

Publicado/Published en/in: *Simtul Nuantei*, A. Tat, G. Valcan, C. Valcan (Editori),

Bucarest, Ed. Napoca Star, págs. 47-63, ISBN 978-973-647-795-9, 2011

## **THE LONELINESS OF THE WRITING**

Carlos Eduardo Maldonado

Full Professor

Universidad del Rosario

Bogotá, Colombia

[carlos.maldonado@urosario.edu.co](mailto:carlos.maldonado@urosario.edu.co)

### I

Reading, a matter of freedom. Reading both entails freedom and leads to freedom in so far as it is not taken as a duty (academic, for instance). Reading is never solitude, but a dialogue with an author, with a set of characters, with a period or a culture. You can read in a park, in the subway or in a bus; you can read in a café or even in the midst of a meeting. Writing, however, is a lonely experience.

### II

The stunning experience in front of the blank page is something already well known –from Cannetti to García Márquez to Tolstoi to Vargas Llosa, for instance. However, very little, if at all, has been said about a more radical experience, namely the loneliness of the writing. As the discussion grows about the future of books over against the Internet the experience of loneliness seems to be left to Romanticism and other movements alike. For good or for bad.

In contrast with chatting and even babbling around (hanging around), cheering out, bullying or playing games with others, writing is a loneliness-attitude, an experience of loneliness.

However, it is thus not to be confused with solitude:

- 1) Because it is a dialogue of the soul with herself (Plato), and

2) Because we talk with other visitors, thinkers, discoverers.

It is the loneliness of whoever proposes a novelty, thereafter but he or she is accused of, prosecuted or (not yet) misunderstood. It is the loneliness of the dreamer.

And yet, the dreamer is a joyful person. Our loneliness should by no means be taken as a state of sorrow or blue. It is the loneliness of fiery, self-security of the voice that talks to us (it is our *daimon*, as in Socrates’).

### III

In fields such as poetry or literature, writing is a fight; a fight with words, expressions, *tournares*, nuances, accuracy and precision. Inspiration can play a role, certainly. But as Dante once wrote, after being fifteen years old, writing is not a matter of inspiration any longer.

The genius, Dostoievsky once wrote, is a long exercise of patience. It is, namely, the patience of striving with oneself, of the quarreling with the mind with itself, of a self-discipline of the spirit (*Geist*).

In contrast, in more scholar fields, say science or philosophy, writing shares the same tenures as the ones of literature and poetry plus the force of concepts, categories and logics. All in all, a good writing is the perfect combination of logics and poetry, of concepts and tropisms, of the brain and our guts.

### IV

Writing is silversmiths, watermarking, but only when we deal with good writing. Silversmith is here about nuances and expressions, concepts, synonyms, and analogies. It concerns the accordance of the mind and the heart of the writer, even if he or she does not clearly and consciously know it. No one can write well that he

or she does not put a piece of his/her body or soul in the writing – metaphorically, of course.

Watermarking comes to the writing when we try to figure out a way for materializing in symbols, signs and characters the strength of ideas, emotions, and feelings. Thus, a combination of rigor and creativity are the threads that weave a well-encompassed writing.

The author does not know it and it is certainly not his or her contention, but a good reader can guess pieces of his/her life, biography, and context.

Indeed, W. Whitman once said that reading well poetry meant discovering which organ a poet was writing with. For example, Beaudelaire used to write with his guts, as well as Lautréamont used to write with his throat. Whitman himself confessed that we used to write with his stomach.

To be sure, such an experience in poetry is paradigmatic. And yet, it can and should be taken to be valid also in literature as well as science and philosophy.

What kind of philosophy one chooses, said Fichte, depends on what sort of a person you are. (Of course, Fichte was thinking about his own system of freedom over against his debate with both Schelling and Kant). One's own life lies at the bottom of the philosophy one chooses – very much in the same sense as it lies at the basis of the sort of method, science, discipline, and the like one is committed to.

## V

In the case of philosophy, we all know that saying by Nietzsche when he wrote: philosophy wants us all courageous. Well, such courage is the atmosphere of the loneliness of the writing. However, it is not a pure courage, for it comes accompanied sometimes with hesitation, anger, or an excess of prudence. Everyone does what he or she can in these circumstances.

The traditional saying – particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, according to which: to pain, no gain – means in the case of writing a lonesome exercise that cannot be interrupted by surrounding noise or disturbances.

Indeed, while reading can take place almost everywhere (we all have witnessed people reading while waiting for the metro, or at a terrace, for instance) writing demands a secluded spot and distance from the world. Except, of course, when you are just taking notes or writing postcards as most Japanese do everywhere all around the world.

Loneliness and adventure and traveling and pilgrimage – even perhaps *à la Liszt* firstly and then also *à la Berlioz*. Always keeping well in mind the difference between loneliness and solitude.

## VI

Loneliness is a gift, if you wish, while solitude is painful and blasting. A personality marked by loneliness can be joyful as it is indeed the case, whereas a person who experiences solitude shows sorrow in his or her face and we can safely say sorrow constitutes his/her atmosphere.

The bottom-line here is that writing is a liberating experience and is never a reductionist or limitative experience. Thus, writing can be seen as the other face of reading, getting thus a token that exhibits spirit and character. It is, namely the character of the thinker, the discoverer, or the inventor – being the common feature the fact that they write their deeds and achievements.

No one has achieved anything if the achievement has not been written. This is the moral of history. When it is not the case, the price is anonymity and oblivion. For a deed passes inexistent not if there are not witnesses but if it is not registered in a well written text or document.

History is devoid of presence if it does not rely on written documents. History, indeed, is but what historians write, not just what people or personalities do. But, once again, the writ is a document of loneliness in that it is nurtured with signs and symbols.

## VII

In spite of Socrates, the oral tradition has been left far behind us. Not that we do not communicate orally. But orality is registered in memory as a writ. Very much alike as sentiments, emotions, feelings, and ideas pass to history as writ. The materiality or the spirit passes through the writing, very much as it passes through the body itself, too.

When there is the awareness that in writing we expose our very self, with its passions, fears, wants, and desires; its dreams, insecurities, and challenges – we face loneliness. Kind of metaphysical loneliness, a real limit experience, in the very sense of Existentialism.

It has its price, of course. Writing asks for a payment when faced with friendship or family. Our kids or parents, our friends or spouse, our own self - all of them must pay the price of an author sitting and writing. It is a kind of heroism that can be mixed with tragedy or drama. Never comedy.

## VIII

There are some people who are able, or prefer, to write with music as background; others write with some good wine, scotch or brandy at the table; some others (like Sartre as we were told by Simone de Beauvoir) who like writing on the bed; not to mention those who like smoking and drinking coffee, regularly; there are even those who write during the night and sleep in the day time.

Writing takes place, especially in science at large, every time more, as a collective experience. While in the past we encounter one book one author, the current trend

is finding papers, chapters of books, and books edited or collected, or written by two and more authors. This, we can say, is a sort of “shared loneliness”, for it takes place as in contrast with the normal outgoing of regular people. Plato has already called our attention on this kind of shared loneliness, in the midst of the polis or of the *agapé*.

If Plato taught us the written as dialogue, and Aristotle the written in the third person of the singular; if St. Agustin taught us the writing in the first person –the I and me-, and Montaigne introduced the form of the essay into the world of academics at large, our world – particularly in science, has been teaching us the writing as a collective experience, namely the co-authoring. It is difficult to point out as “the” first time when this happened. Literature, poetry and philosophy remain as the domains of writing as a singular personal experience. This, however, is likely to change in the future to come.

## IX

Most people do not write in the sense mentioned above. For, most people are, as Nietzsche liked to call it, gregarious. Gregarious people love chatting and babbling, and in spite of the huge increase of blogs on the web, they remain as swarms and prefer, by and large, oral expression over against the writ.

Writing is not a normal experience, very much in the same sense as speaking and babbling, hanging around and fearing being bored are normal experiences for current people. Writers – in literature, science and philosophy, at large – prefer, love and pamper loneliness as a way of living. Loneliness is thus a state of the mind, not just a social or personal experience.

Writing implies, socially speaking, a kind of sacrifice. Life, nonetheless, is a game that is played on the long run. We have certainly no real or definitive certainties. Moreover, we do not need, unlike Descartes, apodictic certainties. Writing gives us pleasure that comes at the end of publishing and editing the written. Knowing,

indeed, as clearly put it Aristotle, gives us pleasure, a pleasure where body and mind are intertwined and become one and the same – just as in love.

On the long run, even with the importance of “early triumphs or victories” life is decided by the writings. The writings nurtured by loneliness and the joy of being read – read and commented, read and criticized, read and pondered by others.

If it is true that we owe our life’s to others, it is even truer that we owe our own writings to others. Writing becomes, thereafter, an interplay, and interface between our inner self and the world around us, our inner self and the world after us.

After all, for those who write and commit their life to writing, we have our own life materialized in the books, papers, chapters, and essays somewhere in our library – at home as well as in the bookshelves of universities, institutes and centers. Some will read us, most will probably not. And yet, the writings are like seeds that can be cultured – on the long run.

## X

Loneliness, not solitude, is the *conditio sine qua non* for writing, namely for good writing. Loneliness, thus, is to be reckoned more radically as *autarché/autarkía* rather than as freedom or liberty. Freedom is definitely a social experience, very much alike liberty. In contrast, the *autarchy* remains a personal experience, a lonesome attitude – in the world, in the midst of the world.

The loneliness of the writing is truly the strength of the mind, the force of the spirit. It is a mind that has come to form and educate itself, a spirit that has strived and most probably succeeded in triumphing over itself. It is one of the highest achievements of culture and civilization, an authentic way of life in its own.

The loneliness of the writing translates the optimism about future, for a writ is to be read sometime in a future to come. Tacitly or implicitly writing means trusting

life, believing in people, knowing that there is good horizon open in front of us; a horizon to be explored, a horizon to be conquered, if not build up and dreamt.