



**From Art as a Science to the Death of Poetry:
Hermann Broch in Dialogue with Scientific Thought in
The Sleepwalkers (1931-1932) and *The Death of Virgil* (1945)**

**Da arte como ciência à morte da poesia: Hermann Broch
em diálogo com o pensamento científico em *The Sleepwalkers*
(1931-1932) e *The Death of Virgil* (1945)**

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Abstract: This article reflects on the contacts and dialogues between literature and scientific thought in the works of Austrian writer Hermann Broch in the first half of the 20th century. His first novel, *The Sleepwalkers* [*Die Schlafwandler*] (1931-1932), points to certain interpretations, allusions and similarities in connection with thinkers such as Max Weber, Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, which suggest the incorporation of literature to scientific and philosophical knowledge. Conversely, in his last fiction work, *The Death of Virgil* [*Der Tod des Vergil*] (1945), Broch seems to question and even to doubt the importance of literature as a way of reflecting on contemporary life. While prioritizing Broch's early works, this article follows his trajectory as he incorporates philosophical, scientific, and religious considerations to fiction, while reflecting on the time in which he lived.

Keywords: Hermann Broch; *The Sleepwalkers*; *The Death of Virgil*; scientific thought.

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é refletir sobre os contatos e diálogos que o escritor austríaco Hermann Broch estabeleceu entre a literatura e o pensamento científico na primeira metade do século XX. No seu romance de estreia, *The Sleepwalkers* [*Die Schlafwandler*] (1931-1932), é possível identificar leituras, alusões e proximidades com pensadores como Max Weber, Walter Benjamin e Hannah Arendt, que sugerem

a incorporação na literatura do saber científico e filosófico. De modo diverso, em sua última obra ficcional, *The Death of Virgil* [*Der Tod des Vergil*], publicada em 1945, Broch parece questionar ou mesmo duvidar da importância da literatura como forma de reflexão sobre a contemporaneidade. Este artigo, ao priorizar a produção inicial do escritor, procura acompanhar como Broch incorporava, no romance, considerações de ordem filosófica, científica e religiosa, ao refletir sobre o tempo no qual se inseria.

Palavras-chave: Hermann Broch; *Os sonâmbulos*; *A morte de Virgílio*; pensamento científico.

Introduction

No longer able to fly up into freedom of the empyrean, the one atmosphere transcending all humankind, he [Hermann Broch] sought out the particular atmospheres surrounding individuals. Other writers collected people; he collected the atmospheres around them, which contained the air that had been in their lungs, the air they had exhaled.

Elias Canetti

Hannah Arendt (1970, p. 111) once defined Austrian writer Hermann Broch (1886-1951) as “a poet in spite of himself”. Such characterization could seem surprising, but it makes sense indeed as one casts a more comprehensive look at Broch’s literary production. Now, how could Arendt consider as a poet someone who showed so little consideration for poetry in his most important work? In *The Death of Virgil* [*Der Tod des Vergil*] (1945), Broch narrates the final moments of the *Aeneid*’s author. In his dialogue with Emperor Octavian, Virgil affirms:

There is no need of poetry, oh, Caesar, to understand life... Sallust and Livy are more competent with regard to the extent and time of Rome, as you call it, than are my songs, and though I may be a peasant, or rather I might have been one, a work such as the admirable Varro’s is far more valuable for the understanding of agriculture than my Georgics... how insignificant are we poets compared with them! (BROCH, 1965, p. 321).

In its insignificance, poetry would do little service to knowledge and, thus, to life. Not only poetry, by the way, but art as a whole should

be abandoned, as the poet states in his final moments. After all, poetic discourse would not be of any use. Considering this position, what should be the fate of a work such as the *Aeneid*? For Broch's Virgil, it would be necessary to burn his main work because no unreal thing should subsist (BROCH, 1965, p. 239). In the words of the poet:

Within the earthbound, nothing becomes divine; I have adorned Rome, and what I have done has no more worth than the statues in the gardens of Maecenas. Rome does not live by the grace of the artists... the statuary will be torn down, the *Aeneid* will be burnt... (BROCH, 1965, p. 241).

Should the character's discredit also be ascribed to his author? In an attempt to suggest some answers, I believe it is useful to investigate how the Austrian writer conceived the artistic craft and its virtues *vis-à-vis* other types and forms of knowledge, such as scientific and philosophical. Based primarily on Broch's first work, *The Sleepwalkers* [*Die Schlafwandler*] (1931-1932), this article sets out to map his notions of literary and scientific knowledge and the interactions between them. To attain this goal, I intend to restore the context in which this work was produced, while considering possible interlocutors and dialogues between Broch and contemporaries such as Max Weber, Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt. Next, I will follow and discuss Broch's thought on themes such as religion, science, philosophy, and, of course, art. The analysis of his last work, *The Death of Virgil*, will allow identifying some important changes and revaluations in the course of his career. After all, is the disenchantment of character Virgil shared by the writer Broch – who in the first half of the 20th century, reenacted the final moments of the *Aeneid*'s author?

Hermann Broch and his interlocutors

In Broch's early production, literature (and not philosophy) appears as a way of finding access to the unreachable, i.e. the irrational. But as I will indicate below, this position was cast in new hues and reviewed in the course of his life.

On the other hand, considering Broch's early texts, Sidonie Cassirer (1960, p. 453) identifies a continuity in his work. In those non-fiction writings, it is possible to point, for instance, to Broch's criticism regarding the insufficiency of art. According to Cassirer (1960, p. 545):

“Even before Broch had published a line of fiction himself, we find here the expression of his life-long reservation about art which is partly responsible for his tortured and equivocal attitude towards his own work”.

Yet, Cassirer’s reasoning is not unanimous. After all, how could one possibly conciliate a discrediting attitude towards art with the fact that Broch’s choice was rather to intensify his writing of novels and fiction works? It may be more productive to suggest that his disenchantment was a gradual process – a mindset that apparently became more acute on account of the vicissitudes he faced in his lifetime. His condition as an *émigré*, for instance, probably played a key role in this process and surely had an impact on his writing (WEIDNER, 2015). It is evidently not the case of seeking an exact correspondence between a writer’s life and works – a pursuit that may lead to the mistake of restricting literature to a documental or positivistic approach, criticized by Dominick LaCapra (1985, p. 124). However, it also seems difficult to set the two elements fully apart, especially as one considers Broch’s trajectory in the first half of the 20th century. Some key events can be mentioned: in 1938, the Nazis annexed Austria and he was imprisoned. As the result of a concerted effort among his friends, including James Joyce (1882-1941), Broch was allowed to emigrate. He first went to England, then moved to Scotland and, finally, settled in the United States. His network of contacts then acquired new contours, and he started interacting with other immigrant thinkers, such as Arendt (HARRINGTON, 2006, p. 8).

But some of these contacts were not new. Since Broch’s early writings, there is a continuous dialogue with other members of his generation and thinkers from the past. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915) and Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936) were relevant figures in the development of his *œuvre*. He participated in meetings and discussions with Max Scheler (1874-1928), Georg Lukács (1885-1971), Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) and Ernst Bloch (1885-1977). But as Harrington points out, one of his main interlocutors was doubtlessly Max Weber (1864-1920). Their interactions were so intense that in the third part of *The Sleepwalkers*, one may even speak about a poetic extension of Weber’s thought (HARRINGTON, 2006, p. 1) – or, put another way, one may speak about a fictional extension of scientific thought. Thus, this novel allows exploring some of Broch’s positions on scientific and artistic thought, in addition to the way he inserts himself and becomes engaged in the context of his times (HEROLD, 2014, p. 157).

The Sleepwalkers is a trilogy. Its three parts are: *The Romantic*, published in 1931; *The Anarchist*, published in the same year; and, finally, *The Realist*, published in 1932. This work brings together different genres such as romance, reportage, poetry, theater, essay and aphorisms. This occurs especially in the final part of the text, where the narrative becomes fragmented in the form of different stories and essayistic-philosophical meditations, which Broch suggestively calls *Disintegration of values*. For Heinz Osterle (1971, p. 952), the third part is also where one may more evidently notice the apocalyptic aspect of this work, which will be approached further in this article. According to Harrington (2006, p. 3), the book provides proof that Broch was familiar with the Weberian theses. Moreover, the editor and expert of Broch's works, Paul Michael Lützelers ensures that Weber's ideas played a decisive role in the genesis of Broch's thought (HARRINGTON, 2006, p. 4).

Another element that bears witness to Broch's admiration for Weber, beyond a mere contact between the two, appears in his early works such as *Zum Begriff der Geisteswissenschaften* (1917), *Eine methodologische Novelle* (1918) and *Zur Konstruktion der historischen Wirklichkeit* (1918). In the first one, Broch endeavors to reflect on the methodology and epistemology of historical sciences. Among his considerations, he addresses a topic dear to Dilthey, namely the contribution of the historians' artistry to the construction of historical knowledge. In his final remarks, Broch states that Weber mastered the artistry of historical writing (a feature that Weber and Dilthey ascribed, in turn, to Ranke), as Harrington (2006, p. 4) reports.

We return now to Broch's debut novel. For the purposes of this article, it is important to know how he conceived his work. According to Harrington, his personal reflection on narrative and form also pervades *The Sleepwalkers*:

Broch thought of *Die Schlafwandler* as an "epistemological novel", a novel with a 'cognitive function', something capable of demonstrating at once the fertility and the rigour of literary narration for the practice of a 'science of man' oriented to value-relevant understanding without particularistic value-judgement (HARRINGTON, 2006, p. 5).

The essential aspect to be highlighted here is that in his debut work, Broch saw art as a way of making science. I will further elaborate on this when approaching the theme of science in his works. For now, I shall emphasize that literature serves scientific knowledge and helps grasping the world. For critic Theodore Ziolkowski (1967, p. 369), this standing is already an offspring of Broch's disillusionment with academic philosophy, which led him to approach philosophical questions in literature. Still, Cassirer reminds us that in his first articles such as *Philiströsität* and, above all, *Ethik*, he expressed a far-reaching concern with Kantian philosophy. One may even notice Broch's admiration for Kant:

Therefore the philosophy of critical idealism and, particularly, Kant's ethics – or perhaps more precisely Kant's own ethical attitude – could provide a kind of general orientation in Broch's personal development which in no way restricted his own thought (CASSIRER, 1960, p. 456).

While he wavered between skepticism about academic philosophy and an appreciation for philosophers and thinkers such as Kant and Weber, the value of poetical knowledge was multiplied. But this viewpoint would not remain the same. By the end of his life, Broch underwent a change of opinion regarding the value and usefulness of art and literature – something that may be observed in his main work, *The Death of Virgil*.

In his article, Harrington (2006, p. 6) agrees with Helmut Kiesel, who states that Broch and other intellectuals from the Weimar Republic were attempting to provide answers to the Weberian thesis about the anarchy of values. *The Sleepwalkers* seems precisely to fit into this perspective. Even before it was published – sometime between 1908 and 1909 –, Broch wrote an article with suggestions linked to the development of a systematic aesthetics. His piece is dedicated to Czech architect Adolf Loos (1870-1933), who in the same period published a manifesto under the title *Ornament and Crime*, with a critique of the allegedly abusive use of ornaments in European architecture in the late 1800s. According to Loos (1971, p. 20):

I have made the following discovery and I pass it on to the world: *The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects*. I believed that with this discovery I was bringing joy to the world [...]. (italics of the original).

Conceived as an excessive use of power and capital, ornaments effectively became a burden and should, therefore, be abandoned. Loos concludes:

Since ornament is no longer organically linked with our culture, it is also no longer the expression of our culture. The ornament that is manufactured today has no connection with us, has absolutely no human connection, no connection with the world order. It is not capable of developing (LOOS, 1971, p. 22).

Issues linked to ornamentation and style play a significant role in Broch's works. In *The Sleepwalkers*, he seems to dialogue not only with the Weberian thesis, but also with Loos'. His main reasoning is found perhaps in the title and in the conception of the work's characters. According to Maria João Cantinho:

As the novel's name indicates, *The Sleepwalkers* are individuals who exist in an *epoché*-state between two systems, or two cycles of reality, similarly to a sleepwalker who finds himself between slumber and reality, while participating of these two orders. Broch' sleepwalkers are constantly seeking to free themselves from the ethical codes of the past, in which they no longer believe, but they are still immersed in a world in which they are a part. They perform limit-situations in which the intrusion of irrational elements becomes permanent and breaks through reality in the form of impulsiveness (CANTINHO, 2003)¹

The structure of the work and the evolution of its narrative also seemingly attempt to respond to, or at least to ascertain, a disintegration of values. As was mentioned above, this novel is divided into three

¹ “Como o próprio nome do romance o indica, *Os Sonâmbulos* são indivíduos que existem num estado de *epoché* entre dois sistemas ou dois ciclos de realidade, do mesmo modo que o sonâmbulo vive entre o sono e a realidade, participando dessas duas ordens. Os sonâmbulos de Broch procuram, a todo o momento, libertar-se dos códigos éticos do passado, em que já não acreditam, mas mergulhados, ainda, num mundo de que fazem parte. Protagonizam situações-limite, nas quais a intrusão do elemento irracional se torna permanente e irrompe, sob a sua forma pulsional”. (translation by Dermeval de Sena Aires Júnior)

parts. Each part is associated with a moment and a specific character. However, in the final part, the characters of the previous parts return to the narrative. The three moments, which are set apart by a 15-year interval, are 1888, 1903 and 1918. Each period, according to Harrington (2006, p. 9), represents a final moment in terms of value-orientations in Europe – in other words, each section shows a gradual disaggregation-process. According to Arendt (1949, p. 477), the romantic character cannot yet notice the decadence of the world, whereas the anarchist finds himself amidst the confusion of values of the pre-war period, and the realist becomes the champion of a nihilistic society. Thus, if Pasenow is a Prussian military and Esch is a bookkeeper, the third character Huguenau is a deserter, an assassin and an exploiter. He is also the only of the three who succeeds. For Harrington (2006, p. 10), nonetheless, these characters cannot be linked to usual standards and seem to be in a state of sleepiness. In any case, I believe Huguenau represents a particular logic of his time, namely economic rationality. Thus, it is perhaps erroneous to state that these characters do not fit into pre-established categories.

As was stressed above, Broch not only dialogues with Weber or Loos, but also Dilthey is a significant reference for him – after all, Broch borrows from Dilthey the concept of “epoch styles”. Again, it is in the third part of *The Sleepwalkers* that the *Epochen-Stil* notion appears quite recurrently. This category is essential for the evolution of the propositions and insights contained in this work. According to its narrator:

Behind all my repugnance and weariness there is a very positive conviction, *the conviction that nothing is of more importance to any epoch than its style*. There is no epoch in the history of all the human race that divulges its character except in its style, and above all in the style of its buildings; *indeed no epoch deserves the name except in so far as it possesses a style*. (BROCH, 1985, p. 390, italics added).

Based on this thought, Broch (1985, p. 391) argues that the current style and epoch are signs of the contemporary moment:

We are left with a profound disquiet and the knowledge that this style of building, which is no longer a style, is merely a symptom, a writing on the wall proclaiming a state of the soul which must be the non-soul of our non-age.

Finally, for the book's narrator, the period at hand would be marked by absences.

In a 1933 text entitled *Experience and Poverty*, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) points to a similar phenomenon, identifying lapses and gaps in the first decades of the 20th century. If experience previously allowed the transferring of a heritage that sought to establish links between the past and the present, now such links were proving impossible. Experience and, consequently, its transmission, had become empty, or, as he states, "poor". Thus, a barbaric period set in (BENJAMIN, 1999, p. 732). For him (p. 731), an effect of such impoverishment is the appearance of a gap – a space that sets not only generations apart, but also the past and the future. I believe this suggests a linkage between Broch and Benjamin: both authors seem firmly confident about the specificity of their own time and both see it in a desolate and afflicted way. In the final passage of *The Sleepwalkers*, the narrator asserts: "Lost generation! as non-existent as Evil itself, featureless and traditionless in the morass of the indiscriminate, doomed to lose itself temporally, to have no tradition in an age that is making absolute history!" (BROCH, 1985, p. 646).

This excerpt also reveals the work's apocalyptic element. In this sense, as Heinz Osterle affirms (1971, p. 946), Broch may be considered alongside other Austrian writers such as Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Rober Musil (1880-1942), Heimito von Doderer (1886-1966) and Karl Kraus (1874-1936). The apocalyptic content of *The Sleepwalkers* appears in many ways, either as a view of history, or by the arrangement of dates in the novel (OSTERLE, 1971, p. 947-948). Broch's diagnosis is severe and apparently alludes to the work of Adolf Loos: the current epoch is doomed to death and Hell, since it is incapable of producing an ornament (1985, p. 398). I believe this is an important aspect that can be taken as a synthesis of *The Sleepwalkers*. According to the narrator:

Huguenau is a man who acts with singleness of purpose. He organizes his day with singleness of purpose, he carries on his business affairs with his eye singly on his purpose, he evolves and concludes his contracts with his eye singly on his purpose. Behind all his purposefulness there lies a logic that is completely stripped of ornament, and the fact that this logic should demand the elimination of all ornament does not seem a too daring conclusion to draw; indeed it actually appears as good and just as every

other necessary conclusion. And yet this elimination of all ornament involves nothingness, involves death, and a monstrous dissolution is concealed behind it in which our age is crumbling away (BROCH, 1985, p. 416).

Neo-Kantian thought provided Broch with a set of concepts through which he could develop his narrative while avoiding the aesthetical and psychological speculations of *The Philosophy of Life*. An example of the appropriation of neo-Kantian thought is found in Broch's use of a certain ideal-type of historical analysis in his interpretation of the Middle Ages and of the period immediately after World War I. However, his departure from Weber can be noticed at this point. While the German thinker was trying to develop an empirical scientific-social research program, Broch strived to establish a methodologically controlled philosophy of history (HARRINGTON, 2006, p. 5-6). This allowed Broch to surpass the Hegelian interpretation of history and to reassess some of the key procedures and notions of the historiographical work. Thus, in *The Sleepwalkers*, he incorporated the idea of history as a practice to the discussion on the "Disintegration of values", calling it "Epistemological Excursus". The excerpt includes a set of questions – "what is an historical event? what is historical unity? or, to go still further: what is an event at all? what principle of selection must be followed to weld single occurrences into the unity of an event?" (BROCH, 1985, p. 560) –, which only reiterate the scientific emphasis ascribed to fiction.

But history is not the only form of knowledge to be examined. Broch reflects on the disintegration of values and artistry, to propose new forms of fiction-writing. According to Arendt, Broch and other writers of the 20th century renovated a classical art form of the 19th century and turned it into a more complex and esoteric genre. Furthermore, the works of authors such as Broch, Marcel Proust (1871-1922) and James Joyce bore a curious similarity to poetry and philosophy, as Arendt (1949, p. 476) points out. For her, it would be possible to summarize Broch's entire work by conceiving it as a triangle with vertexes represented by *action*, *literature* and *knowledge* (1970, p. 112).

It is possible to suggest that this triangle rotates on its axis: if at the beginning, Broch focused on literature, at the end of his career, he began emphasizing the political component, that is, action. The criticism of poetry (of art) in his main work is an indication of this rotation. Perhaps the notion that the contemporary age is plagued by barbarism may have

contributed to his disapproval of art. Broch's Virgil is plainly assertive: "I have made my poems, abortive words... I thought them to be real, and they are only beautiful... [...]" (1965, p. 258). For Arendt, Broch pulls away from literature to emphasize action – a change that becomes explicit as he withdraws from its craft after finishing *The Death of Virgil*. His departure coincided with the discovery of Nazi concentration camps (1970, p. 112-113). Only at this point, the notion of a reluctant poet acquires its meaning.

In the remainder of this paper, I will present distinct features of Broch's work, such as his reflections on scientific, religious and artistic themes, which allow approaching this change in the course of his career.

Reflections on science

As stated by Harrington (2006, p. 11), Broch held that no system of values could exist without an irreducible irrational residue – which, in turn, spares the rational element from a suicidal tendency. And *The Sleepwalkers*' narrator asserts that absolute rationalization, that is, a complete expulsion of irrationality, is also a source of the disintegration of values:

The rationality of the irrational: an apparently completely rational man like Huguenuau cannot distinguish between good and evil. In an absolutely rational world, there would be no absolute value-system, and no sinners, or at most, mere detrimental (BROCH, 1985, p. 541).

This consideration can be extended to the sciences and to religion. Absolute rationalization cannot grasp the whole, since it is also constituted by unreason, i.e., irrationality. According to Wolf Lepenies (1996, p. 243), Weber was also aware of the limits of reason. As a result of these limits, science should adopt a precise methodology to eliminate value judgements. Such epistemological rigorism would also require a refusal of practical objectives such as the finality of science (LEPENIES, 1996, p. 246). It is likely that Broch took distance from this type of view. After all, *The Sleepwalker*'s narrator argues:

For the only method that the rational can follow is that of approximation, an encircling method that seeks to reach the irrational by describing smaller and smaller

arcs around it, yet never in fact reaches it, whether the irrational appears as an irrationality of one's inner feelings, an unconsciousness of what is actually being lived and experienced, or as an irrationality of world conditions and of the infinitely complex nature of the universe – all that the rational can do is to atomize it (BROCH, 1985, p. 626).

In a 1930 article entitled *The spirit in an unspiritual age*, Broch (2002, p. 42) argues that mankind was in a despairing epoch after losing faith in the power of words and in the spirit. Man sought, for instance, to eliminate speculation from science. Yet, he reminds us (2002, p. 44) that such suppressions, included the suppression of language itself, which led individuals to live in an epoch characterized by muteness. For Osterle (1971, p. 949), such muteness is one of the key themes of *The Sleepwalkers*: “The fear and anguish haunting all these sleepwalkers mainly come from their inability to communicate with one another. In existentialist fashion man seems isolated in the prison of his own self.” One may also evoke Benjamin in this regard. For him, contact with the war left soldiers unable to speak – which, in turn, rendered the possibility of transmitting traditions and experiences unfeasible, as was mentioned above.

Another aspect that corroborates the insertion of science in literature is Broch's adoption of the theory of relativity as an essential point of his works. For Theodore Ziolkowski, many writers of the 20th century approached science in their fiction writings. On the one hand, scientists and reporters such as Charles Percy Snow (1905-1980) and Heinrich Schirmbeck (1915-2005) became writers; on the other, writers such as Kafka and Joyce produced works reflecting on the developments of modern science. Ziolkowski also identifies a third group, encompassing writers who explored the scientific achievements to produce poetry and fiction. For him, Broch is not only in this group, but is also its leading exponent (ZIOLKOWSKI, 1967, p. 367). Only in Broch's works did the relativity principles deeply impact the very structure of the writings, enabling him to renovate the form of modern fiction (ZIOLKOWSKI, 1967, p. 368), as Arendt already anticipated. As Cassirer (1960, p. 453) reminds us, the first poem published by Broch, dating to 1913, was suggestively named *Mathematisches Mysterium*.

This is a relevant aspect inasmuch as it adds substance to the account of the change in Broch's perception of the power and, conversely,

the insufficiency of art. As was mentioned above, Broch saw literature as a means to handle scientific and philosophical issues. This is found above all in the excerpts of *The Sleepwalkers* about the disintegration of values. The task of translating scientific issues such as the theory of relativity into literary terms is part of this endeavor, reaching its apex in the emergence of an unprecedented type of narrator: the ideal observer (ZIOLKOWSKI, 1967, p. 373). As Ziolkowski also affirms, this is not an isolated intellectual phenomenon in Broch: the theory of relativity appears in all stages of his work, from his ethical system to his theory of knowledge. Based on this integration, one may discuss a correlated theme that is essential for him – the religious dimension in the modern world.

Broch saw Protestantism – a view that demonstrates a Weberian use of concepts – as a sect, and its birth, as part of the decline of Christian values. In his words:

Protestantism was the first great sect-formation in the decay of Christianity. A sect, not a new religion. For it lacked the most important characteristic of a new religion, that new theology which binds together into a new harmony the new experience of God and a new cosmogony (BROCH, 1985, 523).

For his narrator, it would even be possible to identify a religious cycle: religions are born from sects and degenerate into sects. The impossibility of establishing a new cosmogony or theology stems from the fact that they would lead Protestantism to forfeit its essential nature of intimacy and ego-isolation (HARRINGTON, 2006, p. 12). Harrington does not discuss this issue further. But here, Broch seems to move away from Weber, despite stating his case in Weberian terms, inasmuch as it can be asked whether asceticism is not an intrinsic value of Protestant character.

Protestantism becomes then a target of criticism, since in Broch's opinion the Protestant Reform severed the organic unity attained during the medieval period. Its rise would have marked the onset of a decadence and secularization-process, which led to a fragmentation into countless partial systems of values (OSTERLE, 1971, p. 952). At any rate, and based on his reflections on style, Broch argues that Protestantism is part of the disintegration of values:

Is it this radical religiosity, dumb and stripped of ornament, this conception of an infinity conditioned by severity and by severity alone, that determines the style of our new epoch? Is this ruthlessness of the divine principle a symptom of the infinite recession of the focus of plausibility? Is this immolation of all sensory content to be regarded as the root-cause of the prevailing disintegration of values? Yes (BROCH, 1985, p. 525-526).

The writer also identifies a linkage between Protestantism and the rationalizing penchant of Judaism, since there would be a resemblance between, on the one hand, Orthodox Jews and, on the other, Swiss Calvinists and British Puritans. Such closeness could be a consequence of certain similarities in the external circumstances surrounding these two religions, despite the fact that they experience quite different situations: while Jews are oppressed, Protestants are revolutionaries (HARRINGTON, 2006, p. 12). An example of this contrast is his character Esch, an anarchist – thus, a revolutionary – who decides to convert to Protestantism (Broch, 1985, p. 480). The figure of a Jew, in turn, becomes a representative of the genuinely modern man – a characterization Broch shares with Werner Sombart and Max Weber (WEIDNER, 2015, p. 174). However, Protestant man would transform the severity of his relationship with God into a religious trend and bring about a mass-movement. One may then ask: is the Protestant drive towards the accumulation of capital – a feature Max Weber (2005, p. 116) dubbed a “release of acquisitive activity” – the key phenomenon leading to the production of sleepwalkers (a process exemplified by Huguenau, for whom “business is business”)?

The theme of salvation also appears among the religious issues of Broch’s work. James Hardin Jr. points that it emerges after Broch’s first novel and continues until his final work. Broch proposes numerous solutions for modern society, personified by savior-characters or redemptive figures such as the mother, the child, the young virgin and Christ, among others (HARDIN JR, 1970, p. 219). As was mentioned above, Osterle analyzes the eschatological issue in his work: as Broch conceives it, a common feature of apocalypse-believers is the idealization of a future capable of redeeming the present (1971, p. 952). Osterle recognizes that in the end of *The Sleepwalkers*, a longing is felt for the rise of a strong leader capable of guiding men towards the future (1971,

p. 954). In a time characterized by dissociation, such leader would be beneficial:

We ourselves think that we are normal, because, in spite of the split in our souls, our inner machinery seems to run on logical principles. But if there were a man in whom all the events of our time took significant shape, a man whose native logic accounted for the events of our age, then and then only would this age cease to be insane. Presumably that is why we long for a “leader,” so that he may provide us with the motivation for events that in his absence we can characterize only as insane (BROCH, 1985, p. 375).

The redemptive perspective also finds expression in the value ascribed to the coming generations. In the books analyzed for this article, two children represent salvation: the orphan girl Marguerite in *The Sleepwalkers* and Lysanias in *The Death of Virgil*. The figure of the child is redemptive because it always evokes a form of rebirth (HARDIN JR., 1970, p. 222). An analogous perspective is developed by Arendt. As she affirms in *Between Past and Future*, human action is linked to natality, “through which the human world is constantly invaded by strangers, newcomers whose actions and reactions cannot be foreseen by those who are already there and are going to leave in a short while” (ARENDDT, 1961, p. 61).

In Broch, mystical salvation may also occur by conquering death; among other reasons, because the fear of death is a source of anguish. Death can be overcome via many strategies; for instance, by the power of love, by the annulment of time and of the sense of simultaneity among all events, and also by its sheer acceptance (HARDIN JR., 1970, p. 220-221). In short, for Broch, salvation can be attained both via rational and irrational paths. If these two types of paths often seem to diverge, there is still an aspect shared by them: Broch names it *Mitte*. According to Hardin Jr. (1970, p. 226):

The concept of *Mitte* clearly concerns the ethical salvation of man, but it involves more, for *Mitte* can be broadly defined as a central philosophical position, an ideal way of viewing the world, which reconciles the mystical and empirical, the rational and irrational extremes within man’s psyche and in his external environment. The term

is an abbreviation for a metaphysical vantage point from which Broch views the dualism of the world. This dualism is rooted in his conviction that man has his origins in two realms, the spiritual and the terrestrial.

Thus, the idea of salvation is linked to the disintegration of values: salvation from death obtained via rebirth also means the emergence of a new system of values. Broch does not have a clear perspective about the future, but he anticipates new values. According to Hardin Jr.: “The new order he envisioned would possess an ethic based on the brotherhood of man and on a strict humanitarian code. Throughout his work, one finds the recurrent theme of a rebirth of values, of a future morality” (HARDIN JR., 1970, p. 221-222).

In this sense, the figure of the artist and writer, at least in his early production, had a privileged position. Broch conceived this figure as a prophet, a philosopher and a discloser of new ethical laws and values (HARDIN JR., 1970, p. 219). But this position, as well as his idea about the value of poetry, crumbled in the course of his work. Before approaching the artistic craft, I believe it is necessary to consider what Broch understood by “disintegration of values”. After all, this process may have contributed to his views on art. For him, such disintegration is the result of the autonomization of domains that have been excluded and disconnected from the totality. Each aspect of the globalizing system tends to become extremely rationalized in relation to itself. But excessive rationality rendered these elements irrational in relation to the other parts of the whole, leading to a degraded state. Arendt sums up this process:

The disintegration of the world or the dissolution of values was, for Broch, the result of the secularization of the West. In the course of that process belief in God was lost. [...] Every remaining fragment of the religious and Platonic world view now raised claims to absoluteness. Thus there arose the “anarchy of values” in which everyone could shift as he pleased from one closed and consonant value system into another. Moreover, each of these systems necessary became the relentless foe of all others, since each claimed absoluteness and there was no longer any true absolute against which these claims could have been measured (HARDIN JR., 1970, p. 121).

How could art possibly comprise life if life's values are no longer integrated? And how could it possibly apprehend life's domains as a whole if these domains are isolated from each other? Broch seems to adhere to the trend identified by Luiz Costa Lima (2006, p. 303-304) among intellectuals of the German culture in this period, who vindicated a unitary conception of subjectivity. If through excessive rationalism – which eliminates the possibility of ornaments –, these elements become irrational in relation to the other parts (HARRINGTON, 2006, p. 14), then it is also important to consider their possible effects on art – which, in itself, is also close to ornament.

Final remarks: reflections on art

The expansion of art towards an autonomous realm of values is an offspring of modernity. And its price is its alienation in relation to the whole. For Broch, this is exemplified by the city of Vienna in the period. Vienna was then ridden with sterile and contradictory attitudes towards art and aesthetics, such as the attempts to embellish ugliness and to cover up poverty with wealth. For this reason, that period was characterized by the absence of a well-defined style. This points to a distancing between Broch and the George Circle, since its participants condemned all art forms that sought to be involved in the social reality, that is, all forms of engaged art (LEPENIES, 1996, p. 257).

Even so, the social realm as a whole could never be represented in its totality. It would be necessary to conjure up both rational and irrational efforts, and to aggregate scientificity to art. Yet, a clear feature of Broch's work is the refusal of a conciliation between intellect and feeling. The very proposal of a new fiction following an original method is perhaps the way of qualifying the separation of these elements, and an attempt to give an answer to this conciliation-demand. As was highlighted above, in his lifetime, Broch spun the triangle identified by Arendt, since he gradually adopted a position that perceived art as something inferior to reality, and became incredulous in regard to the power of art. Thus, salvation by poetry was no longer available. In his analysis of *The Death of Virgil*, Costa Lima (2006, p. 298) suggests that in the clash between the State and the poet – in addition to taking sides with the poet –, Broch inserts Virgil in a time that sets beauty and reality apart. This attitude is not contradictory, since what the poet longs for is precisely to destroy

the *Aeneid* – which, as a form of art, would be inferior to reality. Arendt (1970, p. 116) also reminds us that burning the *Aeneid* was a way of sacrificing literature and prioritizing knowledge. Weidner (2015, p. 177-178) suggests that as a pervasive motif of the work, fire could not only reflect the period of Broch's imprisonment in Austria (which coincided with the first versions of his book), but effectively reflected a broader questioning of the utility of the artistic craft.

For Ziolkowski, Broch saw literature as an inferior surrogate of philosophy. In a period of decline, poetry appeared as an immoral creation. Thus, it was necessary to ascribe primacy to action in detriment to literature – and this is what Broch did in the United States, when he abandoned his literary activities to help Jewish war refugees.

In this regard, Arendt's proposal is quite elucidative. In her words about Broch:

For while he may have submitted with some reluctance and halfheartedness to the primacy of action in life, he was, where creativity and work were at question, during the last years of his life completely convinced of the primacy of knowledge over literature, of science over art. And at the end of his life he was persuaded that there was even a kind of priority, if not primacy, of a general theory of knowledge to science and politics (ARENDR, 1970, p. 115).

Art had then ceased to represent an access to the world and a support to life. This perspective is clearly perceptible in the last work finished by Broch, *The Death of Virgil*. As was mentioned above, in this book, the greatest poet of the Roman era regrets his entire poetical *œuvre*. There is no purpose for words that only exalt beauty. It is necessary to burn those works, that is, to destroy art. The non-accomplishment of this destructive desire only reaffirms the worthlessness of the poet, who is incapable of fulfilling his last wish. Art, devoid of meaning, loses any value in a world in decline. According to Broch's *Virgil*:

As a man I acknowledge every duty, for man alone is the bearer of duty, but I know that one cannot impose any duty on art, neither duties of state nor any other kind; for by so doing one makes art into a shamart, and should the duties of men go beyond the realm of art, as they do today, men have no other choice than to drop art, though not from disrespect ... [...] (BROCH, 1965, p. 334).

Such outcome is indeed paradoxical. For it is precisely on account of being so fragile *vis-à-vis* the State that Virgil's works may subsist. The bond that unites Virgil and Broch seems to materialize in a similar way: though he was overwhelmed by a disaggregating world and fell victim to a totalitarian State – and in spite himself – Broch still remained a poet.

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