intoxicating meaning.⁷⁰⁹

To my opinion, this means that in the situation where God is dead, the challenge of the human being is to give the world a new meaning which, in Bataille's case, could perhaps be possible with a help of arts, such as literature. Literature tends to give the impossible communication to the reader as well as the writer. Writing pornography or reflections on unanswered love and death (as in *The Impossible*), the author communicates with the reader through the wound, through *ipse*. Writing becomes a process where "alternation between life and death is not unthought, unthinkable; it is instead the principle of this alternation, the uncontrolled shifting of knowledge to non-knowledge and back."⁷¹⁰ Literature tends to give a new meaning to this world, a meaning which is based on non-knowledge and through this – on the awareness of the death of God, on the sense of presence of the absence of God. As Bataille puts it in *Dianus*:

⁷⁰⁷ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 103.

⁷⁰⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of Idols and Other Writings*, op. cit., 16.

⁷⁰⁹ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, op. cit., 244-245.

⁷¹⁰ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak*, op. cit., 85.

The only way to define the world was to first bring it down to our measures and then, with a *laugh*, to discover it in this: that in fact this is beyond our measure. Christianity finally reveals what truly is, the way a dike at the moment it's breached reveals a force. [...] Is it not the key to human condition that Christianity's having set the necessary limits to life, to the extent that fear placed them too close, is at the origin of anguished eroticism – of the whole erotic infinity?⁷¹¹

The erotic infinity is also of great importance in the definition of the world. Firstly, as I have already written before in other interpretations of Bataille's novels, it has a similarity to sacrifice, where the victim (an animal) plays the role of God. Secondly, eroticism can also be explained as transformation from "outside" (knowledge) to "inside" (non-knowledge), which is feeling that one touches the "*intolerable* secret of being."⁷¹² As A. says in *Dianus*: "The slow rush of pleasure is in one respect the same as that of anguish: that of ecstasy is closely related to both. [...] I believe that only impotence is cruel."⁷¹³ Eroticism is what links anguish, the sphere where borders are overcome, the realm of the absolute, with the realm of the project, the world which is finite. This is the contradiction Bataille sees in Christianity – an effort to put the absolute which is continuous by definition into the frame of the discontinuous world of the human. The contradiction can be solved in two ways – either by ignoring death and bestowing immortality on human beings ("life after death"), or by a desire "to find that lost continuity which we are stubbornly convinced is the essence of being."⁷¹⁴ Following the desire means to be honest with the realm of the absolute, it means to try to reach it through the desire, eroticism and transgression, which "becomes a principle of an organised disorder".⁷¹⁵ One reaches for nothingness, or the feeling of the death of God, and the aim (if there could be any) is to become aware of the "death of God" through the analogy "between the *spell* of death and that of nudity."⁷¹⁶ Is there any chance to be aware of the death of God? Perhaps one possibility is an artistic expression (such as literature), overcoming the borders, and another one – in mystical experience. Of course, this assertion does not mean a positional contradistinction, because, for Bataille, literature as well as eroticism can be a mystical experience. This is where the analysis of the third part of the book, *The Oresteia*, can begin.

c) *The Oresteia*

First association with the title of the third part is the trilogy (*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides*) by Aeschylus.⁷¹⁷ There are a few essential ideas to stress here, for

⁷¹¹ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 99.

⁷¹² Georges Bataille, *Accursed Share*, Vol. II, op. cit., 118.

⁷¹³ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 103.

⁷¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 119.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 104.

⁷¹⁷ It is believed that *Oresteia* was a tetralogy, and the fourth tragedy, *Proteus*, has been lost.

example: they all were Greek tragedies believed to be connected with the Dionysian cult and performed within the Dionysian festivals.⁷¹⁸ It is easy to make parallels with Nietzsche's passion with Ancient Greece and especially with Dionysus. Secondly, Aeschylus's *Oresteia* tells about the end of the curse on the house of Atreus. The short poem that opens Bataille's *Oresteia* seems to render the atmosphere of the ancient tragedy: "night of spiders/of countless hauntings/inexorable play of tears/o sun in my breast long sword of death [...] the rivers of love turn pink with blood/the winds have ruffled my assassin hair."⁷¹⁹ As it seems, in this anonymous monologue the one who speaks is a murderer – whether he could be A. from the previous part (if he had something to do with the death of Dianus and probably the attempted murder of E.), or impersonal murderer whose crime is of an enormous scale. Later on, the text in verses speaks about chance and pale deity (why is this deity pale? because of the loss of blood?), seeing this chance in "long white stockings/chance in a lace nightdress".⁷²⁰ Then there is a subtitle *Discord*, and the next poem tells about falling houses and thousands of dead people, which could be a reference to the Greek tragedy. Such a reference can also be discerned when later on a murder is described: "belly open/hand removed".⁷²¹ This could also be a reference to a sacrifice where an animal has been decapitated or ripped (for the sake of, for example, telling fortune using animal's internal organs). Also, the "halo of death" shows up in the next passage, an inkling of death which is not definable. This part ends up with the confession that the lyrical hero is hungry for blood: "I'm hungry for blood/hungry for bloody earth/hungry for fish hungry for rage/hungry for filth hungry for cold."⁷²² Fish is a widely known symbol of Christianity, and blood also has a wide symbolic religious meaning. Blood is likened to the substance of the soul, also in Judaism – Lev. 17:11, "the life of the flesh is in the blood".⁷²³ The blood of the enemy has the strength of the enemy within it (this is why some nomadic tribes used to drink the blood of their enemies). In sacrificial rite, blood is the drink of gods that humans share with them. In Greek mythology, the blood of Uranus' genitals caused the birth of new beings, including Aphrodite herself.⁷²⁴ In Christianity, blood is also the symbol of Christ's sacrifice (pelican who feeds its babies by tearing its chest).⁷²⁵ Blood has also something to do with the taboo of killing (Cain and Abel in Jewish mythology), because in Christianity the sacrificial animal has been replaced with "God's

⁷¹⁸ Ā. Feldhūns, "Atiskā traģēdija" in *Sengrieķu traģēdijas*, tulk. Ā. Feldhūns (Rīga: Liesma, 1975), 393.

⁷¹⁹ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 121.

⁷²⁰ Ibid., 122.

⁷²¹ Ibid., 126.

⁷²² Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 128.

⁷²³ *Bible On-line. Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry*. http://carm.org/kjv/Lev/Lev_17.htm, accessed on 06/08/2012

⁷²⁴ "Blood", Lindsey Jones, ed. in chief, op. cit., vol. 2., 985-986.

⁷²⁵ http://www.christiansymbols.net/god_6.php, accessed on 24/07/2012

Lamb” on the cross, and this sacrifice is celebrated/remembered in the Eucharist, where wine symbolises Christ’s blood.⁷²⁶ To be “hungry for blood” can straightforwardly mean a desire for killing, but also a desire for the Absolution (in Eucharist). Also, it can mean that an anonymous person wants to drink blood in order to share something with gods or in order to acquire the strength of his/her enemy. The anonymity can as well be attributed to God who, for Bataille, is Nothingness, and is probably hungry for death or the *absolutio* for his atheism. The anonymous person can also be a murderer, using the ancient symbol, Herostratus who has destroyed something great in order to be remembered. If this is a murderer of God, the lyrical hero must be anonymous because of his ugliness.

Next subtitle is *Me*, and poetry in this part contains such messages as “the earth loves cold bodies”, “absence of life/nudity of death”, “the purity of executioner”, “I open in myself a theater/where a false sleep is playing [...] no hope/death/the candle blown out.”⁷²⁷ Next part is *The Temple Roof* and is written in prose, short utterances, expressing solitude and abandonment of the protagonist. The protagonist speaks to his mirror, and perceives the reflection “as deceptive as that of a supernatural being.”⁷²⁸ He also speaks of the desire, which he finds imperceptible, and observes silence in his loneliness. Later on, the protagonist reads *Berenice* and *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe (both are believed to represent the genre of horror fiction) and writes poetry, being limited by words. The poverty of language, impossibility to say the essential is all that we have after abandoning eroticism.⁷²⁹ The protagonist also uses the analogies of theatre and eroticism to explain his state of the soul:

I exhausted myself with love in the void, like being in the presence of a desirable woman who was undressed but inaccessible. Without even being able to express a desire. Stupor. Impossible to go to bed in spite of the hour and the fatigue. I could have said about myself what Kierkegaard said a hundred years ago: ‘My head is as empty as a theater in which there has just been a performance.’ [...] I saw the emptiness and saw nothing – but it, the emptiness, embraced me.⁷³⁰

It seems that, facing the inability of language, the protagonist remembers the force of the sacrifice – he himself is a sacrifice, while trying to get back into the darkness of eroticism, while being possessed by horror and anguish. Like a mystic, the protagonist uses the language of human love, but not the love as Christian mystics understood it; rather, the love of the desire caused by nakedness of the desired object.⁷³¹ Also the reference to the theater cannot be a coincidence – there has been a performance, and it might have something to do with the rite

⁷²⁶ “Blood”, Lindsey Jones, ed. in chief., op. cit., vol. 2, 986-987.

⁷²⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit. 131-134.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁷²⁹ Georges Bataille, *Accursed Share*, vol. II, op. cit., 169.

⁷³⁰ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 143.

⁷³¹ Georges Bataille, *Accursed Share*, vol. II, op. cit., 169-170.

(as it was in the Dionysian festival). Thus, the association leads one to the Eucharist and the Holy Mass, which is also a performance in some sense.

Next subtitle is *I throw myself among the dead*, and here the lyrical hero talks about his nudity and throwing himself among the dead. Death is compared to a little widow who is cowardly and sobs within the heart of the lyrical hero. The lyrical hero defines himself in an enigmatic way: “I am the emptiness of caskets/and the absence of myself/in the whole universe.”⁷³² This suggests that the protagonist, who speaks in riddles, is a link between being and transcendence. The protagonist himself is the feeling of the absent God. There is an empty casket, a symbol of resurrection, and simultaneously the absence of “myself in the whole universe”. The resurrection has been cancelled because it has been an attempt to make a human being immortal. The absence, casket and an empty universe is what relates the human being with the sacred, with the sphere of the Absolute.

Next subtitle is clearer: *To Be Orestes*, a clear reference to Aeschylus’s hero Orestes, the son of Agamemnon who killed his mother, went mad, and was persecuted by Erinyes. Madness because of the death of the beloved (Hermione) and the awareness of murder (although it is a revenge) is what marks Orestes from other heroes of Ancient Greece. “To be Orestes” means to be desperate and mad, persecuted and lonely. Also the protagonist from this part of *The Impossible* is shown as desperate and lonely, longing for some woman who turns out to be nature, as it seems to come about from the interpretation. The desperation Orestes feel can be connected to what Bataille has said about God during the interview with Marguerite Duras:

He said that God, on the contrary, if he existed, would be in a despair no human being could have the power to imagine (a despair such that he would be justified in committing suicide): ‘To put yourself in God’s position is such a painful position that to be God is equivalent to torture. For it supposes consenting to everything that exists; consenting to the worst.’⁷³³

Of course, there will always be a possibility to interpret the reasons why exactly God is so desperate for Bataille, but one thing is quite clear – if God exists and is desperate, it is because the death of God is not separable from the death of man. The powerful God is created by human’s desperate search for meaning, because the human needs a hope in order to live with the awareness of death. For Bataille, desperation is the point where man and God can communicate, where they fall together – through the communication of the wound, caused by

⁷³² Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 149

⁷³³ Interview appeared in *France Observateur* on 12th December 1957. Cited in: Michael Surya, op. cit., 482-483.

their finite being and doubt. The God who probably exists is the dead one who “opens the wound in the Book, the space of non-knowledge, of not-God.”⁷³⁴

The Book, literature thus becomes a tool of communication; as the protagonist in *To Be Orestes* says:

A poet doesn't justify – he doesn't accept – nature completely. True poetry is outside laws. But poetry ultimately accepts poetry.

When to accept poetry changes it into its opposite (it becomes the mediator of an acceptance)! I hold back the leap in which I would exceed the universe, I justify the given world, I content myself with it. [...]

Poetic delirium has its place in *nature*. It justifies nature, consents to embellish it. The refusal to clear consciousness, evaluating whatever occurs to it. [...]

It is penumbra and uncertainty. Poetry removes one from the night and day at the same time. It can neither bring into question nor ring into action this world that binds me.[...]

I approach poetry; but only to miss it.⁷³⁵

This impossibility symbolised by poetry as a mystical experience, where nothing happens and everything happens simultaneously, is a “privileged form of a misery.”⁷³⁶ It characterises the very essence of being, dictated by the strain between the realm of the absolute and the realm of the project. This “form of a misery”, characteristic to the human as well as to God, is the impossible, and literature is a symbol of it not only because of the limits of language but also because poetry can be compared to eroticism (see next part of the dissertation, chapter 3). Poetic delirium, the one that Nietzsche had, as well as that of Bataille, is human, and simultaneously it is a place where a possibility for the human to meet a dead God appears. One must “approach poetry; but only to miss it” in order to free the mind from subordination. Simultaneously, this is also the madness that has “the meaning needed for any thought that takes reversal as far as it can.”⁷³⁷

It can be said that in *The Impossible* there are some ideas essential for understanding what Bataille meant by the death of God. Firstly, it is human existence which is led by madness and overcomes the borders one by one. In addition to the concepts already analysed, another one shows up more clearly than in previous novels (*My Mother*) – the question about God's possibility to choose between living and dying. Bataille asks in *Literature and Evil*: “Is liberty not the power which God lacks, or which He only possesses verbally since He cannot disobey the order which He *is*, which He guarantees?”⁷³⁸ If so, can the answer be found in Bataille's thoughts about the meaning of literature and probably also in his atheistic mysticism where God “is not”? It can probably be also related to *Oresteia*, where the

⁷³⁴ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak*, op. cit., 91.

⁷³⁵ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 158-159.

⁷³⁶ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 39.

⁷³⁷ Michael Surya, op. cit., 478.

⁷³⁸ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 38.

protagonist finds that his desire has just one object – the beyond of the night (let us recall “the dark night of the soul”, the moment when the Christian mystic has doubts about God’s existence and love):

But in the night, desire tells lies and in this way night ceases to be its object. This existence led by me ‘in the night’ resembles that of the lover at the death of his beloved, of Orestes learning of Hermione’s suicide. In the form that night takes, existence cannot recognize ‘what it anticipated’.⁷³⁹

Here everything, described previously in the novel reunites – the mentioning of Hermione and Orestes shows the love which tends to be obsession, the love led by the desire which has destroyed the object. Hermione is a symbol of a woman as is the rat in the first part of the novel – as a beloved, the woman means for Bataille both destruction and continuity, which is united by the madness of the human called the death of God. This madness shows up in nakedness as well as in writing, because both of these phenomena are connected straight to being, to “what is” and “what is not”. Unlike reason, madness is always accompanied by chaos and transgression, and so is literature. It can be said that *The Impossible* is a novel which tells about the impossibility, which is the death of God, who is dead because he cannot believe in himself. This tragedy – God’s loss of faith – is a reason why the human being is capable to reach for God through eroticism, desire and literature, which, for Bataille, is a mystical way of the atheistic Christianity.

⁷³⁹ Georges Bataille, *The Impossible. A Story of Rats, Followed by Dianus and Oresteia*, op. cit., 164.

4. Bataille's Concept of the "Death of God": An Overview of the Interpretations of His Novels

4. 1. Bataille's "concept" of the "death of God" as it appears in his novels

In this part I will summarise Bataille's "concept" of the "death of God" as it appears in his novels, treating them as a religious narrative about the "death of God", as Bataille sees it. In other words, in the last part of my dissertation I will try to "conceptualise" the "unconceptualisable" – i.e., to work out some schema that could at least mirror Bataille's "death of God" concept, thus explaining his atheology in the light of legitimation of literature. To achieve this goal, I will also explain the stiffness of orgasm as the death of God, as it appears in Bataille's novels, expounded in the second chapter of this part. The third part will be dedicated to the symbols characteristic of Bataille's fiction, analysing them one by one, within limits also trying to put them in the context of the development of thinking the "death of God". In the last, fourth part of this part, I will describe what literature and the "legitimation of literature" means in Bataille's case.

Writing about Bataille's *Story of the Eye*, a French philosopher Susan Sontag explains pornography as a form of art:

To discuss even a single work of the radical nature of *Histoire de l'Oeil* raises the question of literature itself, of prose narrative considered as an art form. And books like those Bataille could not have been written except for that agonized reappraisal of the nature of literature which has been preoccupying Europe for more than half a century; but lacking that context, they must prove almost unassimilable for English and American readers – except as "mere" pornography, inexplicably fancy trash. If it is even necessary to take up the issue of whether or not pornography and literature are antiethical, if it is at all necessary to assert that works of pornography *can* belong to literature, then the assertion must imply the overall view of what art is. To put it very generally: art and (art-making) is a form of consciousness.⁷⁴⁰

Granting that Sontag talks about consciousness here, Bataille shows in his novels, that one must not forget his predecessor de Sade, who fought with the double-morality of his time in quite similar ways and using similar means – a pornographic narrative. What distinguishes Bataille from de Sade is that the former does not fight with anyone – his narratives are more of the meditation on human consciousness and simultaneously a way how the human is capable to think of God. To explain this assertion, I offer here a schema of Bataille's "pure understanding" of the "death of God" in his novels as I see it, and later on I will explain various strands of interpretation – in other words, the way how the "death of God" can be expressed, using the religious narrative in pornographic literature. The schema will be used

⁷⁴⁰ Susan Sontag, *Styles of the Radical Will*, op. cit., 44.

and analysed throughout the chapter, and conclusions of the analysis will be offered in the next part of the dissertation.

My understanding of Bataille’s thinking on God is based on his non-fiction works. Now I will sketch a schema that could be taken as a basis for further explanatory summary as well as for the interpretation of symbols.

Table 4. Bataille’s “concept” of the “death of God” as it appears in his novels.⁷⁴¹

THE HUMAN	DEATH	THE DEATH OF GOD
An animal/project in the human (pornography)	Mirror (reflection)	An animal/project in God (idolatry)
Literature (poetry in the human)	Sacrifice (violence)	The Absolute
Desire	Anguish	The Impossible
Laughter/tears		Inner experience

It is also important to point out that the table should be viewed vertically as well as horizontally, i.e. the section “The Human” is completed only if understood vertically, just as the sections “Death” and “The Death of God”. The horizontal sections show the development of the “death of God” concept as it appears in the novels. The arrangement of the table implies that the “death of God”, as it appears in Bataille’s novels, cannot be properly interpreted without the death of the human and reflection on it. For Bataille, pornographic expressions were not a coincidence – everything in his thinking seems related and, when interpreting the novels, it transpires that most of the concepts Bataille uses are somehow related with his understanding of the “death of God”.

The very first and most visible characteristic mark of Bataille’s novels is that they are *pornographic*, as were the novels of de Sade. Still, there is a difference between the two. For de Sade, God is needed in order to have blasphemy; the orgasm de Sade writes about is possible only in the case of blasphemy, and this is why the death of God and pornography are both of the same equality.⁷⁴² It is not the same for Bataille – the reason for Bataille’s turn to pornography is quite simple – pornography has a lot to do with the *animal in the human*, subject to primitive instincts. It is an acting part of the human, so it can also be treated as a project (an animal is *sacrificed* by the human in order to reveal the human to him/herself:

The privileged manifestation of the Negativity is death, but death, in fact, reveals nothing. In theory, it is his natural, animal being whose death reveals Man to himself, but the revelation never takes place. For when the animal being supporting him dies, the human being himself ceases to be. In order for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living – watching himself ceasing to be. In other words,

⁷⁴¹ See Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, op. cit., 20.

⁷⁴² Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit., 22.

death itself would have to become (self-) consciousness at the very moment that annihilates the conscious being.⁷⁴³

Sacrifice is also the violation of being, because it usually ends with the death of one being for the sake of another; it is also showed in the pornographic narratives of Bataille's novels – for example, in *The Dead Man*, where the urge to fulfil the desire ends up with death for all protagonists, and also in the *Story of The Eye*, where the desire becomes an obsession and corruption, at least if evaluated from the viewpoint of the Western Christian morality. It is so probably because of the reason that, for Bataille, to corrupt someone means to inspire him/her with the desire for the never-reachable truth, *desire* for the awareness of the “death of God”. In order to awake “a subject” to this truth, one must be a personification of it.⁷⁴⁴ As Bataille points out further in writing about Hegel:

For Hegel, satisfaction can only take place, desire can be appeased only in the consciousness of death. [...] That is why the consciousness that he has of himself must reflect (must mirror) the movement of negativity which creates him, which makes a man of him for the very reason that it will one day kill him.

He will be killed by his own negativity, but for him, thereafter, there will be nothing left; his is creative death, but if consciousness of death – of the marvelous magic of death – does not touch him before he dies, during his life it will seem that death is not destined to reach him, and so the death awaiting for him will not give him a *human* character.⁷⁴⁵

The *mirror* thus shows up as reflection, like it does in the novels as well – where eroticism can be explained as a mirror for suffering caused by being oneself (I will analyse this assertion in the context of novels further in the text). As such, the symbol of the mirror appears in person's reflection at the moment of one's own death, simultaneously with the “death of God.” Sacrifice also has a lot to do with pornography, but I will return to this later in the chapter “Stiffness of Orgasm as a Death of God”. Sacrifice in the context of the “death of God” recalls in memory Luther's understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, as well as Hegel's assertion that one can be aware of the “death of God” only through the awareness of one's own death. In the context of Bataille's novels, there is a possibility that the proposition – the human is able to grasp the “death of God” (as Jesus' sacrifice for the sake of humankind) through one's own death – shows that Christianity can be understood as an idolatry, because sacrifice means that there is an animal to be killed even in someone who is fully God and fully human. Is the human nature of Jesus concerned here? I doubt it, because that would mean to separate the central figure of Christian mythology in two persons – Jesus and Christ, which would be correct only for the time while Jesus was dying on the Cross and Christ was resurrecting. I dare to say, this is not what Bataille means with the “animal in

⁷⁴³ Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, op. cit., 19-20.

⁷⁴⁴ Yukio Mishima, “Georges Bataille and *Divinus Deus*”, op. cit., 19.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 19-20.

God” – my assumption is that “animal in God” should be understood as idolatry, as Nietzsche’s old God, who was dying from weakness. Bataille himself points out:

If one takes into account that the institution of sacrifice is practically universal, it is clear that Negativity, incarnated in Man’s death, not only is the arbitrary construction of Hegel, but also that it has played role in the spirit of the simplest men, without any common grounds comparable to those which are regulated once and for all by the ceremonies of the Church – but nonetheless in a univocal manner.⁷⁴⁶

Desire, from its part, is also closely connected to *anguish*. As Bataille himself points out: “The sovereign desire of beings is what is beyond being. Anguish is the feeling of danger related to this inexhaustible expectation.”⁷⁴⁷ Anguish is also a phenomenon that often occurs in Bataille’s novels, and usually it goes hand-in-hand with desire (as is the case in *Madame Edwarda*, for example). There is a reason to assume that the last three “concepts” of the table – *literature*, *the absolute* and *the impossible* – are interconnected. Legitimation of literature, annihilation of the text for Bataille means to reach for the absolute, although this is an impossible challenge for the human being. The concept which helps in this challenge is the force of imagination, which is so essential for the English poet, artist and philosopher William Blake (1757-1827), also mentioned in Bataille’s works. In the context of my dissertation, it is useful to sketch the continuity of Blake’s thought within the frame of one “branch” of American radical theology (or the “death of God”, or DOG theology), because the continuity of how Blake’s ideas are developed could be helpful in interpreting them in the context of Bataille’s novels. I will also give short examples of how the DOG theology interprets the force of imagination within the context of the “death of God” – I find this description useful for situating Bataille’s concept of the “death of God”, as I see it in his novels, within the framework of today’s thinking about God, thus to be better able to answer the question “Why Bataille today?”

One of the DOG theologians, William Hamilton, asserts that one must speak about God without objectifying it, because objectification would mean to make God a part of the world (similarly for Bataille, this would mean to speak about God as Jesus Christ, thus revealing the animal in God). One problem on which Hamilton works is the problem of suffering, another – the sense that God is absent, in other words, dead.⁷⁴⁸ He refers to the novels of the French writer and philosopher-existentialist Albert Camus (1913-1960), pointing out that:

The novels of Albert Camus [...] portray not only a world from which the false gods, and the holy God of the theological revival, have departed, but a world from which any and all gods

⁷⁴⁶ Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, op. cit., 18-19.

⁷⁴⁷ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 22.

⁷⁴⁸ William Hamilton, “The New Essence of Christianity” in Thomas J. J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 269-270.

have silently withdrawn. The world of these novels is a world in which the word God simply refuses to have any meaning. This is not treated as a good thing or terrible thing; it is just a fact that is ruefully assumed.⁷⁴⁹

Using this approach, Hamilton interprets the “death of God” as a metaphor which describes experience of the sense of loss of God. As a scholar who also studies literary works and conveys his thoughts in a literary form as well (as it is seen in his *On Taking God Out of the Dictionary*), he has introduced an interesting metaphor of a “detective” and a “criminal”.⁷⁵⁰ The metaphor means that a theologian (“detective”) tries to clarify the circumstances of the “death of God” (i.e., how the dead body was discovered, who killed God etc.). Using free interpretation of Hamilton’s metaphor, I would add that the metaphor of the “murderer” also includes the theologian – it is in place here to remember the “criterion of truth” that Nietzsche has established.⁷⁵¹ Thus, the “death of God” discourse relates to Christianity after the “death of God” interpreted as the end of all spirituality, and thus it becomes impossible to trace the absolute trait of this happening.⁷⁵² In other words, to be a Christian, for Hamilton, means to live without God but with hope and awareness of one’s ignorance. This awareness to some extent leaves space for terror (or, anguish, using Bataille’s terminology). Hamilton refers to the Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman who has said: “If God is not there, life is an outrageous terror.”⁷⁵³ Terror, anguish are an integral part of the human being because one’s awareness of being a murderer of God. Anguish is unconscious, and it manifests in everyday life. As Hamilton puts it:

In its present form, the death of God experience suggests that the God of the great Western monolithic faiths – at least, in the First and Second Wars – is too male, too dangerous, too violent to be allowed to live. Death of God today is not finding a body and figuring out who and why. It is the capture, understanding, and abolition of a dangerous 20th-century ideology. [...] Obviously, because of what is going on in Christianity and Islam people are dangerous. And one of the things you can do to help your brothers and sisters is to take Gods away from people so that their weapons won’t be quite sharp as they are with monotheism.⁷⁵⁴

In my view, the essential insights which are worth to keep in mind when speaking about Hamilton’s interpretation on the “death of God” are the following. Firstly, although the metaphor of “detective” and “murderer” can be based on Nietzsche, who was the first one to emphasise the violence of the “death of God”, Hamilton uses this metaphor in the context of the modern world, i.e. in relation to politics, social life, economics etc. From the perspective

⁷⁴⁹ William Hamilton, “The New Essence of Christianity” in Thomas J. J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 273.

⁷⁵⁰ William Hamilton, “Death of God Theology”, Carl Raschke, “Deconstructionism”, op. cit., 121.

⁷⁵¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of Idols, and Other Writings*, op. cit., 8.

⁷⁵² Lloyd Stephen, “Dangerous God”, op. cit., <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=892>, accessed on 10/08/2011.

⁷⁵³ William Hamilton, “The New Essence of Christianity”, op. cit., 276-277.

⁷⁵⁴ William Hamilton, *Reading Moby Dick and Other Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), cited in: Lloyd Stephen, “Dangerous God”, op. cit., accessed on 10/08/2011.

of my understanding of Bataille – one *lives* in the world of the project, and only the awareness of the “death of God”, seen in the violence which encloses the human being and raises anguish that can be helpful for developing the desire for the absolute. Secondly, Hamilton stands, like Bataille did, in both literature and theology, using the metaphorical approach for explaining his theories. Hamilton draws attention to literature as imaginary means for conveying the message of the “death of God”, showing that reflection on the “death of God” can be found in several literary works. In the interpretation of the “death of God” the force of imagination is important. For Bataille, the force of imagination is included in art as an expression of the desire (literature/poetry), which is also the overcoming of language, annihilating what has been written. Bataille chooses pornography as his way of expression of the desire, and as part of art pornography may be characterised by “originality, thoroughness, authenticity, and power of that deranged consciousness itself, as incarnated in the work.”⁷⁵⁵ This is where the force of imagination reaches its peak, showing in the context of Bataille’s novels also the metaphors of “detective” and “murderer” who are, to put it simply, theologians (as it is seen, for example, in the character named A. in Bataille’s work *The Impossible*).

For Blake, the force of imagination is related to the language of poetry. Blake indicates that the human in his creative acts and perceptions become God and God becomes a human – God is the eternal Self, and the worship of God is thus a self-development.⁷⁵⁶ As another English poet, W. B. Yeats, writes, for Blake, Christ was a symbolic name for imagination. The tomb of Christ (for Blake, in the form of Gothic churches; similarities with the proclamation of the “death of God” by Nietzsche’s madman can be recognised in this comparison as well) is a shelter, where imagination might rest in peace until the hour of God should awaken it.⁷⁵⁷ This “Aristotelian” thought about the potential/active imagination which, on the one hand, is a state of sleep, and, on the other hand, is “ready” to wake up, may also be useful in interpreting Bataille’s atheology – the force of imagination can be explained as the desire associated with the realm of the absolute that “sleeps” in the human being, the one who is completely tied to the world of the project through action that constitutes its being. Imagination enforces a *creative* activity which is essential for a writer as well as for a poet and an artist. The artist expresses the creative activity of God through artwork, and all human creators are contained in the Creator. The very essence of the human and the criterion of his

⁷⁵⁵ Susan Sontag, *Styles of the Radical Will*, op. cit., 44.

⁷⁵⁶ Northrop Frye, “The Religious Vision of William Blake” in Thomas J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 19.

⁷⁵⁷ W. B. Yeats, “Introduction” in William Blake, *Collected Poems*, ed. by W. B. Yeats (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xxiii.

humanity is – how close he is to himself, to his very own being. Blake considers that imagination is life and no one is born without it. The problem is people who cut their imagination down as much as they can. In so doing they deny their humanhood and their divinity which is humanhood. It seems that the viewpoint of Blake is quite simple – to see God in other human being. Still, it does not mean that a human being could be a wholly God; a human being is imperfect and self-restricted. God is also the “essence” from which the individuals or identities proceed. A hand or eye is individual because it is an organ of a body, created by the only Creator (and in that case, the human being is the only perceiver). Separated from the body, it loses all individuality beyond what is dead and useless. That is why Blake insists that imagination is constructive and communicative.⁷⁵⁸ Blake also drew attention to the “prophecy” of Swedish theologian, philosopher and Christian mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1722) – the “prophecy” said that the old world has ended and the new one begins. Blake put the changes of theologies, where new ones replaced the old ones, into the realm of imagination and visions. Blake likened the “gift” of seeing visions to being in Eden a (new world); all reality for him became the old world, old theology.⁷⁵⁹ Influenced by this vision, Blake points out that no human has seen God; the human can perceive (something) as God but cannot perceive God. It is possible to see the divine aspect of a great man, but it can be seen only because the divine in us recognises itself. It is not possible for a human to perceive anything higher than him – for painting God, for describing the divine, we use our tools, we depict God as a man in paintings, or attribute him with human qualities.⁷⁶⁰ In other words, poetic existence in “me” addresses itself to poetic existence in others, and it is a paradox.⁷⁶¹ A human being perceives God as a divine aspect within other individual. This means that the only possibility for perceiving God could be through the use of one’s imagination. There is just one possible way how to think about a perfect God, and this is a perfect development of one’s imagination, using it as a life force.⁷⁶² Each person imagines and therefore knows of his existence with the help of words, says Bataille.⁷⁶³ It could be asserted that, for Blake, all this complex – the realm of imagination and visions as a “new theology”, imagination as an eternal force that imparts humans with humaneness, making them truly human – resulted in a “universal language”, occurring as an absolute “No”, which is the origin of darkness that is the darkness of God, or, more precisely, the darkness of

⁷⁵⁸ Northrop Frye, “The Religious Vision of William Blake”, in Thomas J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 20-21.

⁷⁵⁹ W. B. Yeats, “Introduction”, op. cit., xix.

⁷⁶⁰ Northrop Frye, “The Religious Vision of William Blake”, in Thomas J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 20-21

⁷⁶¹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 116.

⁷⁶² Northrop Frye, op. cit., 20-21, 26-27.

⁷⁶³ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op .cit., 83.

the fallen Godhead only Nietzsche and Blake have known.⁷⁶⁴ As Altizer puts it: “This fallen Godhead is an absolutely alien Nihil, but the full reversal of that Nihil is apocalypse itself, an apocalypse which is an absolute joy, and Blake and Nietzsche are those very writers who have most evoked that joy.”⁷⁶⁵

Blake’s position towards religion can be described as his personal fundament of life. He was convinced that religion affects every aspect in life, first of all, historically, and that this influence is not a positive one because of the cruelties of those people who are claiming they are doing God’s will (similarly to social, political and economical aspects of religion as described by Hamilton).

Another writer and philosopher essential in twentieth century’s DOG theology, as well as in Bataille’s context, is Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), already mentioned in my dissertation while interpreting Bataille’s novel the *Blue of Noon*. Attacking the interpretation of Christianity of his contemporaries in Denmark, Kierkegaard insisted upon the inhumanity of God, indicating that Christianity is torture and God – a torturer.⁷⁶⁶ In his journal (published with the title *Last Years*) he writes:

Suffering that there must be suffering is connected with the majesty of God. His majesty is so infinite that it can be characterized or expressed only by a paradox: it is the paradox of the majesty which is bound to make the beloved unhappy.[...] Suffering depends on the fact that God and man are qualitatively different, and that the clash of time and eternity in time is bound to cause suffering.⁷⁶⁷

It is important to remember that Kierkegaard was a Christian; he had a vivid awareness of the original sin, of life itself as a crime and thus of the discontinuity of the human being (in last journals he thanks God that no living being owes a life to him).⁷⁶⁸ As a writer and as a philosopher Kierkegaard did not manage to make up with the Christianisation of culture and politics if they are opposed to the radical existential demands of faith.⁷⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, describes Christianity like this:

The ideal means hatred of man. What man naturally loves is finitude. To face him with the ideal is the most dreadful torture [...], it kills in him, in the most painful way, everything in which he really finds his life, in the most painful way it shows him his own wretchedness, it keeps him in sleepless unrest, whereas finitude lulls him into enjoyment. That is why Christianity is called, and is, the hatred of man.⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁴ Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Godhead and the Nothing*, op. cit., xiii.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., xiii.

⁷⁶⁶ John Updike, “The Fork”, in Thomas J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 63.

⁷⁶⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Last Years*, ed. and transl. by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), n.p. Cited in John Updike, “The Fork”, in Thomas J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 64.

⁷⁶⁸ John Updike, “The Fork”, in Thomas J. Altizer, ed., *Toward a New Christianity*, op. cit., 69.

⁷⁶⁹ Jeffrey W. Robbins, op. cit., 8.

⁷⁷⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Last Years*, op. cit., 69.

Another important trait of Kierkegaard that cannot be ignored is that he was both genuinely dedicated to religious sentiment and critical towards Christendom. Like DOG theologians, Kierkegaard proclaimed radical faith that was in opposition to the alienation between religion and society. His main concern was of the very meaning of church and Christianity at an individual level.

It is also important to highlight that both Bataille as well as Kierkegaard paid a lot of attention to how the alienation between the individual and society develops (although using different ways of explaining it). They are also both related in the understanding that God and a beloved woman are alike (Kierkegaard shows it in the book *Fear and Trembling*, speaking about a woman whom the protagonist loves in contrast to the whole world, while Bataille emphasised that the love one feels toward God and the beloved woman is parallel⁷⁷¹). Thus, feelings towards a woman can mirror the feelings toward God. It should also be noted that Bataille was against the God who has been created by the Church and thus “believed in”, and so was Kierkegaard. Still, for Bataille, it is essential to mirror the *animal in man*, and it seems that in this reflection the pornographic nature of his novels is of great importance.

4. 2. Stiffness of orgasm as awareness of God’s absence in Bataille’s novels

Recalling the definition of Bataille’s atheology already given in the beginning of the dissertation, I would like to remind a few things. First, Bataille’s atheology is “the science of death or deconstruction of God (the science of the thing being destroyed inasmuch as it is thing).”⁷⁷² In addition, atheology for him is also a method of delving into such concepts as the refusal to know and the “death of God”. According to Benjamin Noys, the “a” connects Bataille’s atheology with trying to get rid of God, as he is the “head” or the main object of theology.⁷⁷³ Also, the “a” signalises absence and thus speaking about the paradox “presence of the sense of God’s absence” becomes possible.⁷⁷⁴

Another important concept for atheology is eroticism which, for Bataille, is by its nature subjective and can be related to the inner experience of the human being.⁷⁷⁵ Bataille’s premise is that the human being needs violence and the desire for violence can be connected to the blasphemy of God. In this way, God is denied and in a strange way revived through the necessity of God’s transgression which leads to *nothing*.⁷⁷⁶ The transgression takes place

⁷⁷¹ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, op. cit., 58.

⁷⁷² Stuart Kendall, “Editor’s Introduction”, op. cit., xxxviii.

⁷⁷³ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 48.

⁷⁷⁴ Leslie Anne Boldt, “Translator’s Introduction”, op. cit., ix.

⁷⁷⁵ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 30-31.

⁷⁷⁶ Donald M. Bordert, ed. in chief, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Thomson Gale, 2006), 4881.

through experiences that always have an effect, such as laughter, tears, poetry, anguish, or ecstasy.⁷⁷⁷ These experiences are related to that of eroticism, and as part of them, sexual ecstasy or the *stiffness of orgasm* is an essential component of the interpretation of Bataille's "death of God" concept as it appears in his novels.

I have discussed seven novels of Bataille, and in each of them eroticism takes a meaningful place in my interpretation of the "death of God". As a writer Bataille presents himself as a continuator of de Sade's style, and his novels seem to reassert that to corrupt someone means to inspire him/her with the desire for a never-reachable truth, desire for the awareness of the "death of God". In order to awake the subject to this truth, one must be its personification.⁷⁷⁸ At the same time, *negativity* as a creative death, as an awareness of one's own death, is of great importance. Also the headless man, described in the second chapter of my dissertation, is a symbol of the awareness of the "death of God". To put it more clearly, it is useful to explain this symbol in the context of the society Bataille himself was involved in (as well as Lacan and Klossowsky):

The monstrosity, the negation of the self, proclaimed the absolute power of dream over consciousness, of dispossession over self-possession, of impossibility over possibility. Sade's version of man was a prototype of modern man without God: he had to escape from his prison, just as the acephale had to escape from his head and the individual from his reason, if he was to destroy the real presence of – and then enjoy – the objects of his desire. This apologia for a monster born out of a confrontation between the Freudian *Wunsch* (wish or desire) and Hegel's and Kojeve's *Begriete* (appetite) was followed in January 1937, in the second number of *Acephale*, by a tribute to Nietzsche entitled 'Nietzsche and the Fascists' in which Klossowski gave an account of the current state of Nietzschean studies.⁷⁷⁹

Bataille connects death and the divine by symbolical use of such terms as *la petite mort* and *la grande mort*. The question is – does the former symbolise the death of a human being and the latter – the death of God?

Such an answer would be far too simple in the context of Bataille's difficult reflection on the "death of God". His novels are the world of violence, sadism and ecstasy, as I have already pointed out, and this is the way how Bataille speaks about the "death of God", as well as of mystical experience, apprehension of the absence of God. A human is capable to reflect on death, and death, from its side, becomes a cusp. Thus the human gains a possibility to use this cusp in order to reach for the realm of the impossible. Latvian theologian N. Titans in his exposition of the genealogy of eroticism in Bataille's thinking describes this situation

⁷⁷⁷ Georges Bataille, *Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 137-141.

⁷⁷⁸ Yukio Mishima, "Georges Bataille and the *Divinus Deus*", op. cit., 19.

⁷⁷⁹ Elisabeth Roudinesco, op. cit., 132.

precisely.⁷⁸⁰ The absence of God destroys all borders, and thus excess (and scandal) becomes possible. Only extreme destruction can show the emptiness of God's absence, which transforms the existence of a human being into the vertigo of a free fall – which could also be his/her experience of revelation or salvation.⁷⁸¹ Thus, the reality of *la grande mort* is possible only through *la petite mort* (which can be either ecstatic or destructive) – this is the moment and the place where the two meet and make a lens through which a human being can have an inkling of God's presence or absence. This is also the reason why Charles and Eponine from the novel *L'Abbe C.* cannot resist laughter during the High Mass – the scandal is inescapable and, at this moment, they refuse to take eroticism tragically. Only Robert is the one who does so. He chooses the “free fall” (or surrendering to erotic experience) instead of denial. His symbolic death in this passage is a moment when consciousness triumphs over unconsciousness. The divine is aware of its own absence and craves to overcome it by joining devoted believers in a free fall. In fact, the divine has committed a suicide. The aim or the reason of this suicide is to become absent, to make a step from knowing to not knowing. Another image of the Mass can be read in the *Story of the Eye*, where the priest is sacrificed. This sacrifice shows Bataille's resistance to the “dialectical reduction of Christ's pain by an image of suffering that does not lead to meaning. Bataille found the attempt to put the divine to death in the crucifixion of Christ comical [...] [because] to make the divine finite is to cause more laughter.”⁷⁸² The death of the priest in the *Story of the Eye* is comical; it causes more laughter and disgust than serious reflection. The High Mass in the *Dead Man* emerges in a different light – as a slaughterhouse where everybody looks for a sacrifice of a female God. This slaughterhouse is described using the tool of pornographic fiction, where sexual relationship leads to death. The important question is – who are attending the sacrifice? The slaughterhouse, in fact, may be a symbol of life which always ends up in death; eroticism is an essential part of it; in fact, eroticism reveals the truth that each being is a separate unit who is born alone, lives alone and dies alone.⁷⁸³ In the fiction works of Bataille eroticism is described as transgression that takes two discontinuous beings into the state of continuity.⁷⁸⁴ This is why eroticism is always connected with the awareness of death, and thus also with anguish, even more through anguish. Anguish opens a human being to the annihilation and

⁷⁸⁰ Normunds Titāns, “Erotisma, nāves nojausmas un reliģijas ģenealoģiskā saistība Žorža Bataja domāšanā”, *Ceļš*, Nr. 59, sast. Valdis Tēraudkalns (Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Teoloģijas fakultāte, LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2009), 199-203.

⁷⁸¹ Normunds Titāns, op. cit., 201.

⁷⁸² Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 26.

⁷⁸³ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 12.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

death, to the awareness of death.⁷⁸⁵ Death makes the human body stiff, and so does sexual intercourse, although in the second case the stiffness may last only a short instant. Stiffness can be frequently seen in Bataille's novels – possibly represented by, e.g., many dots in *Madame Edwarda* and *The Impossible* – everything is paused for a moment, *nothing happens* except the stiffness the awareness of which calls forth the awareness of death. And *vice versa*: “the knowledge of death deepens the abyss of eroticism.”⁷⁸⁶

The abyss of eroticism is a characteristic mark to all libertines Bataille writes about in his novels; this is why I will highlight some essential aspects of the character of Bataille's libertines. I will begin with male libertines – such are Robert in *L'Abbe C*, sir Edmond and “I”-person in the *Story of the Eye*, the Count in the *Dead Man*, “I”-person in *Madame Edwarda*, Troppmann in the *Blue of Noon* and Pierre in *My Mother*. The most conspicuous detail is that all male characters are passive. Robert freezes up after the collapse in the church, sir Edmond takes part in the “I”-person's and Simone's libertinage as an observer, Troppmann is impotent for the most part of the narrative, the Count does nothing for his own pleasure, while Pierre lets his mother decide his fate, also sexually, and the “I”-person in *Madame Edwarda* follows the madness of Edwarda and observes her sexual act with a taxi driver. Here it is useful to note that activeness/passiveness also belong to a sexual symbolic. On the one hand, the male has always been thought as an active agent in the act of love-making, and the female – a passive one. On the other hand, the roles become equivalent at the moment of orgasm, which can be characterised as stiffness, as freezing, as if all essential functions of life have stopped at that moment, apart from the will of the human being. This freezing or stiffness has a resemblance to death on the one hand, and it embodies creative act of the human on the other. Thus, orgasm becomes a “link” between being and non-being, a moment where any kind of choice becomes impossible and everything is as it is. In Bataille's novels, orgasm is frequently followed by transformation, after entering another “level of reality” (as, for example, in *Madame Edwarda*, as well as in the *Blue of Noon*).

All men, for Bataille, seem to live on the edge between the awareness of God's absence and desperate need to believe that there is “someone out there”. Call it a paradox, but this “someone out there” usually proves to be a woman. This circumstance is also a reason why one must be attentive while reading feminist interpretations on Bataille – for example, the assertion that “sexual possession of the woman equals sacrifice in Bataille's symbolic equation: the one commonly attainable experience of the sacred in a profane world. [...] The female prostitute really is as close as he [the protagonist of the novel – I. J.] can get to

⁷⁸⁵ Georges Bataille, *Accursed Share*, Vol. II, op. cit., 84.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

‘GOD’: reviled, outcast, debased but always and still available (for a price) after dark.”⁷⁸⁷ As far as I see it, in Tauchert’s interpretation of Bataille’s *Story of the Eye* and *Madame Edwarda*, some traits essential to Bataille’s thinking are missing (e.g., the absolute/project, his attitude towards literature, etc.). Contrary to the typically assigned role, women are usually the active agents for Bataille, embodying the “death of God” concept. So it is with Dirty in the *Blue of Noon*; the same can be said of Simone in the *Story of the Eye* and especially of Edwarda and H el ene in *Madame Edwarda* and *My Mother*. Reading Bataille’s *Divinus Deus* it is easy to see how the image of the mother (H el ene) overlaps with prostitute (Edwarda), and “with it a vision of defilement, of incest which violates the sanctity of the Sacred Mother.”⁷⁸⁸ The function of this Mother is to force others experience terror, anguish and ecstasy, thus driving them closer to the experience of the “death of God”. Both mother (traditionally, the loftiest representation of the feminine) and whore (traditionally, the most ignoble representation of the feminine) originate from “the very same part of that flesh: you may recall the words of Baudelaire who called God a representative of whores.”⁷⁸⁹ For Bataille, women make the leap (or, the fall) from one state to another:

There is a kind of relay operating here between a beautiful woman, animality, and the subjectivity (and its loss) of the observer. Just as attainment of absolute knowledge is immediately reversed into nonknowledge, so too the recognition of the beauty and perfection of the other, her completion, leads to a recognition of her animality. The animal here is specifically the sign, the mark, of the incomplete. Hegelian recognition of the other is rewritten as the recognition of the other as radically wounded, open; the animal is the movement down from the summit, from the perfection of God, to an earlier, bestial state. More important, the animal is being who is fully integrated into the natural order [...] rather than a being, like Man, who consciously negates the environment. [...]

In the other, Bataille would recognize a being who cannot be recognized: not a woman as a partner, as interlocutor, but a woman as sexually aroused and arousing, who *stares back*. In the moment of recognition there is a nonrecognition: what is conveyed to me is not recognition to myself, my liberty, or my status as agent; it is instead my status as a double of a denuded aroused woman, the woman as like me but animal, the ‘communication’ to me of myself as animal but also the ‘communication’ to her of myself as animal.⁷⁹⁰

As the other and “communication” between the animal in man and the animal in God, woman constructs a “gate” for the process of corruption and simultaneously embodies the personification of truth. With the help of the “gate”, through *la petite mort*, a link between death (*la grande mort*) and the divine is created. Thus, orgasm is a “bridge” between the world of the project (animal in man/animal in God) and the world of the absolute. Being the bridge, orgasm itself draws nearer to the realm of the absolute than that of the project.

⁷⁸⁷ Ashley Tauchert, op. cit., 24.

⁷⁸⁸ Yukio Mishima, “Georges Bataille and *Divinus Deus*”, op. cit., 12.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁰ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit., 170.

There are two characteristic traits I can use for explaining what I mean by “gate”. Firstly, in Bataille’s novels a woman who “is” a “gate” usually has mystical experience through having sex with somebody (as does Edwarda in *Madame Edwarda*, Dirty in the *Blue of Noon*, Marie in *The Dead Man*). The common point of this experience could be described as some kind of change of the human’s state which illustrates the process of becoming a personification of truth (which is: “God is dead”). The second one is the activity which, within the frame of my interpretation, ties female characters to the world of a project. They are whores in most cases, and Bataille said that whorehouse is his true church. Besides, every priest (the libertine, in the context of Bataille’s novels) “went to a whore at one time or another.”⁷⁹¹ The whore is the one who offers satisfaction for the *desire* – as it also is the case in *The Impossible*, a novel which differs from all others not only because of its form but also because of its lack of pornography. Still, *The Impossible* talks about libertinism in a straighter way, i.e. it talks about nature which is de Sade’s part of libertinism. Nature (in the human) is what kills God as a virtuous and fictional image because the “libertine identifies with the ‘other’, the always-ready murdered, in the very act of negating that other; this alone stimulates the libertine and makes possible the greatest identification of all, with Nature.”⁷⁹²

The erotic desire is conscious searching for the end.⁷⁹³ As such, it is also an important part of the erotic experience, and is both erotic and religious. Through the desire, the human being achieves the consciousness of the end, i.e. the totality of one’s being, in which solitude is of great importance – this is also the reason why it is possible to assume that male libertines, for Bataille, symbolise the essence of the human being, of what the human being “is”.⁷⁹⁴ Human solitude cannot be grasped without the presence of eroticism which transcends bodily and temporal limits. One must produce silence of others within oneself in order to become a Crucified (an animal in God?) or Dionysus. Simultaneously, one must not forget one’s solitude, in order not to lose one’s “otherness”.⁷⁹⁵ The individual existence is not commensurate to the universe with which it seeks identification – the awareness of this inevitability leads to anguish. As Bataille puts it, we kill God in our neglect of the sacred, in our devotion to the project (which can be religion as well), yet we sustain our belief in him in the fear of oblivion.⁷⁹⁶ Even if man has fulfilled his destiny and the history has come to its end, there is still a question – what should one do with this freedom? The answer one

⁷⁹¹ Georges Bataille, *L’Abbe C.*, op. cit., 57. See also: Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 12.

⁷⁹² Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit., 67.

⁷⁹³ Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros*, op. cit., 44.

⁷⁹⁴ To explain this assumption, it is worthy also to keep in mind that Bataille himself was a man, and sex is something even literature cannot overcome.

⁷⁹⁵ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 156.

⁷⁹⁶ Leslie Anne Boldt, “Translator’s Introduction”, op. cit., xi-xii.

probably gets from *Guilty* is that “recognition of unused negativity is now precluded – as is satisfaction of the desire for recognition. Thus, the experience of (desire’s) negativity is linked to radical solitude.”⁷⁹⁷

Stiffness of orgasm, the short moment of the duration of orgasm, is usually characterised by a momentary feeling of solitude in Bataille’s novels. The already-mentioned issue about sexual activeness/passiveness has its own stereotypes as well – in spite of the “active man” and “passive woman”, the roles become equivalent at the moment of orgasm (or at the moment of solitude) – it can be characterised as freezing, as stiffness, as if all functions essential for life have stopped in an instant (likewise in the mystical experience). This “freezing” has resemblance to both death and the creative act of the human. Of course, the creative act also includes death, if perceived as creation of a new life (on which Bataille never speaks in his novels) – the potentiality of conceiving means to create another death (as an old saying goes, there is only one thing about what the human can be sure in his/her life: it is death). Thus, the stiffness of orgasm becomes a “link” between being and non-being, a moment where any kind of choice becomes impossible. Of course, it would be irrelevant to offer a definition of orgasm in my doctoral thesis – firstly, because it is more a medical term, and, secondly, there are too many definitions of this phenomenon.⁷⁹⁸ Still, the fact that definitions of orgasm are so “popular” is evidence that humankind for centuries has spent a lot of time and energy thinking about it. As a man interested in anthropology and prehistory, Bataille definitely was aware of the importance of orgasm. It is a “flash-moment”, a “thunderbolt”, as something very intensive and very short, and this is why orgasm can be related with death:

There’s a feeling of presence in me irreducible to any kind of notion – the thunderbolt that ecstasy causes. I become a towering flight from myself as if my life flowed in slow rivers through the inky sky. I’ve stopped being ME. [...] And a deep kiss between us, in which the distinction of our lips is lost, is linked to that ecstasy and is dark, familiar to the universe as the earth wheeling through heaven’s loss.⁷⁹⁹

Stiffness of orgasm usually comes about as a warning about the change of state while, coitus could be interpreted as *unio mystica* between two human beings. It is seen, for example, in *Madame Edwarda*, when Edwarda changes after the love-making and their race into the night begins. The coitus is for the protagonist a means to reach for the impossible, to be aware of the death of his own. The same thing, the same awareness of the totality of the human being

⁷⁹⁷ Denis Hollier, “A Tale of Unsatisfied Desire”, op. cit., xi.

⁷⁹⁸ See, for example, Kenneth Mah, Yitzchak M. Binik, “The Nature of Human Orgasm: A Critical Review of Major Trends”, *Clinical Psychology Review*, Vol. 21, Issue 6, August 2001, 823-856, where authors point out that more than 26 definitions of orgasm are possible.

⁷⁹⁹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 18.

and death is described in the *Blue of Noon*, when Troppmann and Dirty make love over the graveyard and, in the moment of orgasm, begin to slide down from the rock, only by lucky chance escaping bodily death.⁸⁰⁰ This powerful symbolic explores the way towards the illusion of fulfilment of the desire – to have someone who can *mirror* the protagonist in his sense of the state of being, which at this point of the novel is desire for the sake of desire. In other words, the act of love-making is, for Bataille, the movement of negativity, his creative death, which gives the impression of really dying for all persons involved.⁸⁰¹ In his search for the fulfilment of desire, the protagonist in *Madame Edwarda* craves for a naked body, for an act which can seemingly free him from his being. He craves for a tangible experience without logical explanation; in other words, he wants to face the impossible through sacrifice, because that much is true that there are some similarities between the act of sacrifice and coitus, while during the sexual act death becomes “self-consciousness”.

As far as it emerges in the novels, the atheology of Bataille is a theology of delirium – it includes ecstasy, poetry, sexuality, the absence of consciousness, the death of thought, everything that is an effect of the impossible. Experience dominates there, and it studies sovereignty (or the moment of time).⁸⁰² One must understand that Bataille does not talk about the experience of faith; rather, it is a “leap” of disbelief which tends to reach toward the impossible by laughing at organisations (such as church), “because they impose a form, a discipline, because they make a project of the experience.”⁸⁰³ The erotic objects of Bataille are simultaneously an animal and a human (or a human and the dead), and this is the experience that Bataille characterises as “impossible”, inaccessible. As such, the impossible can be defined as “the contradiction between human and nonhuman, between thought and animality.”⁸⁰⁴ Somehow it must be experienced, and this is why even the impossible must be possible.⁸⁰⁵ This experience sketches two worlds for a human being – the one where “I” is present, and another – where “I” is absent; thus it is the opposition between the world of identity and its alternation, not the opposition between the profane and the sacred. “God” is the profane name of the sacred.⁸⁰⁶ This alternation is essential when thinking about the death of God and its connection with sacrifice (also in the context of eroticism), because:

The name of God introduces the equivocal dimension of the presence–absence whose ambiguous play will contaminate all language. For this name which posits the divine as

⁸⁰⁰ Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, op. cit., 143-145.

⁸⁰¹ Georges Bataille, “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice”, op. cit., 20.

⁸⁰² Stuart Kendall, “Editor’s Introduction”, op. cit., xxxix.

⁸⁰³ Allan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual. Commitment, Subjectivity and the Performative in the Twentieth Century French Tradition*, op. cit., 268.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁶ Denis Hollier, “The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille”, op. cit., 132.

transcendent is the absence of God: *absence of his presence*; but its reverse, or the sacred (as distinct from the divine), is also a mode of the absence of God, this time however in the *sense of the presence of his absence* and of the immanent experience of this absence. This passage from the obverse to the reverse is what Bataille calls the *sacrifice* that is the putting to death of God by man, which both consecrates the dead God and deifies his human murderer, the perpetrator of God's absence.⁸⁰⁷

This is also how the feeling of the presence of the absent God, mentioned in the interpretations of the novels, can be explained: it is both language and eroticism as sacrifice that make the difference. The eroticism depicted in the *Story of the Eye*, *Madame Edwarda*, *Blue of Noon*, *L'Abbe C.*, *The Dead Man* and *My Mother* can also be named the "accursed share" that engages protagonists and the reader into a voyage to the impossible, to the divine. Eros reintroduces the sacred into existence, reveals *what is there* when the subject (God) is no longer "there". Reading is eroticised when the images of loss contained in these tales are released to reader's experience, inviting his/her loss in turn.⁸⁰⁸ One of the possibilities to interpret Bataille's novels: "The mirrors which covered the walls, and of which the ceiling itself was made... finished losing us."⁸⁰⁹

The orgasmic experience also rouses the awareness of one's own death, as it is most clearly seen in *L'Abbe C.*, when Charles makes love with Eponine pretending she is dead; it also shows the reversed states of both brothers (priest-libertine). Soon they both realise that they are under observation. The illusion of the butcher, and Robert as the observer shows clearly represents the way how Bataille conceives of the link between the awareness of death and orgasmic experience in his novels.

In short, characterised by the feeling of solitude, the stiffness of orgasm in Bataille's novels is used as a literary means of expression for symbolising the "prelude" to the transformation of the state of the human being, which usually takes place from non-awareness of the "death of God" to awareness of God's absence through the awareness of the death of one's own. It can also be interpreted as a "first gate" towards the impossible (nothingness), a "concept" which lies at the very heart of Bataille's atheology and is to be explored further in this chapter.

4. 3. Use of symbols and metaphors in Bataille's atheology in his novels

In this section I will try to explain symbols Bataille uses in his novels most often. It can be considered that Bataille's "positive atheology" includes six domains of delirium – laughter,

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., 133

⁸⁰⁸ Leslie Anne Boldt, "Translator's Introduction", op. cit., xx.

⁸⁰⁹ Georges Bataille, *My Mother. The Dead Man. Madame Edwarda*, op. cit., 22.

tears, sexual excitation, poetic emotion, sentiment of the sacred, and ecstasy.⁸¹⁰ Sexual excitation, ecstasy and sacrifice have already been analysed in the previous section, poetic emotion is going to be analysed in the next. Since sentiment of the sacred has a lot to do with tears and laughter, I will include the analysis of this domain in the part where I speak about the legitimation of literature. For now, I will make a resume of the symbolism of laughter and tears in the context of the “death of God” as it appears in Bataille’s novels, adding six more domains I see as important in the context of Bataille’s novels – i.e. anguish, laughter, the figure of the observer, tears, mirror and the concept of Trinity.

Anguish

Anguish is the symbol Bataille often uses to describe feelings of the human in face (or the presence) of the dead God. This is also the impossibility of a human being as far as “me” is concerned.⁸¹¹ The definition of “me” here goes hand in hand with the awareness of one’s own death and simultaneously with the awareness of being God’s murderer. Anguish is an integral part of human existence as well of eroticism (because of its violence); one must go to its depths, not to flee from it. Also, as it is shown in the novels, anguish is what pursues being, what puts a human on the edge between being and non-being (as, for example, Marie in *The Dead Man* when she feels anguish because of the Count’s arrival).

Anguish is what opens a human being to annihilation and death.⁸¹² Being inherent in eroticism, it is also connected with the opening of limitations to being and with transgression (a violent breaking of taboo).⁸¹³ Anguish is related to the feeling of finitude, the awareness of an inevitable death of the human being, who experiences a desire to surrender to anguish.⁸¹⁴ As seen from Bataille’s novels, anguish is a *conditio sine qua non* also for the “death of God” – anguish is what leads a being towards the impossible, the condition where the murderer sanctifies the victim as well as himself, thus driving the simplicity of a continuous being to the edge:

A very typical Christian way of thought is apparent in Bataille’s idea that, in short, God does not manifest himself while our being remains in its proper, balanced form; and only when our existence exceeds this life and leaves behind it [...] then will God manifest himself. What is unique in his utilization of “eroticism and pain” is the extreme as a means of attaining it.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹⁰ Lucio Angelo Privitello, op. cit., 171.

⁸¹¹ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, op. cit., 7.

⁸¹² Georges Bataille, *Accursed Share*, Vol. II, op. cit., 84.

⁸¹³ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 10.

⁸¹⁴ Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, op. cit., 163-164.; Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 26.

⁸¹⁵ Yukio Mishima, “Georges Bataille and *Divinus Deus*”, op. cit., 13.

God who manifests godself is the dead one, the God who has exceeded the project (which is church, as well as religion). Still, anguish is the possible that “plays its part (and is thus retained) and then falls away, is forgotten, leaving only the impossible.”⁸¹⁶ In other words, anguish is what makes the impossible what it is, exceeding the limits of oneself; anguish symbolises a natural state of the human being in the situation where God is dead.

Laughter

All novels mention laughter at least one time, although the use of the concept is quite similar in all of them. Laughter is the concept Bataille shares with Nietzsche, and it includes the affirmation of life. Remembering also what Nietzsche has written about the old gods: “They did not fade away in twilight – that is a lie! On the contrary: they laughed themselves to death!”⁸¹⁷ Clarifying his attitude to God, Bataille points out that only confusion and subordination allow us to speak of God, while laughing has liberated his life, and he refuses any intellectual translations of this laughter, since God (who does not laugh) is a slave who demands enslavement. Again, there is an affirmation of laughter as transforming the principle of prohibition. Also, laughter points to the lack of understanding or unwillingness to understand.⁸¹⁸ God who does not laugh, embodies the unwillingness to understand, and this is why a human being is obedient to what is said and refuses to think himself. It is laughter which sets a human being free from enslavement and opens the possibility to think by him/herself.

For Bataille, laughter is something that liberates from the “imperatives of the universe, the demands of the world as it is.”⁸¹⁹ Laughter relates the one who laughs (a human or an animal in human) with the unknown.⁸²⁰ In Bataille’s novels laughter frequently appears as a messenger of sex. Laughter can also be a prelude to ecstasy, and thus lead the one who laughs beyond the limits, toward the impossible and nonknowledge.⁸²¹ Laughter means losing seriousness by experiencing failure. In the *Inner Experience* Bataille writes: “I laugh at a man whose failure does not tarnish my effort at sufficiency, at a peripheral figure who had pretensions and compromised authentic existence (by mimicking its outward appearance.”⁸²² Laughter is also connected with the death of God because it is “the result of the subversion of

⁸¹⁶ Allan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual*, op. cit., 270-271.

⁸¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, op. cit., 201.

⁸¹⁸ Georges Bataille, “Preface” to Pierre Angelique’s) novel *Madame Edwarda*, op. cit., 139.

⁸¹⁹ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 37.

⁸²⁰ Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, op. cit., 134.

⁸²¹ Chris Gemberchak, op. cit., 182.

⁸²² Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 89-90.

the image.”⁸²³ Such, for example, is the laughter of Eponine and Charles in *L’Abbe C.* – they are attending in the High Mass which is a subversive image, where “God”, who had to be in the centre of the Mass, is only a caricature of the absolute because of being already dead (or, according to another possible interpretation, is dying during the Mass). Laughter frees them for the abyss, which is a human try to reach the impossible.

Mirror

It could be said that all corpus of Bataille’s [pornographic] novels can be seen as a mirror which takes the most disgusting aspects of human being and confronts the reader with them. It can also be envisaged as a mirror of the world of the project, where everything is clean and orderly, where everything is easy to explain with the help of logics. The mirror shows the world of the absolute, the world of obsession and chaos which makes it *reality* through the image of the mirror – in other words, the world of the absolute which shows the dead God, while he is assumed to be alive in the world of the project. The most illustrative use of the mirror is seen in *L’Abbe C.*, where both twins, Charles and Robert, mirror each other – not only by lending the cassock but also by identification – they switch the role of the libertine, both being libertines, although one is dressed in the cassock. This is the way how Robert becomes a monstrous mirror image of the life of a libertine. Also Pierre in *My Mother*, looking at Hansi in the mirror realises that he looks at something that reminds him of the dead God (Helene), but is subversive and *unreal*. Mirror is also used as a tool to stress Troppmann’s existential and mental state. *Mirrors* is the name of the brothel where the protagonist of *Madame Edwarda* meets Edwarda and begins his mystical journey. Besides, he chooses this prostitute because she is able to mirror his state of being, as if he was the name “God” (project, an image), while Edwarda was the absence of God (what is, or, precisely, *what is not*). Mirror can be interpreted also a symbol of one’s consciousness of oneself. Moreover, the mirror embodies sexual desire as an irresistible urge that leads closer and closer to the very fact that both of them, the narrator and Edwarda, are subject to the violence of eroticism or inner experience, with all of its maladies. Bataille also uses the symbol of the mirror in his non-fictional works:

The maladies of inner experience. In it the mystic has the power to animate what pleases him; the intensity suffocates, eliminates doubt and one perceives what one was expecting. As if we disposed of a powerful breath of life; each presupposition of the mind is animated. Rapture is not a window looking on the outside, but a mirror. [...] The first malady, the mirror, is evidence of a crude servant, whose ties to a profound servitude escape him.⁸²⁴

⁸²³ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 37.

⁸²⁴ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 54-55.

Mirroring is a process, symbol of two opposites which in fact are the same; it is also a tool for observing the nakedness of oneself, a divine attribute where the possibility to reach for the impossible emerges. Lacan also wrote about “the mirror stage as formative of the function of the ‘I’ which analyses the origin of the human subject through mirroring effect of the mother’s look.”⁸²⁵ Thus, the mirror stage is an identification, transformation that takes place when one assumes an image; the function of this transformation is to stabilise relation between the “inner” and “outer” worlds (or, as Lacan himself puts it, *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*).⁸²⁶ There is also a difference between Lacan’s and Bataille’s understandings of the mirror :

Lacan [...] set the mirror stage at the origin of the child’s entry into language and the symbolic. The mirror stage would constitute the most elementary form of the subject-object relation. Bataille, by contrast, speaks about the inner experience as being objectless and a break with all objectification. The inner experience as ecstasy, Bataille says, means that the subject is a “nonknowledge” and thereby sovereign. Thus does the inner experience come to embody the horizontal axis in its capacity to shake the transcendent theic.⁸²⁷

For Bataille, mirror is unbearable because it is the malady of the inner experience. As such, mirror has no object, and this is why it is unbearable – the mirror is a symbol which shows death to the human being – for example, we may notice a wrinkle or a grey hair while staring at the mirror, and this is a signal that we become older, that we are approaching death. By showing the death of the human, the mirror also shows the death of God – while mirroring another human being (Hansi, for example). The image of the mirror is *telosless* (like Marcelle in the *Story of the Eye*). As such, the mirror can be seen as a circle of knowing and nonknowing and thus also be related to another passive symbol of Bataille’s novels, i.e. the observer.

Observer

The image of the observer also deals with the circle of knowing and nonknowing. Such observers are the Count in *The Dead Man*, Sir Edmond in the *Story of the Eye*, Robert in *L’Abbe C.*, also Troppmann in the *Blue of Noon*, and partly – the protagonist in *Madame Edwarda*. It seems that these passive characters (or their passive stance) symbolise a human being (self) who reflects on the awareness of the death of God. There is no project, no attempts to save God from his death, no attempts to stop the murderer of God (if there is one). The observer is a human who is not aware about the animal in him, a human who does not

⁸²⁵ Benjamin Noys, op. cit., 32.

⁸²⁶ Jacques Lacan, op. cit., 1-3.

⁸²⁷ John Lechte, op. cit., 120.

think he is (or could be) a murderer of God. As such, this human also is a “gate” between the awareness and unawareness of the “death of God”. The “I”-person in *Madame Edwarda* is a witness to God’s recognition of herself as a self-hatred: “God constitutes herself through the disbelief in her totality, her eternity, her majesty, her causality – but what is God if not these things? God’s atheism is the fall, but it is also a recognition of a radical nonknowledge and nonbeing.”⁸²⁸ Without a witness, one cannot attain this recognition, because it needs a mirror to be reflected in. Also, the observer symbolises the eternal return, like the Count in *The Dead Man* – the eternal return as everything that causes life slip in the opposite direction, as does poetry, desire and laughter.⁸²⁹ As such, the observer is a link between the world of the project and the world of the absolute, a moment of time when the “self” realises the happening of the “death of God”. Because of the lack of awareness, the observer also stands for the idea that God can never be touched. Using the structure of *Bildungsroman*, Bataille identifies the reader with the “I”-person, driving both the reader as well as the observer “inside the nothingness of seeing, like the sand on an hourglass, the essence of one’s own existence towards an object.”⁸³⁰ Throughout this process, the reader also becomes an observer. Thanks to the pornographic nature of Bataille’s texts, where the “I”-person or the main character becomes a victim, the reader also becomes “a victim whose identification with the poet as victim lost in continuity provokes his or her own loss of continuity.”⁸³¹ The reader sees the observer as a symbol, and simultaneously he is the observer oneself. Thus, the observer is inside the circle of knowing and nonknowing which is desire, poetry and laughter. In other words, nonknowing may be explained in terms of sacrifice, the concept analysed in the first part of this chapter.

Tears

In Bataille’s novels tears often is a manifestation of consciousness. The consciousness they illustrate is never anonymous – mostly it has something to do with the feeling of solitude which makes one to be aware of his/her existence. At the same time, as in *Madame Edwarda*, where Edwarda bursts into tears after making love with the taxi-driver, tears may symbolise “this dialectical tension in human life between the flight from and the search for this ‘sacred’, ‘sovereign’ aspect of existence: ‘intimacy’.”⁸³² To be “sovereign”, for Bataille, means to come as a flashlight, to show up in an instant. Thus it can be said that tears stand for being at

⁸²⁸ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit., 107.

⁸²⁹ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, op. cit., 111.

⁸³⁰ Yukio Mishima, “Georges Bataille and *Divinus Deus*”, op. cit. 15.

⁸³¹ Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, “Sacrifice and Violence in Bataille’s Fiction”, op. cit., 99.

⁸³² Chris Gemerchak, op. cit., 2.

the moment, being aware of the moment. This is possible only if one declines from knowledge, cancels it:

This is the case if we weep, if we sob, if we laugh till we gasp. It's not so much that the burst of laughter or tears stops thought. It's really the *object* of the laughter, or the *object* of the tears, that suppresses thought, that takes all knowledge away from us. The laughter or the tears break out in the vacuum of thought created by their object in the mind. But these moments, like the deeply rhythmmed movements of poetry, of music, of love, of dance, have the power to capture and endlessly recapture the moment that counts, the moment of rupture, of fissure. As if we were trying to arrest the *moment* and freeze it in the constantly renewed gasps of our laughter or our sobs. The miraculous moment when anticipation dissolved into NOTHING, detaching us from the ground on which we were grovelling, in the concatenation of useful activity.⁸³³

As such, tears are similar to laughter – they represent the world of the absolute, or human's reaching towards the world of the absolute, where God is Nothingness because of the power of nonknowledge. Marie weeps before entering the inn, and tears seem to symbolise her change of state from a woman who has recently lost her lover into a symbol of the divine (a woman who acts like a prostitute). It is essential to point out that recognition of the "self" in Marie's case is also the awareness of the death of God. As one could interpret Hegel – Marie is the observer, the one who looks at the crucifix and simultaneously she is the one on the cross. For Edwarda tears symbolise awareness of the absence of her own, caught in the moment which is already gone, short as her orgasm with the taxi-driver. Like the observer, she finds herself face to face with the universe where God is absent.

Trinity

Trinity as a symbol can be discerned in several of the analysed novels. For example, Carl, Robert and Eponine make a trinity in *L'Abbe C*, and also Charles, Robert and the editor make one which is probably even more significant than the first. This latter trinity concerns the annihilation of text, creation of non-text by correcting and rewriting each other. By doing so, they enact a never-ending Mass, a ritual where God endlessly dies, a literature which contains awareness of what the "death of God" is. Another symbol of the Trinity can be seen in the *Story of the Eye* – at the beginning it seems that the trinity could be Simone, Marcelle and the narrator, but when Marcelle goes off the stage, the trinity seems to be made of Simone (Jesus Christ), Sir Edmund (Holy Ghost) and the narrator (God the Father), thus leaving Marcelle the role of the Virgin Mary. This trinity kills the priest in the midst of the church service, thus framing a powerful symbol of the death of God – the representative of God is killed by the trinity, invoking three interpretations. First, the representative of God is punished to death because the trinity is angry with him, probably with his work of representing the trinity. This

⁸³³ Georges Bataille, *Accursed Share*, Vol. II, op. cit., 203.

interpretation does not bear criticism – there is no anger in the text, only a temptation to love-making. Besides, one can make further parallels with love-making as “knowing” in the Jewish Bible, and this would lead to another interpretation of “knowing” – that the sin of the priest and the reason why he must die a martyr’s death is that he *knows* God, that he is part of the church who has the monopoly to the only truth about God. Second interpretation is already described in the chapter where the *Story of the Eye* is analysed, and it is that the young couple (with Sir Edmund as the observer) kills the “concept of God” because they are legitimate gods themselves. This interpretation leads to the third where the trinity symbolises God who kills himself during the service. Perhaps this last one could be closest to Bataille’s thinking.

The symbol of the trinity can also be found in the *Dead Man*, because there are three main characters – Edouard, already dead, the Count, the living dead, and Marie, the martyr. In this novel, Edouard could be seen as God the Father (the presence of the awareness of his death is unbearable), while Marie can be seen as Jesus Christ (because of the scene in the inn), and the Count – as the Holy Ghost, the living dead who dies last, after Edouard and Marie have already died. The reason why it is possible that the Count dies last is simple – he symbolises the Holy Ghost who is distorted by humans; he is the symbol of the presence as well as of absence, and also the symbol in which the death of God makes appearance most clearly in the novel.

In the *Blue of Noon* the symbol of the Trinity can be seen in Troppmann’s three women, although it is not so easy to identify the “roles” here, except that there are three of them, making a massive symbol of the trinity, while Troppmann stays in the role of a devoted believer who is not capable to believe (make love). In *My Mother* there are three false incarnations of the “real God” who is Helene; similarly in the *Blue of Noon* it is only a symbol to make one see the devoted believer (Pierre).

Another case is with *The Impossible*. At first, the book itself is divided into three parts, and in each of them one of the characters is the main character. The first is from the notes of Dianus, a God who cannot believe in himself and therefore chooses to die in his loneliness (God the Father), the second is Father Alpha, who turns out to be a false priest, too human to be a priest (Jesus Christ), and the third – the anonymous author of poetry (the Holy Ghost).

After this interpretation, it is possible to sketch out how the trinity is shown in the novels of Bataille. God the Father is active, but not as active as Jesus Christ (Simone is more active in her sexual games compared to the narrator), lonely, absent (as Yahweh forgotten because of the new God of Christianity); besides, he is also an atheist, and the awareness of his absence is unbearable. Jesus Christ is an active force – being aware of all taboos (Simone), he becomes aware of his humanity and finitude (father Alpha) and chooses to die because of

the absence of God the Father (Marie). The Holy Ghost is a passive observer (*Story of the Eye*), as well as represents the eternal return, time and the poet (*The Impossible*), something ungraspable, unreachable, but present.

4. 4. Legitimation of literature and Bataille's concept of the "death of God"

As I have already pointed out in my dissertation, interpreting Bataille's novels, I consider them as literary-religious texts. Regarding atheology – the science that deconstructs a thing as far as it is a thing – it can be read into the literature Bataille has created in two ways. The first one, as I hope I have already clarified during the interpretation, is to read a novel and to interpret it in the light of Bataille's "concept" of the "death of God", using narrative as well as characters of the novel to construct some sense and find out what Bataille implies about the "death of God" in the novel. A short conclusion of this study will be given in the next and last chapter of the work. Another way how atheology is worked in Bataille's novels is through what is outside the text which can be revealed to the reader through understanding what legitimation of literature means. In short, it means that literature is (and must be) the transcript of inner experience, and I will try to explain this proposition step by step here.

While trying to find out what literature is for Bataille and what can be understood with the legitimation of literature, it is worth to remember what Bataille himself said, i.e. that "nothing is less animal than fiction, which is more or less separated from the real, from the death."⁸³⁴ He also added:

Man does not live by bread alone, but also by the comedies with which he willingly deceives himself. In Man it is the animal, it is the natural being which eats. But Man takes part in rites and performances. Or else he can read: to the extent that it is sovereign – authentic –, literature prolongs in him the haunting magic of performances, tragic or comic.⁸³⁵

From this citation it becomes clear that one must distinguish two sides of literature. The first one is the story, the comedy of pornography which can be received with disgust or with interest, or even with excitation (as it is, for example, with pornographic movies). This is the "side of the project" of literature, a deceptive comedy which becomes a comedy because the human (reader) is not aware of the animal in oneself. But the animal needs the thing we call pornography only for one reason – to avoid extinction. And so it is with the animal in the human who, reading pornography, becomes aware that pornography is all about death, not sex. This is the "side of the absolute", the literary absolute in this case, i.e. non-text, or the transcript of inner experience of the self. Although writing, for Bataille, can also be likened to

⁸³⁴ Georges Bataille, "Hegel, Death and Sacrifice", op. cit., 20.

⁸³⁵ Ibid.

“mysticism”, which is also the “inner experience” of the death of the self and through this – also the inner experience which reflects the “death of God”, there is nothing metaphysical in Bataille’s writing. Rather, it can be seen as anthropological investigation of the awareness of the death of the self in which one also attains to the awareness of the “death of God.” Bataille is not interested in the question what literature *is*; it can be asserted that, for him, literature as transcript of the “inner experience” is atheistic religious praxis.⁸³⁶ It is the negation of language, in which “things are what they are only because of the meanings words give them.”⁸³⁷ As such, literature itself is atheology, because it deconstructs things as far as they are considered as things. This is Bataille’s “method” (if it can be called so) of atheology – to free words from their meanings, revealing silence or nothingness (or the dead God) behind them. This is also why Bataille tends to “annihilate what is written”, using so many dots (as silence), writing pornography instead of theological theories or reflections on God. As I have already pointed out, Bataille’s researcher Tomasso Giartosio wrote: “Literature’s *raison d’être*, in fact, can only be found in the quest for an absolute ‘revealed’ in inner experience; conversely, the inner experience is the only possible legitimation for the literary enterprise.”⁸³⁸ This is why it can be said that writing, literature and poetry, all three alike, are connected with understanding the death of God and also with understanding the inner experience. The goal of Bataille’s writings is to answer one central question:

How can one *write* an inner experience, in other words, a religious event that in a sense doubles the sacred of sacrifice *before* it was made pure, holy, eternal, good, and useful? If we reject established religion as useful, fixed, predictable, predicting, we are left with a sacrificial moment, individual or collective that, it would seem, cannot be codified, cannot be taught, transmitted, used, put in words.⁸³⁹

The sacrificial moment must stay out of any system of religion to remain “real.” Literature as poetry in man is led by the desire and causes laughter as well as tears; simultaneously, the animal in man mirrors the animal (or the project) in God, even if it is only a reflection. What literature must be is the transcript of inner experience. It must *be* a sacrifice which leads one through the laughter, tears and anguish towards the impossible, which tends to break the isolation of the human, yet never succeeds, because this task is also impossible. The human is isolated not only from the sacred but also from the self. For instance, in *L’Abbe C.* there is isolation between Charles and Robert – this is a human isolation. Or perhaps it is what Christians call the original sin – humans are alienated from each other, and the only way to

⁸³⁶ Helga Finter, “Vorwort”, op. cit., 8–11.

⁸³⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, op. cit., 182.

⁸³⁸ Tomasso Giartosio, op. cit., 22–23.

⁸³⁹ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit., 62.

approach the other is eroticism as an awareness of this isolation. Robert is aware of his life; at the same time, he is withdrawn from it, he is an observer of his own life. As he lacks eroticism, he tries to live the eroticism of his mirror image, of his brother. In a way, all life of Robert is simulation – he is a simulated priest, a simulated brother and a simulated lover for Eponine. The only real thing in this character is observation, which is a sense and consciousness of absence. In the moment when he meets eroticism in its nudity, “as it is”, in the High Mass, he faints. The awareness of the death of God is unbearable, and Robert becomes a symbol of the Christian Church – he is a murderer of God. Fatality has struck the criminal, and the curse is not what it seems. Robert has considered arrogantly that he is able not only to know God but also to rule over his presence; at the same time, the absence in this “constructed presence” is too unbearable.

In view of this, the essential time, foretold by Martin Heidegger, has begun – Nietzsche talked about the consciousness of the “death of God”, commencing a new era where God is recognised as a “concept” made within a religious system. And this is what the Count represents in *The Dead Man* – the awareness of a living dead, of God as a constructed concept, describable, passive, understandable, human and impotent. It is a God who is a passage, an image of human destiny, cut off from violence and thus – imperfect.⁸⁴⁰ Charles, in his turn, represents language, construction, the comedy – humans would know nothing of God if they did not have language for formulating this knowledge. The object of faith thus becomes *clear* and easy to understand. In fact, the object of faith in this case is an interpretation of words. Humans can believe in things of their own creation. Words designate some state; when a word disappears, the thing to which it refers disappears as well.⁸⁴¹ This “caricature of God” or Christian systematic concept of God is present as long as words connect it to people. In other words, the presence of a human-made God is possible as long as the language is present. However, there is a possibility to turn words into a process which is never-ending, thus making the absence of God omnipotent. In this case, I see it in the narrative when it is used as a medium. In fact, narrative “happens” only in correlation with the reader. Narrative uses language as a tool, leaving “free space” for interpretation, clarification, and thus provides for a possibility for the development of imagination and thinking.

In its broader sense, narrative is also a means by which the story is told, regardless of the medium. Novels and other forms of writing focus on particular events and their causal relations. One theory about fictional narratives tells that the reader is supposed to *imagine*

⁸⁴⁰ Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, op. cit., 44.

⁸⁴¹ Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche. Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, transl. Charles Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (Chicago: Henry Regner Company, 1966), 133.

(emphasis is mine – I. J.) the occurrence of events described in the narrative rather than to treat these descriptions as assertions to be assessed against the standards of evidence and truth.⁸⁴² Bataille deconstructs written narrative differently in a passage from Charles’s writing – at first, he elaborates on the already mentioned Nietzsche’s idea: “I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar.”⁸⁴³ Text must live on its own life and can never be completed; text is something that requires freedom – as a free fall which confirms the absence of God, as *la petite mort*, which confirms the violence of sexual relations.⁸⁴⁴ Writing and telling is closely linked with time and hence with history; thus, they are predestined to decay. For Hamilton, there is still a living hope in the world without God; Bataille thinks in other categories and forces one to live with an awareness of the “death of God”, to live in anguish as a natural state of the human being.

Yet, narrative, being created not only by the author but also by the reader, continues to create itself in the process of reading. Besides, as literature, narrative becomes a process of infinite interpretations as well. In the opposite case, when literature is perceived as a *reality* (or a comedy) it becomes a project, a religion: “To write is to plan, to project, to put off the pleasure, to render permanent, to put to use what is there, what is natural. But this is precisely what religions do: the major religions are all ‘religions of Book.’”⁸⁴⁵

To avoid the mistake that all “religions of the Book” have made, Bataille was more interested in developing the “side of the absolute” of literature – by legitimating literature through destroying it as far as it is a thing (language/grammar). In this process, he was creating a non-religion, a religion where God does not believe in himself and dies laughing, when he sees what “religions of the Book” have done to him.⁸⁴⁶ What for Blake was the force of imagination, for Bataille was the annihilation of literature. His aim was to negate “the written word”, turning it into its opposite. Although it sounds absurd, the key is quite simple. Bataille himself explains it in *Literature and Evil*:

Sartre rightly says, with regard to this impossibility [lies of the poets: that the poetic process wants the object to become the subject and vice versa, the subject to become the object – I. J.], that the tragedy of the poet is due to the mad desire to unite the being and existence objectively. [...] But whichever way we look to the synthesis of the unchangeable and the perishable, of the being and existence, of the object and the subject, which poetry seeks, is an ultimate definition of poetry. It limits it and transposes it into the realm of the impossible and the unsatisfiable.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴² “Narrative”, Edward Craig, gen. ed., op. cit., accessed on 01/08/2010.

⁸⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of Idols, and Other Writings*, op. cit., 162

⁸⁴⁴ If we accept the idea that each human being’s birth, living and dying are unique personal experiences, then, in fact, any intimate relationship is rape or outrageous interference in human being’s independence and constancy – it is as cruel as raping because it is a way how to throw a person into his or her non-being, into the consciousness of the absence of the divine.

⁸⁴⁵ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit., 61.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 87–92.

⁸⁴⁷ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 44.

Thus, one of the specific features of Bataille's narrative is that it is laid out in a story form, supplemented with a non-story, or, in other words, a story which is not told and whose main relation is with its opposite. As a story, narrative is present; at the same time, it is absent – as a sense of the story. It is a place where all possible interpretations can happen; it is open to changes, destroyable, supplementable and contradictory. To “understand” all sides of the narrative and unify its interpretations in one is beyond the human mind. Hence, narrative remains incognisable. The goal for the author in order to legitimise literature as transcript of inner experience becomes identification between the “writing I” and the “ecstatic I”.⁸⁴⁸ This is why the purpose of Bataille's text is “to confront the reader with what he called ‘heterogeneous matter’ [...] Bataille did not attempt to tear down Hegel's formulation of the dialectic; instead, he explored the limits of the dialectic by focussing on excesses of the body – waste, laughter, orgasm, religious ecstasy – that could be reincorporated and explained by dialectical systems of thought.”⁸⁴⁹

Non-story also includes the approach of negative theology, and, as it seems, Bataille's novels ask us another question – if you say that God is fully God and fully human, how is it possible that he then can also be identified with the characters of the novels? If God is understandable within the framework of human thinking, then he (she) is a prostitute, a libertine, a false priest who know that everything he is doing is just a theatre. Bataille himself writes that God is “a public whore, in no way different from any other public whore.”⁸⁵⁰ Furthermore, he explains about naming of God, pointing out eroticism to say that:

God is nothing if He is not, in every sense, the surpassing of God: in the sense of common everyday being, in the sense of dread, horror and impurity, and, finally, in the sense of nothing... We cannot with impunity incorporate the very word into our speech which surpasses words, the word *God*; directly we do so, this word, surpassing itself, explodes past its defining, restrictive limits. That which this word is, stops nowhere, is checked by nothing, it is everything and, everywhere, is impossible to overtake anywhere. And he who so much as suspects this instantly falls silent. Or, hunting for a way out, and realizing that he seals himself all the more inextricably into the impasse, he searches within himself for that which, capable of annihilating him, renders him similar to God, similar to nothing.⁸⁵¹

As this quote shows, for Bataille God also must be a never-ending thought which cannot be defined within the framework of dogmatic theology. In order for God to become the God who Hegel talks about, in order for God to become the absolute, he must die. What humans can do

⁸⁴⁸ Tomasso Giartorosso, op. cit., 25.

⁸⁴⁹ Elliot Vanskike, “Pornography as Paradox: The Joint Project of Hans Bellmer and Georges Bataille”, Mosaic (Winnipeg), 12/1/1998/University of Manitoba, n.p. <http://www.questia.com/library/1G1-53643779/pornography-as-paradox-the-joint-project-of-hans>, accessed on 22/10/2012.

⁸⁵⁰ Georges Bataille, “Preface” to *Madame Edwarda*, op. cit., 141.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

is, like Hamilton says: to take gods away from people so that their weapons will not be as sharp as they are with monotheism.⁸⁵² The “real God” is the evil that humankind has created, Blake’s Urizen; he is war and simultaneously the suffering, caused by time (as for Kierkegaard) and the contradiction between continuity and discontinuity. The problem with Christianity is that the human wants to become a God, forgetting that the absolute (or nothingness) is something he is not capable to think of. The symbolic solution to the problem of God (of the Book) as evil is showed in *L’Abbe C.* By “destroying the evil he [Robert] had created”, Charles destroys his dead brother once again. The voyeur’s observation of Robert, his presence, is turned into absence. Speaking of the divine, this is the way he turns the divine into the “death of God” and provokes the free fall, a hope for the consciousness of absence. We cannot get rid of the living dead (God) until we destroy (or kill) him. The same is seen in the *Story of the Eye* – and, in a paradoxical way, the only thing how to deal with it, is to make this living dead to be conscious about his own absence. Second, in the *Story of the Eye*, the narrative stops the process of the divine becoming present in the concept and reverses it. What has been considered divine has fallen from grace and has become absent. The priest has been killed, and the sacred space has become a place where eroticism, as it is, becomes a tragedy. The divine absence takes place in the presence of the divine in this tragedy. In this process, what is present is the observation of the absent God. To remind, it is Sir Edward who gives Simone and the narrator the priest’s eye as a sacred means for their opportunity of revelation or salvation. The priest is a reversed symbol of the divine, similar to the observer in *L’Abbe C.* or in *The Dead Man* – the evil demiurge who has created the world [of Christianity] and now looks at it, playing a role of non-action. It hardly needs saying that this demiurge has been created by another demiurge, and the latter – by yet another... and all of them have themselves been created – by humans, and their language, before creation has become a literary narrative. Humans, in turn, in a paradoxical way, have been created by an absent God.⁸⁵³ Simone and the narrator, for their part, are devoted believers and illustrate the only possible way to salvation for humankind, i.e. consciousness of the absence of the divine. Making love under the observation of Sir Edmund or beneath the corpses of Marcelle or the priest, or under the observation of the degenerate priest – as in *L’Abbe C.* – or Marie’s public sex in the inn – as in *The Dead Man* – are brave decisions indeed. The involved persons overcome being and become non-beings in an orgasmic ecstasy. They live out the tragic of

⁸⁵² William Hamilton, *Reading Moby Dick and Other Essays*, op. cit.

⁸⁵³ This idea is partly borrowed from another novel – that of the Estonian theologian Jaan Kaplinski, who speaks about demiurges in his novel the *Slim* (Eye). This novel has been translated in Latvian and the idea I have borrowed is developed at the end of it. See: Jāns Kaplinskis, *Acs*, tulk. Guntars Godiņš (Rīga: Mansards, 2010), 83-130.

eroticism fully and take full responsibility for its gloom. They are ready to take risk for the sake of salvation and to face the absence as a fact, because this absence (or power of the dead man) is unbearable.

The above insights provide me with an opportunity to turn to the concept of the “inner murderer” once again. “For any man who has eyes to see sees God and not tables or windows.”⁸⁵⁴ God, for his part, is omnipotent in his death, yet cannot be separated from the human.⁸⁵⁵ If the absence or “death of God concept” is *la grande mort*, it could be attainable for the human consciousness only through the tragic of *la petite mort*, as described before. *La petite mort* becomes a very personal narrative, which links a person to the absence and possibility of endless interpretations. Sex is the opportunity to see oneself, and, as humans are sinful and guilty, this moment becomes a tragedy. At the same time, it is not possible to make love and not to see oneself or the dead God in the human. In fact, raping or killing God as a part of literary narrative is an act of liberation, a choice for the good of the free fall. And it turns out that the “liberated God” is the dead one behind the concept, while the constructed God is a phenomenon which must be overcome. Thus developed, literature is very close to transcript of inner experience as well as to the impossible, because it keeps searching for the identity of things it describes as well as the consciousness which reflects them. This process can as well be called a craving for the impossible.⁸⁵⁶ This is so because the narratives of Bataille reflect on the extreme desire and extreme death (death of God), and, according to Bataille, only such extremism “enables one to attain the truth.”⁸⁵⁷

Still, this is only one of the possibilities how to reinterpret Bataille’s narrative. Even eroticized fiction can be a comedy if it is perceived as a Book, not as a counter-book, and only a counter-book, a non-text, for Bataille, can be legitimate:

Bataille’s stress on the writing of a counter-Book, a text that opens out, doubles, and loses any unitary doctrine, can only be seen as a direct blow aimed at any attempt at a repressive and totalitarian religious doctrine – a blow elaborated from within, but against, the imperative of religion. Non-religion, we might call it, at the limits of religion: the religion of the fall of God.⁸⁵⁸

Thus, the schema offered in the beginning of this chapter can also be explained. The human is *ipse* (a broken self) that is the (sacrificial) animal that dwells within the human. The animal in the human is a project, yet the awareness of death, lived through by the animal in the human, is the only possibility to see the animal (project) in God, by analogy. When seeing this, the

⁸⁵⁴ Georges Bataille, *L’Abbe C.*, op. cit., 137.

⁸⁵⁵ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit., 91.

⁸⁵⁶ Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, op. cit., 45.

⁸⁵⁷ Georges Bataille, “Preface to the Second Edition” in Georges Bataille, *The Impossible*, op. cit., 9.

⁸⁵⁸ Allan Stoekl, *Bataille’s Peak*, op. cit. 64.

animal in the human laughs and cries, because the other half in the human is led by the desire (for transcript of inner experience that is literature/poetry in the human and is definitely impossible). The desire is an act of sacrifice where the *ipse* mirrors the self who is a murderer of the *ipse*. The mirror is a reflection on “what is false”, or religious experience expressed in language and thus made a project. Anguish, which accompanies the contradiction between the *ipse* and the self, results in a sacrifice, which is also an awareness of the contradiction between the realm of the project and the (unreachable) realm of the absolute where the impossible is the transcript of inner experience.

4. 5. Conclusions

In the doctoral thesis *Thinking About God After the “Death of God”: An Interpretation of George Bataille’s Novels* I traced the idea of the death of God in the novels of the French writer Georges Bataille. Using the hermeneutical method – attentive reading and analysis of the novels in the context of the death of God, I examined the thesis of my work – that Bataille’s fiction works – their narrative events and protagonists – imply his understanding of atheology and the idea of the “death of God”. Here, I will offer some conclusions I have made during the interpretation.

In the fourth part I summed up what the novels reveal about Bataille’s concept of the “death of God”. There is one main conclusion and a few ones of lesser importance. I would like to list them all one by one, beginning with the most important:

(1) The “death of God”, as I see it in the novels of Georges Bataille, is the inner religious experience of a human being. For Bataille, God can be described as absolute, impossible and absurd, or as nothingness. The human, for Bataille, is an animal whose life force is desire and fear of death. Desire and fear intersect in eroticism – i.e., in the “little death” that mirrors death. In a vain try to overcome the anguish caused by the inkling of death, the human sacrifices the fear experienced when one tries to be aware of such “concepts” as the absolute, impossible and absurd. By the process of sacrifice, the human creates a project of God – a God who is understandable, explainable for the human, who does not expose the human to danger (such is the God of the Bible, the God of the church, the God of dogmas, etc.). Simultaneously, the human cannot get rid of his reproductive instincts, which makes one to be aware of the death of one’s own. Also, the human has a creative force, which is uncontrollable in its development in thought and imagination. The force of imagination manifests in several forms of art, but for Bataille – in literature. In fact, creating a project of God means the annihilation of God. This could also be the end of the interpretation, but no – the dead God is

more powerful than the living one. The “death of God” mirrors a conflict in the human being – from the one side, there is endless, vain aspiration to the absolute and the impossible and the awareness of one’s death. From the other side, there is an active desire to create the project of God and thereby prove the immortality of the human. Also, the necessity for proving the immortality arises as eroticism – by creating descendants, the human being seems to confirm the continuity of oneself. Notwithstanding, creating descendants does not give continuity – quite the opposite, it multiplies the death (the creator becomes old and dies, the descendants make their offspring, then grow old and die etc.), and this is why eroticism guarantees only one thing which is inescapable for the human – i.e., it is death, and eroticism gives the awareness of the death of one’s own. In Bataille’s novels, as I argue, this awareness is described with sexual symbols, and it evokes anguish which, from its part, makes one to try to be aware of the absolute, the impossible and the absurd, wherewith this process of awareness becomes the inner religious experience. For Bataille, the transcript of the inner religious experience is literature. This process of awareness is what, in my opinion, could be called Bataille’s “concept” of the “death of God”. This is so because no one could kill the absolute, but it is possible to kill the project and never reach the absolute.

(2) The pornographic nature of Bataille’s novels is explainable by his thought that to corrupt someone means to inspire him/her with the desire for the awareness of the “death of God”. Also, the nature of eroticism described above is of great importance. Besides, pornography has a lot to do with the animal in the human which has to be sacrificed in order to reveal the human to him/herself and thus also bring about the awareness of the death of one’s own. Pornography is what links the “little death” with the “big death” for the reader.

(3) Literature, for Bataille, is two-sided: it belongs simultaneously to the world of the project and to the world of the absolute – from one side, pornography is a comedy if the reader is not aware of the animal in oneself, from the other, for the animal in the human, pornography is all about death, not sex.

(4) As transcript of “inner experience”, literature for Bataille is his atheistic religious praxis.

(5) Stiffness of death and stiffness caused by sexual intercourse (orgasm) reveals the “link” between being and non-being, a moment where any kind of choice becomes impossible and everything is as it is. In addition, it reveals the inevitable solitude of a human being, and, for the protagonist, the coitus usually means to reach for the impossible, being aware of the death of one’s own.

(6) To express the “death of God”, Bataille uses certain symbols in his novels – such as, for example, anguish (symbolises the natural state of the human being in the situation where God is dead), laughter (as a symbol of overcoming the limits and getting “closer” to the impossible

and nonknowledge), mirror (symbolises the malady of inner experience), observer (symbolises the circle of knowing and nonknowing), tears (symbolise consciousness) and trinity (the meaning of the symbol varies depending on the form the novel, but usually is connected with the character of the dead God).

(7) All male characters of Bataille's novels seem to live on the edge between the awareness of God's absence and desperate need to believe that there is "someone out there". This "someone" usually proves to be a woman – a prostitute or a libertine woman. This is the reason why, from a certain perspective, Bataille could be called a "feminist theologian".

Some possibilities for future research emerge from my doctoral thesis. For example, it would be interesting to study the dialectics of Bataille's concept of the "death of God" with similar concepts in the literary works of such writers who influenced Bataille as William Blake, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Marcell Proust and Franz Kafka. In a more complicated study, using Bataille's concept of the "death of God" as a central point, it would be useful to analyse where exactly this concept fits in his view about solar energy and economics. Also, Bataille's "concept" of the society in the context of solar energy and economics could widen the perspective of how Bataille saw the person and his/her relationship with society and religion.

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