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*Keywords:* *self-referential discourse; metaphor; self-reflexivity; catherine pozzi.*

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# "A Castaway's Look". The Writing of the Wreck-Metaphor in Catherine Pozzi's Diaries

Aline Magalhaes Pinto

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## I. Introduction

Catherine Pozzi was born in 1882 and received a high-level *bourgeois* education. The city of Paris was at the center of her life, even though she spent long periods of time away from it to undergo treatment for tuberculosis –a disease she contracted in 1912, and which became the cause of her death in 1934. From a very early age, she developed an intellectual ambition in regard to the sciences (with her studies in chemistry, physics and biology), although she is nowadays better known for six poems well received by Jean Paulhan (editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française,* and a key figure of French literary life between the wars), posthumously published in the *NRF*, later included in the fundamental anthology edited by André Gide in 1949, and published as an authorial work by Gallimard (1959). These poems are considered to be sophisticated representatives of a neoclassical, or at least a non-avant-garde type of poetry (Malaprade, 1994, p. 105-111).

In 1893, Catherine Pozzi received a notebook as a gift from her grandmother and started using it as a diary. Except for some periods when she interrupted her writing, she maintained it up to the time of its disappearance.[1]As a diary-writer, Pozzi adopted the viewpoint of an ironical and cynical observer of her milieu. However, much like the 19th century tradition of spiritual diaries, Pozzi also sought to bring about a meditative self-reflection and self-exploration, and this penchant makes of her diary entries a self-portrait –a textual device resorted to by M. Beaujour. Beaujour's research follows along the lines of P. Lejeune's reflections and is linked at a deep level to Michel Foucault's observations on subjectivity. In seeking to grasp fragmented texts, such as diaries and essays, Beaujour asserts that the absence of a narrative characterizes a specific type of self-referential statement, namely the self-portrait. In these texts, composition – though counting on a creative subject and a chronology to guarantee a certain unity and meaning – emerges by way of a non-narrative process of bricolage and juxtaposition. But the most interesting result of this way of writing is that in evoking a self-portrait, like a painting, the reflective expression of sincere readiness leads into the central and empty point of subjectivity, allowing each reader to recognize him or herself in this same empty space (Beaujour, 1980, p. 14-18). C. Pozzi's self-portrait – in other words, the way she weaves her discourse about her own self – is guided by a specific validation system, which revolves around a sincere and meditative truth that reaches out toward its extremities: it is, in Pozzi's own words, "the truth that burns" (Pozzi, 2005, p. 47-48). The validation of this discursive form avoids factual criteria, without ignoring them, as the writing subject seeks to understand herself in connection with the disharmonious relations among human projects and modern life conditions. At the borderline of such disharmony, Pozzi experiences her mortal condition and explores it as someone who is fated both to live with tuberculosis, and to die from the disease.

This article focuses on the volume that includes Pozzi's adult diaries composed between 1913 to 1934.[2]

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[1] Along with the data contained in Catherine Pozzi's diaries, her biographies written by Diaz-Florian (2008) and Joseph (1988) are the sources of biographical information for this research.

[2] The first edition of C. Pozzi's diaries was published in 1997. In this study, I use their second (expanded and revised) version (Phébus, 2005). The original texts, fulfilling Pozzi's wish, are now kept at the National Library of France (BNF).



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The year 1913 is marked by the end of her marriage, which took place in 1909, with Edouard Boure– a childhood friend who became a playwright and the father of her only son, Claude. On November 26th, C. Pozzi wrote: "I continue my psycho-uterine crisis. I am as active as a politician, and as resilient as a surgeon; I have the eyes of a morphine addict and the longing of a castaway" (Pozzi, 2005, p.58).[3]In this aphoristic entry, we see the elements selected by Pozzi to attain a composition –an effect that desires, requests and crystallizes in a profile: the slick social dexterity of a politician; the resistance and impassivity of a surgeon; the inebriated eyes; and the expectations of a castaway. This statement about herself, which combines self-observation and self-description, is emblematic both in relation to her inner mood and to the language by which she expresses the state of seeing oneself as small, skinny, ugly, intelligent and elegant, but, at bottom, weird and inadequate. At the multidimensional level, composed by the evocation of the images of a politician, a doctor, an addict and a castaway, I call attention to the final one – the representation of the castaway. The two initial images Pozzi resorts to are directly linked to her father's figure and to the power over her of its shadow;[4] the third image recalls an altered state of mind which, in Pozzi's reconstruction of herself, is intimately linked to a mystical element capable of opening a historical and semantic universe that deserves special attention.[5] The image of the castaway, in turn, emerges as an innermost and unique reference, which can be interpreted where her diary takes up the reflexive form of a metaphorical destiny.

As a reflex and a metaphor, Pozzi's wreck encompasses three constitutive motifs of her self-referenced discourse: the sadness of an ill-fated love, the impact of tuberculosis, and a frustrated intellectual vocation.[6] The wreck image renders her text into a means by which she can affirm to herself that she is dying. This writing exercise produces the effect of an *almost* unimaginable image: a portrait that gives form to an anticipation of death, by compressing the relation between a universal addressee (who swings between a secularized "spirit" and God) and an effective addressee (her reader, to whom she refers without knowing whether he or she will ever actually exist).Here, the doubly absent addressee serves as a mirror for an "I" who discovers, in attempting to provide a record of her life, a process of disappearance. In this sense, Pozzi's writing is capable of configuring – instead of an empty space –an emptying of meaning. The reflexive tone of her diary resides precisely in this displacement of the sphere of meaning, which occurs as a look toward oneself as a dying subject.

To substantiate our hypothesis, let us analyze the three motifs that constitute the metaphorical image of the castaway. I will return to this point in my final remarks, to approach the idea of "love for the world", which is developed by Pozzi in her unfinished theoretical treatise *Peau d'âme* (1990). As an intermittent backdrop and a form, love and wreckage make up the metaphorical pillars that sustain Pozzi's self-portrait. In other words, in composing this metaphor, the "I" is submerged in love, and love is submerged in the "I".

Hans Blumenberg's studies on metaphor are the theoretical structure that inspires my analysis. For Blumenberg, a metaphor is:

> …to begin with, in a particular text, a disturbance of the connections, i.e. of the homogeneity that allows a mechanical reading. A metaphor obstructs the fluidity of a text's reception […]. A metaphor certainly occupies, in a given context, a weak position as a determinant factor, which is placed instead of what, in that specific context, would be enough to satisfy the expectation involved. An expectation can be broken through, because one's ability to determine a context is quite weak(Blumenberg, 2013,p.108).

From this theoretical perspective, metaphors are not only signs of persuasion and seduction, but also artifices and mediation-devices. They function as indicators of fundamental experiences of the human life.

> The human need for specific devices, which are necessary for a reactive behavior in the face of reality – their actual instinctive poverty –, represents the starting point of the fundamental anthropological

[3] "Suite de ma crise psycho-utérine. J'ai une activité de politicien, un ressort de chirurgien, des yeux de morphinomane et une attente de naufragé".

[4] A feverous and humanist republican, Samuel Pozzi (1846-1918) was a renowned surgeon who circulated in the Parisian intellectual and literary milieu. He was a frequent presence in the literary salons of Madame de Caillavet, Madame Geneviève Strauss, and Madame Lydie Aubernon de Nerville. Known as Doctor Pozzi, he published one of the first comprehensive books on women's surgery in the then recently acknowledged field of gynecology. As a doctor, he participated of the Franco-Prussian War, an experience that awakened his interest and led him to contribute to studies on antisepsis and anesthesia. Catherine's father also became, in 1888, President of the French Anthropological Society. Along with René Benoit, he translated the work *The expression of the emotions in man and animals* (1872)written by Charles Darwin (1809-1882), with whom he corresponded frequently. Described as an extremely handsome and charming man, Samuel Pozzi had close relations with several exponents of his time – Marcel Proust, Georges Clemenceau, Robert de Montesquiou, Leconte de Lisle, and Sarah Bernhardt, with whom he had a passionate friendship. He was killed by a long-time patient, and his funeral procession brought together, according to the newspaper *Le Figaro* on June 18, 1918, the most remarkable figures of science and politics. Cf. (Costa, 2010).

[5] There is an intimate relation between the psychological phenomena caused by Pozzi's medication and the mystical experiences she describes in her diary. This relation leads to a type of writing that stands out in certain moments in her diary, constituting a hybrid expression of truth and delirium that deserves to be examined in a specific and differentiated way. I expect to undertake this effort shortly.

[6] Regarding the way how emotions and feelings express themselves as metaphors, cf. Snaevarr (2010).

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> issue, namely how this individual being, in spite of such need, is able to exist. The answer cannot be found outside this one formula: by not keeping immediate relations with this reality. Man's relation with reality is indeed indirect, complicated, and choosy; and, above all, "metaphorical" […]. The *animal symbolicum* dominates a reality that is authentically deadly for itself, inasmuch as such reality allows itself to be represented (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 105).

Based on this conception of metaphor, and within a theoretical dialogue, I seek to understand how a self-referential statement acts in a discourse by composing a metaphorical image capable of representing the experience of a painfully stimulated conscience. In *Shipwreck with spectator*, H. Blumenberg (1979) revives the nautical metaphor in dialogue both with ancient authors such as Lucretius, Horace and Zeno, and with modern thinkers. For him, among from the elementary realities humans must deal with, the sea – at least until the conquest of the skies by aviation – is the most ominous. By taking the maritime world to epitomize the perils of existence, Blumenberg links the notion of failure to the metaphorical web that evokes sinking and breaking. Here I find inspiration in the anthropological horizon of risk and failure suggested by Blumenberg's reflections as the basis for a hypothesis: by claiming for herself the place of the castaway, Pozzi enables the composition of a metaphorical image that allows us to understand how her writing can ascribe the intensity of a nightmare to an anti-reality (the "feeling" that the world is not as it should be) for the painfully stimulated conscience that is her own. In this sense, the actual presence of the words "wreck" and "castaway" in the text are less important than the plastic strength they mobilize as images. In the movement of constructing a self-reference, the entries in Pozzi's diary are rooted in a referral structure that is more similar to a plastic interpellation in the effort of deciphering than to a descriptive reproduction of daily events. The metaphor of the castaway brings us closer to her indeed, and helps us unveil the enigma of a life in a movement toward collapse. This theoretical mainstay allows us to shed light on the discursive procedures used by Pozzi to describe the bitter taste of her life, which we address in the lines below.

## II. An Ill-Fated Love Affair

From 1906 to 1908, when she was feeling uncomfortable with the perspectives for women in her native setting, Catherine Pozzi made an unsuccessful attempt to live in England. Yielding to the urging and to the blackmail of her relatives, she returned to Paris and married in 1909 (Joseph, 1988, p.65-66). In a letter to her son, which was transcribed in her diary, she described how she felt forced to accept marriage as the only possible means of social insertion into what she called the "*machine française*"– a milieu in which, as a 25 year-old single woman, she would have no access to social life (Pozzi, 2005, p. 198-200).

In referring to her adolescent diary in 1913, she recalled a time when, through writing, she evoked her deities. Marriage had scared those deities away and, despite her husband's presence, she continued to be alone. 1913 therefore marked for Catherine Pozzi a year of increasing awareness that her marriage was more than simply a circumstantial failure. She perceived the marriage-institution as the cause of the loss of her soul, and a as moral slip for which she could not forgive herself – and from which she was not sure she would recover. The most brutal mistake for her was to indulge in an inebriating feeling for her future husband. Such feeling lasted a number of months, and subsequently imprisoned her in the confines of his will and temper. The collapse of her marriage, along with the diagnosis of tuberculosis, impressed on her a paradoxical mood. The year 1913 symbolized for her a new chance for freedom – the intellectual and spiritual freedom that, due to deception or cowardice, she had allowed to slip away (Pozzi, 2005, p. 25).

Her relation with her lawyer, Gaston Morin, who represented Pozzi in her divorce attempt, which she abandoned due to a number of difficulties, including above all the issue of her son's custody, provided the occasion for her first extramarital love affair. He insisted on marriage, but she persistently refused him. She repeatedly reevaluated and reconfirmed her decision not to marry. When turning away from her first husband, her goal was to dedicate her energies exclusively to her intellectual work, and to explore her creative capacities by following a strict program of studies. Since adolescence, she sought to become an artist, but this did not mean for her that she should dedicate herself exclusively to art or poetry. Her primary intellectual goal had always been to develop a philosophy of science, or more specifically, a philosophy capable of encompassing science as the intimate aspect of Being, and, as such, one that would not lead to rejection of the religious and theological realm. By claiming her status as an artist, Pozzi alluded to the figure of a person capable of being "herself" and of carrying out her work in the society to which she belonged.

In 1920, Catherine Pozzi met and fell in love with Paul Valéry (1871-1945), one of the most prominent men of the French *intelligentsia*, and she longed to become his source of inspiration, his associate and lover. They spent eight years together, and during this period, C. Pozzi dedicated a good part of her time to reading, discussing and organizing Valéry's writings, including the well-known volumes of his *Cahiers*. References to her reference, mentioned as Karin, K, Ck or Beatrice, certainly did not go unnoticed by the readers of this monumental effort of reflection. Pozzi, in turn, referred to



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Valéry in her writings as Leonardo, L'autre, or (during moments of tension) L'Enfer.

When the two first met, Valéry was already considered to be an heir of Mallarmé, and he was experiencing a turning point in his career after a period of editorial ostracism. The publication of *La Jeune Parque*(1917) and the reedition of his texts *La Soirée avec le Monsieur Teste* (1919) and *L'introduction à la méthode de Leonard de Vinci* (1919) projected him once again (?) onto the French intellectual scene. To consolidate his place, Valéry became a frequent figure in the Parisian salons, specifically in the salons of Mme Muhlfeldand Mme de La Rochefoucauld, who were to a great extent responsible for his election to the French Academy in 1925 (Bona, 2014, p. 89-91).

C. Pozzi's relation with Valéry allowed her to become an interlocutor of J. Benda, J. Paulhan, P. J. Jouve, R. M. Rilke, E. R. Curtius, J. Maritain, and C. Du Bos. Except for Rilke, who died in 1927, she met and corresponded with these intellectuals until the end of her life. Though at the backstage, C. Pozzi managed to enter a milieu in which intellectuals did not occupy the central position they now occupy, in which intellectual exchanges depended for the most part on personal relations (Cf. Shattuck, 1968).On the other hand, her fierce passion for Valéry brought her to interrupt her movement toward intellectual emancipation and autonomy. Pozzi and Valéry embarked in an amorous adventure –embodied, for today's readers, in what remains of the correspondence they exchanged (collected and published by Gallimard in *La flame* et *la cendre, 2006)*. Both of them beheld their union in a mystical light, as their love came to signify a contact between spirits who attract, identify and are juxtaposed to each other, leading to a fusion between being and knowing.

Pozzi's entry on about June 20th, 1920 when, at a dinner, she met Valéry for the first time, is a construction that evokes a minute description of the hotel setting, the way she selected her night clothing –a plain black dress giving prominence to the valuable pearls around her neck – and the first words they exchanged. All details converge on the intellectual debate in which they were engaged by the end of the night, about time and poetry. In her account, this debate became a climax in the discovery, behind some of her interlocutor's excessively "Malarmaic" gestures, that she had encountered the beauty, the form and the music of her own life. She concluded the entry by declaring that this dinner had given her the possibility of recognizing the final goal of her existence and of her heart (Pozzi, 2005, p. 142-147).

Valéry corresponded to her feelings, as one can read in the entry about their exchange of letters, and in the reference to this day in the *Cahiers*, where he affirmed that he had experienced an immeasurable feeling (1974, p. 762). Some months later, Valéry wrote a long letter to Pozzi, saying that his feeling for her was a system in which love was a movement taking him from ordinary sensibility to the pinnacle of the spirit – the conjunction between sensibility and intellect –, with pain acting as a conduit (Pozzi & Valéry, 2006: 126-129). This elaboration on love is far removed from the vita list and anti-intellectual philosophies that were common features of European thought of the 1920s. Love, in this system, is not akin to an impulsive or irrational flow. Quite the contrary, it is the most refined possible combination of the sensible and intellectual forces of the spirit, and a sophisticated mediation that enables the enjoyment of the intellect's extremities. Described by Valéry as a furious and insatiable thirst, the fascination awakened by Pozzi is a constant element in this system and takes shape in their unique dialogue, fueled by a deep intellectual identification. Together, Valéry and Pozzi undertake researches and studies, and hold discussions. In the 1920s, Paul Valéry lived at rue de Ville just, nowadays rue Paul Valéry, and Catherine Pozzi lived in the rue de Long champ, and the two were practically neighbors. Pozzi's diary describes the countless mornings when Valéry visited her to talk about literature, science, philosophy, politics, mathematics, language, memory and time. As Simonet-Tenant (2011) presumes, Valéry saw this interlocution as a dialogic extension of the reflections he wrote on his Cahiers before dawn. The poetry of *Charmes* (1922) and the dialogues of *Eupalinos* (1923) and *L'âme et la danse* (1921) were written in the heat of their stormy relation, which they reflect. His unfinished projects include a version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. According to the entries in his correspondence, it is based on their own story (cf. Pozzi & Valéry: 2006).

However, as the years passed, Valéry's desire to keep other affective relationships increasingly met with Pozzi's resistance: for her the ideas of rigor and purity gradually attained huge moral proportions. Valéry's Parisian life with its salons, dinners and parties became increasingly detestable for Pozzi, who considered his willingness to continue these activities to be a waste of time and a despicable mundane vulgarity. For Pozzi, such way of living collided with the intellectual and affective system formed by a couple's relation, since the complex fusion between being and knowing behind this system establishes a path of spiritual and amorous enhancement. As Pozzi drew nearer to thinkers such as Jacques and Raissa Maritain, her ideal of love increasingly acquired a moral tone. For Pozzi, falling in love with Valéry forced her to admit for herself the condition of being his lover – and of coexisting with his other lovers. Her life, by definition, was set apart from the happiness allotted to a wife as an "official" social life. In this sense, an element of jealousy appeared in her composition. In her diary, nonetheless, this aspect is not the key determinant of her personal "drowning since, as she understood it, the real is not founded in worldly

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happiness. Thus, the measure of reality in their relation hinged precisely on the ability to escape this type of socially shared conditioning.

In fact, the decisive element motivating the "wreck" text was not the social dimension of Pozzi's life, but her unfettered projection of an intellectual identification with Valéry, which created unattainable expectations. Starting in 1925, her certainty regarding this identification – which is inevitably bound to frustration – led her to reformulate her love affair in a harsh and unbearable way. Her feelings and their relation began to resemble thermo-chemical systems, characterized by entropy – one of her own intellectual obsessions. In order to understand this, one must resort to Pozzi's philosophical essay *Peau d'âme* (1990). This work develops the second law of thermodynamics – which states that the entropy of an isolated thermodynamic system increases with time until it reaches a maximum value – in a quite peculiar way that resembles Neo-Thomist philosophies. In accordance with the second law, when a part of a closed system interacts with another part, energy tends to be equally distributed between the two until the system attains a thermal equilibrium. In other words, in order to attain equilibrium, the heat of a part of the system tends to increase, while for the other part, it tends to decrease. As Pozzi attempted to show, entropy increases with the transformations that result from the loss of energy, but it also erodes, strains and ultimately kills (Pozzi, 1990, p.71-82). By symbolically projecting her scientific knowledge into the affective dimension, Pozzi showed, starting in 1926, how her relation with Valéry was bound to lead one of the parties to become the prey of and finally to be destroyed by the other. On May 23rd 1927, after describing a disagreement between them, Pozzi wrote: "He stays, he will be back. That is all. There is nothing good, actually. 'I tumble over you as a stone', Paul Valéry said to me in 1921. And he will crush me" (Pozzi, 2005, p. 400).[7]

In light of the drastic decrease in the number of entries in Pozzi's diary in 1924 and 1925 (Pozzi, 2005, p. 311-338), we are able to comprehend the configuration of feeling. In May 1924, Valéry noticed a lump on her arm. Later, they discovered that it was an abscess resulting from a tubercular infection. The complications resulting from this discovery lead her to interrupt her writing and all other activity during this period, which she denominates the "year of martyrdom and agony". The couple remained together and met constantly. Although Pozzi's physical state was deplorable, Valéry was experiencing one of the most important moments of his career: his election to the French Academy on November 19, 1925. Starting in 1926, a maniac obsession frequently began to appear in Pozzi's entries, fueling a deep ambiguity in her feelings for Valéry. The love, involvement, attention and time she had dedicated to their relation seemed now to have been bought at the cost of her own intellectual possibilities. Valéry's success began to appear to her as the irrefutable proof of this process. At the same time, however, she did not feel capable of renouncing their relationship. She evoked Eurydice's figure to incarnate the idea of sacrifice, meaning that one party must succumb so that the other may shine. As she wrote to Valéry in 1927: "I am in your life to shine obliquely, obscurely – there's a specter of absorption" (Pozzi, 2005, p. 385)[8].

Pozzi finally decided to end her relationship with Valéry in 1929. Valéry made great efforts to reconcile with her. However, as a member of the Academy, he was primarily concerned with protecting his reputation and preserving the intimacy of his massive correspondence with Pozzi.[9] He tried by all means to recover their letters, in a gesture she perceived as an offensive attempt to delete what they had experienced, which became a source of acute anguish and affliction. Although Pozzi had maintained other relationships parallel to her affair with Valéry, she expected recognition not only of her affective importance, but also of the intellectual contribution she had made to the life of the man with whom she thought she had experienced "the noblest love". From then on, despite her attempts to reconstruct her intellectual and social circle without Valéry (Joseph, 1988, p.261), her diary pages focused mainly on a resentful revision of their relationship in a mood of intense solitude and grief.

## III. The Impact of Tuberculosis

Pozzi was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1912, but its symptoms only became systematically and persistently noticeable in 1921. From then on, she started weaving a semantic game between her tubercular fatigue and the weariness of living, while she identified her difficulty in breathing and speaking as the indication of an alliance between body and spirit. In March 22nd she wrote:

> "A surprising thing happened yesterday. I had just laid down. Something was weird in my throat. I wanted to cough. I sat straight up and, as I coughed, blood flowed through my mouth. There was nothing

[7] "Il est resté. Il reviendra. Voilà tout. A quoi bom rien? "Je tombe vers vous comme la pierre tombe", disait Paul Valéry en 1921. Et m'ecrasera..."

[8] "Comme je suis dans votre vie pour brillêr au travers, obscure – le voilà bien, le spectre d'absorption!"

[9] As Bona points out, Valéry – "un grand brulé de l'amour" – had several mistresses throughout his life. Besides Catherine Pozzi, he was also involved with Renée Vauthier, Edmée de La Rochefoucauld, Émilie Noulet, and Jeanne Voilier. Immersed in a context where the production of knowledge is intrinsically linked to the construction of a reputation and a personality, since Paul Valéry was married with Jeannine Gobillard and the father of three children, he had absolutely no interest in propagating evidence of his extramarital affairs(cf. Bona, 2014, p. 51-66).



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about being quicker, or cleaner. It was not an ugly thing, or a painful thing, as it had been some other times. That blood was vivid, scarlet red, smooth and flawless. It was the most beautiful, the noblest. It was the liquor of a lived life, fully aired with oxygen from the lungs" (Pozzi, 2005, p. 176).[10]

Her enchantment at the beauty of her own blood was rapidly replaced by a gloomy certainty: her body was finally succumbing to the infection diagnosed almost 10 years earlier. At first, it was possible to conceal the pain in her lungs, her fatigue and her occasional fevers under beautiful hats and dresses. But her crises and moments of fatigue and fever gradually became constant companions. Her diary then became then an theatre stage, a game of mirrors in which Pozzi and her readers learn that a death sentence is also a sentence to live under a circumstance of condemnation.

Up to the 1940s, tuberculosis therapy consisted basically of rest, good nutrition and the use of analgesic drugs to enable patients to endure pain and suffering (cf. COURY, 1972).[11] Pozzi became a constant user of the latest available opiates, which were expected to alleviate the side effects of ether, opium and morphine, while she resorted to these drugs in times of serious crises. In wintertime, she was used to leaving Paris in order to seek a better atmosphere through travel to Italy, Switzerland, or, more frequently, to her family estates in Bordeaux, Montpellier, and – her favorite–Vence, Côte d'Azur. Yet, although she resorted to all possible therapeutic means, she was not motivated to write in her diary by the hope of overcoming her disease. The disposition of her self-referential discourse is directed toward the construction of a representation of her physical and psychological decay. Her physical ruin was projected onto the spiritual plane without providing any hope of redemption – of a cure – in life. In this sense, we may reiterate that for Pozzi, physical misery sustained the ambiguity contained in the "longing of a castaway". For a castaway, the possibility of rescue results only from the threat of the unlikelihood of a rescue. The unusual alliance between possibility and unlikelihood lays the foundation for her text's system of reference and, in its movement, Pozzi undertakes her own self remodeling. The dividing line imposed by an unlikely cure or rescue set limits, in her case, to fictional elaborations about herself. The irreparable sentence to die from tuberculosis erects itself as the kernel of her writing's sincere truthfulness, which is reluctant to accept the order of fiction. By writing, Pozzi attempted to offset the feeling of being condemned and of her own loss – both of which are considered to be irreparable facts. In such context, as Odo Marquard has pointed out (2001, p. 23), the idea of compensation suggests relief and respite, though without ever reaching an outlook of fulfillment or reconciliation.[12]

The emergence of the first tuberculous abscess on Pozzi's body in 1924 acted as an inflection point in her life, and as a physical indicator of her debacle. Her doctors did not promptly link her abscess to tuberculosis, and for some months they considered the possibility that she had contracted tetanus, cancer or syphilis. Ultimately, they decided to extract the abscess. Pozzi was submitted to three delicate surgical procedures, followed by an experimental treatment in which a compound substance obtained from the material extracted in surgery was injected into her blood to stimulate the production of antibodies. The result was terrible and it accelerated the evolution of the disease. From then on, Pozzi affirmed that her life took on the shape of suffering (Pozzi, 2005, p. 333-334). This new configuration is expressed in her diary. Each hemoptysic crisis directly aroused in her a consciousness of finitude and a conviction of the certainty that disease was tantamount to martyrdom. She began to link the redness of her blood to the impossibility of working, then to her own bitter thoughts and, ultimately, to the dread of her impending fate. She began to take her ailing body as clear evidence of the evil that had affected her trajectory. Her self-interpretation combined self-observation and self-description, culminating in a kind of reflexivity in which the writing self takes distance from the rapidly dying self. Such detachment does not assume that one of these two selves is a fabrication; rather, the image of the castaway emerged between them as a figure of mediation that grants access to the experience of knowing that one is condemned to die. At the same time, the act of composing this image, by giving a form to her experience, prevented her conscience from

[10] "Hier; il est arrivé une chose étonnante. Je vennais de me choucher. La gorge me faisait mal. J'avais envie de tousser. Je me suis levée, et comme je toussais, um flot de sang est venu. Rien n'a été plus soudain, plus propre. Ce n'était pas une matière laide à voir, à subir, comme certais autrefois. C'étais du sang écarlate, fluide, sans défaut. Le très beau, très noble... la liqueur de vie venant, tout aérée d'oxygêne du poumon ».

[11] Until the discovery and use of antibiotic chemotherapy in the 1940s, tuberculosis was specifically characterized as a disease the treatment of which destroyed both it and its patient, and it was linked to a typically romantic imagery, in which a disease is the projection of a spiritual sequel. As Sontag points out, TB was encircled by a mythology, the source of which was centered in love and its delusions. Its symptoms – emaciation and hemoptysis, mostly – were seen to represent the bodily limits between life and death. As a disease, it played the role of legitimizing a poetic and artistic condition, inasmuch as it reinforced the expression of a "vocation", above all, a literary vocation (SONTAG, 1978, p.20-26).

[12] Marquard has pointed out the singularity of the modern concept of compensation, which is constituted in a manner similar to Immanuel Kant's reflexive judgment. Compensation, in this sense, does not mean fullness, but refers to a totality to be supplemented without reaching completeness. For Marquard, a compensation-anthropology occupies an intermediate place between metaphysics and empiricism, promoting thought-provoking linkages between virtually irreconcilable themes, such as the metaphysical theme of a theodicy (divested from theology) and the empirical theme of desire (Marquard, 2001, p. 15-31).



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breaking apart. The certainty of an approaching death horrified and frightened Pozzi but, without eliminating her dread, it was also paradoxically transformed into a possibility of relief. In the course of time, she gradually realized – in a movement of dwelling in herself –that she would no longer attain peace or happiness, or live even one single day without pain, until the moment she found eternal Peace. And she also realized that with the arrival of this event she would be deprived of all other possibilities.

On March 14, 1931, one single sentence resonates on her diary: "I am one of the unique points through which this planet's suffering irradiates" (Pozzi, 2005, p. 609).[13] At this moment, Pozzi's extreme thinness–standing 1.75m tall, she weighed 40 kilos (cf. Joseph, 1988, p. 283) – was only the most visible aspect of the state of her body: her left lung was totally compromised by infection, and her right lung presented its first lacerations. The infection on her arm did not diminish, nor did her constant asthma and fever crises. In her text, living and suffering become equivalent notions. A discursive chain is established between understanding life, understanding suffering, and writing. This chain accelerates, in her diary, in a the process of emptying out life's meaning. Her diary portrays the literal transformation of the body's sensation into a form of a submersion in decay, allowing her readers to visualize the combination of self-observation and self-description as an act quite similar to gesticulating before a mirror. As the disease advanced, along with her fever crises, infections and hemoptysis, and subsequent morphine-Laudanum-Sedol-opium doses, the damage to her body increased. The signs of physical worsening announced the deterioration and erosion of life. The reality of Pozzi's text is highlighted by the decay of her body, experienced as the intimate destiny of the self: that of being wrecked. Her writing in the diary converts a near and certain death into the discovery of the impossibility of circumventing facts and of the dying image of the non-fulfillment of the meaning of life. This textual metamorphosis alternates between two narrative levels: at one level, which is most frequent, is the blurting out, the remorse and surrender of the writing self. Here, Pozzi provides a large amount of information about herself. At a second level, which is more rare, a less subjective and more reflexive mood of writing emerges from the sincerity inscribed in her discursive fabric. By severing the connection between the writing self and this created system of information, sincerity stands out in a reflection that no longer concerns the subject corresponding to the identity of C. Pozzi. This is illustrated by the following entry from October 1927:

> "How does each of your heartbeats make a human? Surrounded by bodies, beings and objects, and entertained by hopes, there you are. An infinite number of signals reach out to you: it is the universe that imposes itself. You respond, you believe you are still, and quiet… you respond! At every heartbeat, you accept, you refuse, and you demand something. But you have the certainty that you did not act, and that each of these invisible movements is void. What if they were not in vain?" (Pozzi, 2005, p. 356).[14]

At every beat of the human heart, as Pozzi tells us, even in circumstances of dire illness, life imposes itself. To become human is to accept that the beating heart, of the condemned, will someday cease to beat. Life pulsates beyond conscience: the heart vibrates even when the mind believes that the body is still. Pozzi takes cardiac movements, involuntary as they are, to indicate that something larger than man-made conscience prevails over man, and that existence involves ignorance of the connections linking the signals that surround us. But it also involves the acceptance of *Death's* inexorability. In the oscillation between wreckage and life, which imposes itself upon Pozzi, we find the type of reflexivity that runs throughout her diary, swinging like a pendulum between, on one hand, the extreme lack of meaning in life and, on the other hand, its tireless pursuit. The castaway metaphor transports and transforms dread into sublimity, allowing readers to uncover, in the sublime element of a dreadful experience – the fear of death – the counter-image transcending meaning in life. In other words, one finds an image of the limitations of the self.

## IV. An Obstructed Intellectual Vocation

Since C. Pozzi's adolescence, the relation between her intellectual vocation and the social milieu in which she lived became a source of conflict. In her diary entries covering the years 1893 to 1906, friction becomes evident due to the difference in the kind of education she received, in comparison to that of her slightly younger brother Jean Pozzi (1884-1967). Jean studies at Lycée Condorcet, enrolled as a student at the Sorbonne and the École de Sciences Politiques, and subsequently pursued a successful diplomatic career. By contrast, in spite of the good education she received, Catherine, unlike Jean, did not attend schools known for their excellence (Pozzi, 1995: 34). She was brought up by her family in conformity with the type of education provided to women of her social class, primarily aimed

[13] "Je suis um des points singuliers par où la souffrance de la planète rayonne".

[14] Comment chaque battement de votre coeur fait-il un homme? Entouré de corps, d'être et des objets, amusé d'espérances, vous êtes là. Une infinité de signes vous parviennent: c' est l'Univers qui se impose à vous. Vous répondez, vous croyez d'être immobile, vous croyes de taire...vous répondez! A chaque battement de coeur, vous acceptez, vous refusez, vous demandez quelque chose. Mais vous êtes assuré de n'avoir pas agi, et que chacun de ces mouvements invisibles est à néant. Et s'ils n'etaient pas au néant?



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at raising good wives, and based on a model or social standard that considered obedience and abdication of one's will as the best qualities of a woman (Cf. Brofen, 1992).At home, she received lessons "for maidens" and learned history, literature, German, English, Latin and Greek, along with music (piano) and sports. In her father's library she devoted her study to scientific subjects such as physics and chemistry, and also to philosophy. Later, thanks to the aid of the writer Marcel Schwob, she was engaged in an ambitious studies program encompassing philosophical, theological and scientific subjects, which put her in contact with the ideas of William James, Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson. In the late 1920s, she received her *baccalauréat*, which entitled her to take chemistry, physics and biology courses at the Sorbonne and the Pasteur Institute, where she dedicated herself to laboratory practice and scientific experiments. However, another conflict emerged when her father, Samuel Pozzi, a progressive republican in the French Senate, headed a committee in charge of educational reform in France and opposed the extension of instruction in the topics of Latin and philosophy to women, since he considered these fields to be unnecessary for future mothers and wives (Joseph, 1988, p. 27).

Over the course of Pozzi's diary, her writing allows us to visualize the social web that imposes itself on the will and intellectual vocation of women in her time. Such a web is noticeable in moments when she describes advice she received from friends, who sought to encourage her to abandon the sciences and dedicate herself to fiction writing, or to convince her that a person with her good taste for beautiful dresses could not write a treatise in philosophy. On such occasions, her writing shows how the historical relations through which the subjectivity of the feminine gender was forged in the early 20th century make necessary a different kind of life for a *femme des letters* in regard to previous models of feminine identity. This thinking and writing feminine subject finds herself in a situation of rupture with the socially approved expectations, marked by her personal struggle with the established standards (Perrot & Martin-Fugier, 1990, p.110-115).

Along the paths of reflexivity revealed by the self-circumscription and self-referential writing of women, silence forms a pattern. In women's autobiographical discourse, silence must be understood less as an absence than as the conveyance (?) of traditional masculine parameters (2013:31). And not only this; as S. Felman points out, the autobiographical constitution of the feminine subject neutralizes (?), in the guise of self-resistance, the hesitation to accept difference (Felman, 1993, p. 2-19). Pozzi's writing inserts itself in such a situation, and by studying it, one may visualize the social and cultural obstacles gender conditioning imposes, and also get a grasp on the ways by which she managed to bypass some of these obstacles.

Yet, in Catherine Pozzi's days, the narrow intellectual space allotted to women was not itself the decisive factor that shaped what I understand to have been an obstruction in her intellectual vocation. Rather, the prevailing factor seems to have been the constitution of an intellectual disposition marked by acute impotence, which comes to light in the disparity between her vocation and the function of intellectual work in modernity. This factor becomes clear in the correspondence exchanged between Pozzi and Jean Paulhan (Pozzi & Paulhan, 1999). For Pozzi, writing was an activity linked to the awakening of conscience; intellectual work should chart out an existential path capable of enabling the unique task of reconnection in order to function in a world that resents the loss of totality; the reasons for writing belong to one order, and the reasons for publishing to quite another. Writing ought to serve to restore the order of the world, which explains her intention to build a theological philosophy based on the sciences (Pozzi, 2005, p. 527). As Pozzi develops a Neo-Thomist perspective, she conceives the task of writing and intellectual work to lie in the incessant rediscovery of the essence of the cosmos. The form of a work connects living and writing as a measure of excellence. The *oeuvre* of an individual, comprising life and writing, delineates the threshold of the possible: an encounter with and a response to God (Pozzi & Paulhan, 1999, p. 80-89).

This conception stood at the root of the state of frustration in which Pozzi found herself by the end of her life. For her, intellectual life, seen as this path of formation and enrichment, and also as an attempt to recapture the oneness of the world, is destroyed by the requirements of commitment and the demands imposed by the world of publishing. Since Pozzi understood that writing must lead to a way of life governed by rigor and purity, she had great difficulty in occupying public space as a writer, that is, in publishing her texts. By the end of her life, she faced the weighty contradiction that opposed the certitude of her conviction that writing has an intrinsic value to her sad lack of courage and consequent incapacity to fulfill her public role as an intellectual. In the months preceding her death, her diary became the stage for desperate pleas to her son, as she urged him to publish the philosophical essay she had spent her entire life trying to write, but which remained unfinished, despite Jean Paulhan's persistent attempts to publish it. The need for purity and rigor seem to have been equivalent, for her, to pride. Her inability to mobilize pride and extreme self-demanding rigor to fulfill practical results resulted in fruitlessness, since she could not manage to finish her book and her theoretical work. Her unfinished book became a dubious symbol: in the face of death, it expressed exhaustion, while bearing witness to a vain courage that had

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abdicated from the task of writing (Boutang, 1991, p. 55-60). This in an indication of the unfulfilled potency of Pozzi's subjectivity, which was at once proud and hurt, and was ultimately defeated by her life's end that imposed itself as an inability to finish an *oeuvre*. In the prolific writing of her intimate diary, such potency emerges in the metaphorical form of the wreck.

## V. By Means of Conclusion: The Central Wreck-Love Metaphor

Three layers of significance – an ill-fated love affair, devastation inflicted by tuberculosis, and a frustrated intellectual vocation – set the space for the emergence of the wreck-image as a metaphor for the process of loss Pozzi experienced during her life. The fabric of her text transforms her exercise of self-description and self-observation, raising her self-referential writing to the reflexive-metaphorical plane, without converting it, however, into a strictly philosophical or fictional discourse. As a hybrid form of discourse, such a movement has as its effect a disjunction with the perverse triteness of another person's misfortunes. In other words, it evokes compassion, understood – with Aristotelian endorsement – as a human trait that, in betraying an outlook of danger and ruin, reaches out to us from the individual who experienced it (cf. Halliwell, 2012, p. 207-33).

When a text composed of self-referential statements gives rise to the image of a wreck at the precise spot where it should offer the picture of a lifetime's accomplishment, it raises the question: what can a castaway expect? And, more specifically, what confers on the castaway image visibility in the text? What brings it to light? And with what does it stand in contrast? What do we behold in ourselves as we behold Pozzi's wreck?

In her attempt to transform a narcissistic level of affection, resulting from her generalized inadequacy, Pozzi constructs the idea of "love for the world" in which the gift of creativity and the gift of love merge and become in dissociable. Pozzi treads a strict path of wisdom, which she develops in her diary texts, in her poetry and in her unfinished treatise. From a Neo-Thomist perspective, based on the metaphysical teachings of Plato and Aristotle, and on the modern philosophies of Leibniz and Pascal, she composed a notion of love, which she also desired, divested of social bonds, and representing the capacity of restoring lost order to human beings and to the universe. In her search for the transcendental conditions of sentiment, Pozzi came to the understanding that love is neither illusory, nor fully real; love does not hold beauty as its object, but engenders itself as beauty; it neither announces the experience of healing, nor of liberation from fear, and even less does it promise happiness. Love for the world is at the same time not bounded by individual existence; it is the immortal energy inhabiting mortal human bodies, and for this reason immortality, rather than beauty, must be the theme and object of love (cf. Pozzi, 1990).

Mortality – inexorable and imminent – becomes castaway's unique discovery when she beholds the reduction of all her potency and vital desire to a single possibility: death. This contradiction stands at the core of Pozzi's experience and of her modernity, as she portrays the irreconcilable abyss that separates an evanescent world from the driving force of desire for a permanent basis for love and for being loved. Here the realm of desire is an excitation that at once founds and annihilates the self. Conceived as a passive faculty which, paradoxically, calls for a creative capacity, Pozzi's love for the world is joined to the wreck-image, and appears as its backdrop. The wreck metaphor unravels her text, since it grants access, by contrast, to this figurative totality to come, the notion of love for the world as Pozzi formulated it. A castaway expects love because there is nothing else to be expected. The castaway ultimately becomes a metaphor for infinite, yet forever missing love submerging the individual. The shock of the innermost pain of personal failure in all spheres of life, coupled with a universal understanding of love, awakens recognition for each reader of Pozzi's text of the process of emptying and submersion with which all limited, finite and conditioned beings are faced.

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