Writing the Disaster: Disruptions of Reason, Religion, and Rhetoric

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This thesis is dedicated to my dad, Frank Jue, whose life and memory is an ongoing inspiration for me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY

This dissertation explores responses in philosophy, religion, and writing to what is called "disaster" after the term was most notably penned by Maurice Blanchot. Disaster refers to the ineffability of extreme pain, trauma, or suffering, and therefore lies outside the bounds of understanding and reason. The project investigates how scholars approach the project of "answers" in the midst or following the disaster. Depending on a person's view of language, writing, ontology, and theology, the answers in the disaster can take on many forms. Therefore this dissertation addresses the disaster with specific focus on theodicy in religion through the book of *Job*; post-Shoah philosophy; subjectivity and passivity in the formative text, *Phaedrus*; and rhetorical passivity and expressive writing in Rhetoric and Writing pedagogy. The main objective of this dissertation will be to explore responses to disaster and look into how the fields of religion, philosophy and rhetoric and writing endeavor to accomplish the impossible task of "answering" in the midst of those experiences.

Introduction

As philosophizing creatures we stumble in the prospect or reality of uncertainty. We search for explanation amidst uncertainty wishing to stabilize ourselves on answers. In our attempts to provide an account for our circumstances, confusion, and pain, we encounter the resurgent question ever-present in the wake of inexplicability: "Why?" This question fuels philosophical, scientific, theological, and historical investigation, and the response to this question drives the research of this dissertation. The compulsion towards the question "why" is itself a rhetorical topoi, revealing our presumptive necessity for answers, and the ontological burden placed on those answers to ameliorate suffering. Often, the answer to the why is too burdensome, and also, altogether illusory. Pain and suffering disrupt and confuse the strategic path of understanding and also provide a complex rhetorical situation, rich for investigation.

The main objective of this dissertation is to explore responses to disaster,[1] (a term that refers to pain, suffering, or trauma so great in scope that it escapes description) through the lens of rhetoric, but in the context of many different fields of thinking. There are a variety of ways in which the project of answering happens, through the lens of language, writing, ontology, epistemology, and theology. One of the reasons the project is so fraught is because of the impossibility of answering the most traumatic experiences of pain and suffering. Language, understanding, and rationality at times do not suffice, and so these experiences leave us with only more confusion, questions, and uncertainty.

My research starts with the book of *Job* in the Bible. The book presents one of the most well known examples of human suffering in Scripture. Job, a "righteous" man by many accounts, found himself stricken with boils, bereft of his children, livestock, and livelihood, calling out to

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[1] The term "disaster" is most notably attributed first to the work of Maurice Blanchot, particularly in his famous *Writing of the Disaster* (1995).

God in extreme desperation with the question "why?" The book presents the dilemma between the desire to provide an account for the experience of pain and the inexplicability of suffering. Job and his friends present a variety of attempts at theodicy by grounding Job's experiences of pain within the context of divine providence and goodness. The book is important to the project of this dissertation because it outlines the some responses, or theodicy accounts, common in the search for meaning in the face of disaster. The work of theodicy reflects the objective of trying to provide rationalized explanation in the midst of inexplicability. Ultimately this way of thinking closes off ineffability from experiences of pain and suffering. This chapter is meant to set up the problem of disaster for philosophy and consequently language, theology, and epistemology.

The second chapter looks at the major shift in philosophy and writing, pointed to by Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot, after the Holocaust. The Holocaust reveals the failure of language and the great Otherness of the experience of suffering which is non-translatable, and in-describable, and so indicative of the failure of words. This failure confounds the potential of making meaning out of experiences of pain and suffering. This section of the dissertation will again come back to the problem of providing an account for that which is ineffable and non-totalizable. Maurice Blanchot pointed to the gap and break from representation that presented itself in the Holocaust. Levinas explained the ineffability through his term infinity, and his claim that "since Kant, philosophy has been finitude without infinity" (*God, Death, and Time* 36). No writing or testimony could capture it. So what was writing to do? And how could rhetorical theory respond? I propose here a discussion of the places where our rhetorical imaginings reflect a reverence towards the word, a belief that language can represent experience, and the places where we acknowledge its failures for invention, specifically in the shadow of the disaster. The chapter ends with the lingering question of "why write?" in the face of disaster.

The third chapter takes up that question of "why write" by looking to one of the most formative texts on the advent of literacy and writing: the *Phaedrus* by Plato. Writing the disaster (as mentioned in chapter 2) or trying to provide an account for it (as discussed in chapter 1) is posed as impossible and even immoral so what remains for writing or rhetoric? This chapter looks at the claims made by Socrates on the detrimental consequences of writing, but it also suggests that the argument on writing does not end there. There is an underlying claim pointing to the power of invention given over to the speakers because of writing. This chapter will explore the curative properties that come through language. Blanchot points to the impossibility of reducing the disaster to an object that can be known in writing, but the *Phaedrus* points to the way in which writing releases one into a type of inventive madness. In this madness one no longer attempts to master a thing as an object that can be analyzed, an impossibility for the disaster, but instead one is given over to that thing to be mastered. Socrates notes that "If madness were simply an evil, it would be right, but in fact some of our greatest blessings come from madness, when it is granted to us as a divine gift" (244a), and that madness inspiring invention is the focus of this chapter.

The fourth chapter investigates the term "rhetorical passivity," an idea developed throughout the project, but more specifically interrogated in relationship to current rhetoric and writing scholarship and pedagogy. In this chapter I review the past 30 years of scholarship in major rhetoric and writing journals on the idea of passivity. I find that the idea is notably missing from the field and, when mentioned, is subjugated. My intention in this chapter is to discuss why this may be. Maurice Blanchot's proposes passivity as integral to writing of the disaster, but the larger field of rhetoric does not reflect the same sentiment. Through this chapter I hope to clarify Blanchot's perception of the writer and the act of writing and discuss the conspicuous absence of

the notion of passivity and consider whether passivity can fit into the reigning framework of the field.

Concluding the dissertation is the final chapter on expressive writing. This chapter allows the project to explore some of the pedagogical consequences and perspectives relevant to writing on the disaster along with the rhetorical appeal to *pathos*. This section will review how *pathos* allows for and inhibits writing. I continue some of the discussion of madness, explored in chapter 3, but this chapter will question how pathos is viewed, used, and framed in the classroom to inform the writing process. In this final chapter, I'll be reviewing the ways in which *pathos* has been described in the field of rhetoric and how *pathos* is viewed as a rhetorical appeal in writing about traumatic experiences. I'll be looking at how these descriptions structure the way we talk about pain and suffering today. The chapter will also examine the reputation of expressive writing amongst rhetoric scholars and analyze the underlying premises of their opinions.

Wisdom and the Whirlwind

"But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of
understanding? Mortals do not know the way to it, and it is not found in the
land of the living."

--Job 28:12-13

One of the earliest literary accounts of disaster is found in the biblical book of *Job*. Job

was a man from the land of Uz who was known to be righteous in the eyes of God and his

community. He was a wealthy man with a wide range of livestock, land, and a large family of 7

sons and 3 daughters. The plenitude of Job's possessions and offspring reflect the great wealth of

Job. But, unexpectedly one day Job was devastated by extreme loss, suffering, and trauma. He

lost his sons and daughters, livestock, and health. His children were crushed by a strong

windstorm that collapsed the walls of their home, while his livestock were consumed by fire, and

extremely painful boils overtook Job's body. Suffering and searching for answers, Job sat in

mourning for days, tearing his clothes and covering himself in ashes.

I introduce Job as an important figure encountering disaster not because of the severity of

his suffering, but because the text is important to post-Shoah thought because it offers an

important portrayal of the ineffability of suffering. For this reason I'll be offering a reading of

the text and commenting on its importance to post-Shoah thought.[2] Job's pain and trauma is

staggering in its scope and simultaneously, its acuity. Soon after hearing of Job's suffering, his

friends come to attend to him. They see Job from a distance, and they barely recognize him. The

text says that as they approach him "they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes

and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven

nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great" (Job

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[2] A substantial amount of writing exists on the connections between *Job* and the Whirlwind in
correlation with post-Shoah discourse (see in particular Yael Lin's *Levinas Faces Biblical
Figures* 2014*, and *Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Literature (1999))*.

2:12-13). Job's friends acknowledge Job's extreme pain, and so they mourn alongside him, for a time: seven days and seven nights, a number symbolic of completion.[3] They allow time for silence, and perform the ritualistic activity of mourning with Job by tearing their own clothes and covering themselves in ashes just as Job had done. But as this time of mourning passes, Job's friends begin to speculate upon the cause of Job's suffering; they began to search for answers and justification for Job's unexpected suffering. What was the purpose of this painful tribulation? Why had it come?

The crux of the text reflects an intellectual wrestling match in which the friends debate the origins of Job's suffering by speculating, accusing, and arguing. Bildad, Elihu, Eliphaz, and Zophar take turns disputing Job's merits and transgressions, arguing about the utility that a suffering as severe as Job's could serve. Thirty-four of the 42 chapters in Job are dedicated to the arguments of Job's friends. Job is about attempts to theorize the suffering. These theories, or theodicies, show the human propensity to fit the ineffable into a comprehensible system for analysis. Each friend brings his own theory to the table for consideration. Their theorizations will be a focus of this chapter, and what I have denominated as a *logos of disaster*. I give this title, *logos of the disaster*, to the arguments given by the friends to highlight the rhetorical appeal to rationality, synthesis, and analysis seen in the dialogue; this is the project of the friends as they attempt to vocalize an argument to account for Job's suffering. My purpose for the chapter is to look at argumentation and the influence of argumentation and analysis seen in Job[4] as the text

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[3] The number 7 signals the idea of completion throughout the Old and New Testament in the *Bible*. In Genesis 1, the act of creation is completed in seven days. The command from Elisha to Naaman to wash in the Jordan seven times to be cured of Leprosy (2 Kings 5:10), and God command for the Israelites to march around Jericho for seven days, and on the seventh day blow seven horns (Joshua 6) in order to take over the city of Jericho.
[4] Many post-Shoah scholars reference *Job* as a seminal work important to discussions of language, religion, philosophy and rhetoric in the aftermath of the Holocaust. For this reason a close reading of the text is invaluable to the discourse of speaking and writing in the disaster. See

sets out to make even the most traumatic, ineffable events, into objects ready to be systematized and analyzed. The exercise of creating a theodicy is just one expression of that pursuit of rationality in the experience of extreme suffering, pain, or trauma, or what this project calls the disaster.

The arguments and debates of the friends work to reveal the purposes and meanings of suffering. What is revealed in their conclusions is a desire for conclusive explanations to make sense of the senselessness of Job's plight. Clambering for answers, they begin an investigation into Job's suffering in order to clarify, understand, and rationalize it. The friends pursue the *logos* of Job's disaster by running it through their understanding of the laws of cause and effect: Job must have transgressed in some way to bring about God's wrath. Their pursuit ultimately fails. It is that failure of argument and understanding through theodicy that will be the focus of this chapter. Ultimately the disaster, which has fallen upon Job, is beyond the proposals of philosophy and explanation. Theodicy fails in the face of disaster.

The arguments of the friends are not the only voices represented in *Job*. After Job and his friends tire from wrestling and reasoning, God comes in a whirlwind. The "Whirlwind Speech" in the book of *Job* serves as the breaking point that interrupts and disrupts all previously offered theories and explanations. It breaks with the assertions of the friends to offer a singularly simple but frustrating suggestion: Job's suffering is un-knowable. God emerges in the confusion and begins to narrate the ineffability and inexplicability of life. No answer is provided; no solution and no understanding are given. Instead, we find a complex and fantastical depiction of the infinite "otherness" of God and the bewildering nature of life.

in particular *Semeia* Journal, Volume 19; also *Out of the Whirlwind: a Reader of Holocaust Literature* for short stories and essays on the Holocaust which reference Job as an important correspondence in the discussion of suffering. Also see Levinas' *Entre-Nous Thinking of the Other* for specific references to Job and the act of theodicy (p.82).

The whirlwind moment interrupts the arguments that formed the *logos of disaster* built by Job's friends. The speech fractures the friends' *logos of disaster* at its foundation and leaves it lying in ruins, which only speaks to the inexplicability of disaster. The speech provides a break or opening to explore ineffability. In this chapter I use that space to investigate the ways in which disaster interrupts pursuits of understanding. Disaster leaves no room for theodicies that seek to fathom the unfathomable, so I examine the relationship between the implications of the *logos of disaster* alongside the significance of the disruptive whirlwind speech.

A *Logos of Disaster* and the Assertions of Theodicy

The *logos of disaster* in *Job* is relayed through a type of thinking which views language as a tool used to create meaning. This understanding of *logos* sees language as an arbiter clearing the path for thinking to work towards understanding. Through language one may communicate one's thoughts, written or spoken, and work towards comprehension and mastery. Philippe Nemo, in his considerations on *Job* argues that the friends' idea of justice and its relationship to suffering proceeds from "a morality of recompense and punishment, from a certain order of the world, one already technological" (*Job and the Excess of Evil* 174). Nemo explains that a technological order governs the thinking of Job's friends, and so their attempts at understanding his suffering ground themselves in cause and effect, this for that, payment and restitution. In fact, asks Nemo, "is not every attempt at theodicy a way of thinking God as the reality of the world?" (174). This "technological" conception of suffering suggests that language and knowledge— *logos* in other words—can promulgate. the world A vision of the world under the grasp of *technē* or technique sees only mastery, manipulation of that which is—an ultimate assertion of unassailable subjectivity. As the friends began their discussion of the calamities of Job, they could not imagine his suffering outside of the model of "cause and effect." The *logos of disaster*

pursued by the friends was based upon their predisposition towards a complete and coherent domination. This propensity denied a *logos* for Job's suffering outside of that closed order of thinking.

Bildad, Eliphaz, Zophar, and later Elihu, each create a theodicy in the text, which seeks to justify God's actions and providence in light of the presence of evil. The term "theodicy" originated with G.W. Leibniz (see his work on "théodicée"[5]), who sought to make sense of the problem of evil and the questions surrounding God's goodness in light of a hurting world.

Liebniz' premises founded themselves on the discourse of absolutes, that is, God's purpose will ultimately reveal itself as the resolution predetermining and instigating and unfolding his purposes in every case. God is an absolute in the resolution beyond all resolution; this is the rational value of theodicy. And yet, as I will later explain, the God of the whirlwind speech does not work in this way. Leibniz is particularly important to this discussion because he uses a technological approach[6] to theorize suffering. Under this technological approach, suffering is know-able, master-able. In light of extreme suffering, this type of thinking can be particularly problematic. It assumes that the world works in adherence to a certain order so that even pain and trauma are subject to explanation, accountability, and reason. It also assumes that language or logos is ruled by this same ordering and access to knowledge just requires the correct formulation of assertions. That framework is decidedly the same as language that is standing by, ready for use and to be on call for further utility in creating order (under the grasp of

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[5] Leibniz, G.W. *Theodicy.* Open Court Publishing Company, 1985.
[6] Heidegger posits that under the grasp of technology, Enframing acts as a challenging and setting upon posture towards seeing, thinking, and speaking, and it "banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering" (*QCT* 24-27). And how does it stand that this notion of "setting-upon," and "challenging-forth" is a negative turn in the expression of man? "Enframing is the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve (*QCT* 24).

technique). Modern society often voices these responses towards disaster, just as the characters

of Job did. Job's friends could not conclude their seven completed days of mourning un-settled

and un-resolved about his suffering; they needed more.

Attempts at Order through Theodicies

In what follows, I review several theodicy accounts attempted by Job's friends (these are

attempts at creating a *logos of disaster*). These accounts also manifest themselves in modern

societies, both secular and religious.

Retributive Justice

The first perspective presented to Job on the meaning of his suffering comes in the

dialogues between his three friends: Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad. The dialogues culminate in a

proclamation that his suffering must be a consequence of what I denominate: *retributive justice*.

It is in their dialogues that Job's friends try to justify the loss of Job's children; the collapse of

his livelihood through the seizure of his oxen, donkey, camels, and sheep; and the infliction of

sores that overtook Job's entire body.

At the beginning, the text makes it very clear that Satan went after Job specifically

because God attests to his blameless and upright nature, and as one who "fears God and turns

away from evil" (Job 1:8). So we are led to believe that Job's suffering is not tied to specific sin,

blame, or evil in Job's life. But despite Job's repeated testimony to his blamelessness, his friends

insist that he must have done something to incur such painful wrath. Scholars call this

association of pain and suffering as punishment for previous sin *retributive justice*.

Bildad's speech is reflective of this type of reasoning. He asks Job, after he insists that he

is innocent:

How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind? Does

God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children sinned against him, he delivered them into the power of their transgression. If you will seek God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place. Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.…Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water? While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish. (Job 8:2-13)

Bildad's account shows an insistence on creating a cause to justify the effect (Job's suffering). He argues that God is just and right, and so he only answers sins and transgressions with punishment. But, Bildad suggests that if Job "makes supplication" then he will be restored to the care and blessing of God. Bildad's suggestion makes the working of God out to be a simple equation of cause and effect. Bildad uses the subordinating conjunction "if" repetitively to set up the framework of cause and effect: if one does wrong, one gets punished, if on the other hand, one remembers God and implores God, he will forgive the sin and allow for blessing instead of punishment again. Then, Bildad defines the laws that he has seen govern nature through two questions: "Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water?" Nature follows a certain order in the cycle of growth and death, and therefore the events ordering human life must also follow that order. The implication of all of Bildad's suggestions is that God works within that order and not outside of it. Nemo explains that this type of thinking is based on a "mechanical view of God" or one that speaks to a view of God through the lens "of instrumentality" (*Excess of Evil* 52). He explains that in this mechanical view "God becomes the principal component, or motor, of a mechanism which can be described with a good degree of

precision" (52). From this perspective God works according to the laws of nature, where for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Eliphaz also reflects the same line of reasoning and order that Bildad suggests. He impels Job to consider: Who being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? (4:7). He explains that from all the wisdom he has obtained while on earth, he can only come to assume that "those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it" (4:8). Here, intensifiers, comparators, and correlatives mark Eliphaz's argument. He repeats the structure of the first clause in verse seven, "who being innocent has ever perished?" with the second clause: "Where were the upright destroyed?" The two questions reflect the same thought that the innocent do not get punished with suffering. This evaluation premises suffering as the result of discipline or retribution. His statement also uses comparisons to contrast "sow[ing] trouble" with "reap[ing] it." One act leads to another. This argument reflects Eliphaz's understanding of God's justice. Here, Eliphaz correlates the presence of evil with destruction and the presence of good with preservation. In this instance the narrator is evaluating, through the character of Eliphaz, the cause and effect relationship between evil actions and inciting punishment through pain. In this theodicy account, God's activity is predictable: when one transgresses the Law set forth by God, he should expect punishment as the natural response and reaction. Job's friends repeat this line of reasoning throughout the book as they attempt to account for the suffering of their friend within the framework of moral and natural law.

The framework of retributive justice stands as a very powerful narrative explaining the purposes of pain and suffering. Although Job stood as an individual figure and a Gentile, un-aligned with the collective body of the Israelites who held a covenantal relationship with God, his character in the book of Job operates as a significant figuration of individual retributive

justice. One may look more closely at the book of Deuteronomy, which presents associations of

punishment and blessing in line with obedience and defiance. The nature of its covenant

maintains a special relationship to God because "the Lord set his heart in love on [their]

ancestors alone and chose [them], their descendants after them, out of all peoples" (Deuteronomy

10:15). Moses was given the Law to establish and preserve that relationship between God and

between his peoples. They understood that "if [they would] only heed his every

commandment…loving the Lord your God, and serving him with all [their] heart and with all

[their] soul then he would give the rain to [their] land in its season." But they were warned to

take care against being "seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshiping them, for

then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens"

(Deuteronomy 11:13-17).[7]

In the Hebrew Bible, a break in the covenantal relationship with God results in

punishment or withdrawal of God's presence. Daniel Lasker writes that "The flood is visited

upon the inhabitants of the earth because of their wicked ways. Sodom and Gomorrah were

overturned because of the evil of their inhabitants, and the Temple was destroyed as a result of

Israel's turning away from God" (Lasker 98). The suffering of these various people is viewed

within the framework of retributive justice for their disobedience in turning to other gods and

idols. Punishment or suffering was figured in these cases as specifically attributable to the

disobedience in a cause and effect relationship indicative of the "mechanical" relationship

pointed to previously. The relationship between suffering and retribution is contained within the

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[7] How *Job* interacts with Deuteronomy is subject to some debate. See Joel Kaminsky's article
"Would You Impugn My justice? A Nuanced Approach to the Hebrew Bible's Theology of
Divine Recompense" (2015) for a review of recompense as it pertains to not only Job and
Deuteronomy, in addition to several other Old Testament books. For a closer look at justice as it
is described in Deuteronomy see J. Gordon McConville's "Retribution in Deuteronomy:
Theology and Ethics."

covenantal relationship in which the People of Israel stand in relationship to God with calibrated

consequences. Within the historical books of the Bible[8] we often see attributions being made

between disaster and Israel's defiance to God. Job is one of the premier examples pointing to

retribution from God as a cause of suffering.

Educative Theodicy

  The second response that rises to meet the question of Job's suffering in the text, comes

through the voice of Elihu. Elihu has a very contested role in the book of Job. He is not

introduced alongside the three other friends in Chapter 2, nor is he accounted for in the Epilogue

when God announces his judgment on the friends for their wrongful testament, as that they had

"not spoken of me what is right" (Job 42:7). Some argue that Elihu was put in by a later scribe[9]

in order to suggest another perspective on Job's suffering that the friends had not hypothesized.

Elihu's speech asserts, in contrast to the logic of the other three friends, that Job's suffering

served as a lesson or warning that could protect or teach him something that would help him in

the future. Some theologians call this *educative theodicy*. This explanation for suffering

maintains that "the sufferer gains a better understanding of his life through his personal

suffering" (*Theodicy in the Bible* xxxix). This view ascribes usefulness to the suffering, and even

in the midst of confusion about the pain, there is reason and purpose to it.

  The text introduces Elihu as a younger interlocutor who has been waiting in the

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[8] Historical books as viewed in the Old Testament include the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

[9] John Briggs Curtis, "Why were the Elihu speeches added to the book of Job?" *Proceedings* vol. 8*, 1988, pp. 93-99.*

J. Gerald Jazen, *Job, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.* Knox, 1985, pp. 217-218.

Samuel Terrien. *Job: Poet of Existence.* Bobbs-Merrill, 1957, pp. 189-90.

Larry J. Waters, "The Authenticity of the Elihu Speeches in Job 32-37" *Bibliotheca Sacra, vol.* 156, 1999, pp. 28-41.

background, listening to Job speak with Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar. The narrator differentiates

Elihu from the other friends by explaining that "Elihu had [been waiting] before speaking to Job"

which positions Elihu in a different light: he is younger, but he had also listened to the other

speeches and believed that he had something different to say. Elihu is set up as a voice which is

distinct and different from the repetitious arguments provided to Job thus far: that he must be

suffering because he did something wrong. This break in the narration takes on an evaluative

function by setting up Elihu's future monologue as potentially "better" than the previous ones.

In fact, Elihu's speeches do differ from the other friends. First, Elihu states that his words

are inspired by wisdom from God. He states, "I am young in years, and you are aged; therefore I

was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you…But truly it is the spirit in a mortal, the

breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding" (Job 32:6,8). Elihu makes a case for his

wisdom in spite of his age. The text narrator projects Elihu as a character with just as much

potential for wisdom, despite his age.

In the 33rd chapter of Job, Elihu explains that contrary to the others who "found no

answer" (32:3) for Job's suffering, he believed that

> God speaks in one way, and in two, though people do not perceive it. In a dream, in a
>
> vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on mortals, while they slumber on their beds,
>
> then he opens their ears, and terrifies them with warnings, that he may turn them aside
>
> from their deeds, and keep them from pride, to spare their souls from the Pit, their lives
>
> from traversing the River….God indeed does all these things, twice, three times, with
>
> mortals, to bring back their souls from the Pit, so that they may see the light of life. (Job
>
> 33:14-18, 29-30).

Elihu's speech provides a new evaluative correlative between suffering and preserving an

individual from an even greater tribulation. This formulation evaluates suffering through a different lens. This newly introduced view of suffering also signals to the audience that this perspective is not only a step up and away from previous reasoning (as dictated by Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar on suffering), it is a better perspective.

In his explanation, Elihu assumes that God intended Job's suffering to warn and to keep him from future trials. Elihu assigns an intentionality to Job's suffering that rises from God's premeditated design. Most commonly this perspective is voiced in contemporary western culture when people explain that a painful experience happened "for one's own good" or "part of a bigger plan." Suffering is situated in the context of divine providence to suggest that "all the unfortunate things that occur in the world have a larger purpose and will ultimately tend to the good, as guaranteed by God" (Van Hooft 15). This view holds the same conviction as retributive justice by finding that suffering has purpose, and it attempts to fit the suffering into a larger framework of understanding.

Twentieth century literary scholar, C.S. Lewis took up the presence of pain and suffering as an apologetic project and also worked within the tradition of western philosophy to set the activity of God within the logical and linear lines of reasoning. Lewis uses the example of the nature of wood in order to compare the laws of nature to the allowances of free will, which lead to pain and suffering in the world. He explains that because wood is naturally solid, it allows us to use to build and also to hit another on the head and cause harm. This permanent nature means that "when human beings fight, the victory ordinarily goes to those who have superior weapons, skill, and numbers, even if their cause is unjust" (*The Problem of Pain* 24). He refers to this attribute of wood through the laws of nature to explain that God could correct the natural state of wood every time that it was used for evil, but that world would be one in which wrong actions

were impossible and free will would be void" (24-25). Such a world would eliminate pain but consequently eliminate free will simultaneously. Lewis proposed suffering as an effect of this free will, and it is because of free will that sin was able to come into the world, and evil was allowed to rein and induce people towards violence, deception, and malevolence.

Lewis's accounts of pain and suffering reflect the belief in *educative theodicy* because he suggests that "tribulations cannot cease until God either sees us remade or sees that our remaking is now hopeless" (107). Lewis declares that he is in fact a "great coward" in the face of pain and he does not intend to argue that pain is not painful, but he does explain that "the Old Christian doctrine of being made 'perfect through suffering' is not incredible," although he does say that making pain palatable is beyond his design (105). In *Problem of Pain,* Lewis suggests that pain and suffering can help to decenter people from selfishness so that they are able to step into empathy for others in their pain. He speaks purpose for the state of pain by setting it as the tool which refines and goads towards compassion for others as a result of identification with pain and suffering.

Lewis' account of suffering provides an explanation for suffering in relation to purpose and use. He believed that providing explanations and provision for suffering could help aid in enduring or accepting pain. As Lewis said, he could not relieve individuals of the pain that came with tribulation, but he did attempt to respond to the "why" which inevitably visits all people in the midst of suffering. The "why" of suffering is what perpetually continues to instigate attempts at theodicy.[10]

Theodicies as Order

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[10] For a very different account of suffering by C.S. Lewis, turn to his later work, *A Grief Observed.* After the loss of his wife, Lewis abstains from the type of apologetic arguments that characterized his previous book. While he does not negate his earlier assertions, he focuses the majority of the text articulating the severity and disruptive nature of grief in the midst of extreme pain.

I empathize with Job and his friends. Finding understanding in the midst of disaster is appealing because we assume that it will alleviate the confusion, alienation, and disorientation that often accompany pain. Knowledge is touted as a panacea for so many ills, and it would seem that, for suffering, knowledge would follow in that same stead. Intrinsic to human experience is the pursuit of understanding, and the exercise of creating a theodicy is just one expression of that pursuit. Yet, we must keep in mind that there are inherent problems in the search for a theodicy. Theodicies assume order and certitude where there is often none. A *logos of disaster* created in a theodicy also assumes that language or *logos* is ruled by this same ordering and access to knowledge just requires the correct formulation of assertions. They clear all other ways of thinking by putting limits and bounds on that which is outside of finitude.

What is most notable in the book of *Job* amidst this focus of argumentation and analysis about the reason for Job's suffering is that readers of the book of *Job* are privy to that exact knowledge never shared with Job. The dramatic irony of the book is that in the Prologue of *Job*, readers find that in the heavenly realm, Satan (or "the accuser" as the text calls him)[11] approached God to challenge Him. Suspicious of Job's loyalty, Satan argues that the only reason for Job's faithfulness was his prosperity and good fortune. Job's affliction would truly test the scope of Job's dedication. God took the challenge and allowed Satan to test Job through the loss of his livelihood, family, and health. God does not prepare Job with any insight prior to his suffering. Job's friends spend the rest of the book theorizing their own prologues of theodicies, which would account for his tribulation. The reason for the disaster in *Job* is never revealed to its main victim; the answer to the lines of questioning remains elusive to the very end. A response

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[11] The New Oxford Annotated Bible provides a note about the name Satan which explains that "*Satan* is not yet the personal name of the devil, as in later Jewish and Christian literature. Rather the Hebrew (with the definite article) simple means 'the adversary' or 'the accuser', a reference to one of the members of the divine council who served as a sort of independent prosecutor" (pg. 728). See also Elaine Pagels' *The Origin of Satan*.

comes to Job, but does not provide insight, order, or clarity. Instead the response comes to Job as a rushing whirlwind, a storm.

The Mystery of Theodicy

The last account of suffering in Job rises to meet the "why" which implicitly comes with all experiences of pain and suffering, but it does so through very different means. The "whirlwind speech," or God's response to Job's imploration, does not address use, purpose, cause or effect when speaking about Job's circumstances. The whirlwind speech disorients the arguments of the friends and presents a new way of thinking and imagining. This perspective is actually not an account for suffering at all, instead I would describe it as a turn towards what Levinas calls "infinity," in the face of suffering. Some call this perspective the "Mystery of Theodicy" because it suggests that the human mind does not have the capacity to understand the workings of God and the purposes of suffering (*Theodicy in the Bible* xlviii). Whether this view is seen as an exploration of the infinite or the embrace of mystery, both readings take God's ultimate response, after he is tried through the arguments of Job and his friends, as a display of the limitless quality of God. Any attempt at trying to place the nature of suffering into philosophical, social, or theological schemata will ultimately fail because they are outside of human understanding.

Right before God appears in a whirlwind Elihu sets some of the groundwork helpful in recognizing the great separation that exists between God and humanity. Elihu adds a new view of God, his action, and his justice in light of suffering. Elihu explains to the friends that God is higher in knowledge and nature; he exclaims, "How great is God—beyond our understanding!" (Job 36:36). The greatness of God is not meant just as a proclamation of appreciation for God, but as a sign of awe at the wholly other distinctions of Him. Elihu turns the questioning away

from God and towards Job by interrogating Job's understanding of the vastness of God. He instructs Job to "stop and consider God's wonders" and then asks him: "Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:15-16). We will see this same pattern of questioning in the whirlwind speech, but it starts here with Elihu, the unlikely sage. Elihu finalizes his point by affirming that "The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power" (Job 37:23), and so the friends should reconsider their deliberations set on gaining understanding.

Finally God himself speaks. For thirty-six chapters the audience waits on God to respond and make known the reason behind Job's suffering. God's speech is introduced in a storm signaling power and the disruption that is about to emerge.[12] It appears as if God has been listening to the speeches between the friends. He begins, "Who is this that darkens my counsel?" (Job 38:2), and then orders Job to "Gird up your loins like a man" because it is he who will now be playing the role of interrogator. From the start it is Job and his friends who demand answers but now, God says, "I will question you, and you shall declare to me" (Job 38:3).

What follows is a series of repeated cycles of questions about God's power, domain, and sovereignty. He asks: "Where were you [Job] when I laid the earth's foundation?" and "Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?" (38:4-5). God is indignant towards Job and his friends, and so the whirlwind speech unfurls as a fantastical excursion into all corners of creation, passing over the rising and setting of the sun and the passing of time, along with the circular nature of life and the reproduction of plants and animals that fill the earth.

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[12] This is an example of a theophany – where God appears in a storm. See also Elijah's vision in 1 Kings 19: 11-13.

God's questioning continues for four chapters. His vexation comes out in acerbic questions and demands like "Where does the darkness reside…Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!" (38:19, 21) and "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" (40:2). This repeated indignation obliterates the lines of reasoning that had been built up by the previous speeches in the text. The repetition emphasizes God's displeasure at the inanity of Job and his friends. Here Job stands apart as God speaks to him directly. His speech displays a tone of displeasure but at the same time reflects the voice indicative of divine speech. The whirlwind speech forces the audience to re-evaluate all reasoning that had come before the whirlwind. The voice of God eclipses all other speeches by Bildad, Elihu, Eliphaz, and Zophar so that the audience comes to see that despite the friends' efforts at understanding, they did not know of what they were speaking.

The whirlwind speech speaks to the complete "Other-ness" of God. The speech establishes that His ways, thoughts, and being are non-integratable, incomprehensible, infinite, and not-totalizable. As Levinas writes, "God is, in a sense, the *other, par excellence*, the other as other, the absolutely other" ("Toward the Other" in *Nine Talmudic* 16).[13] An Other-ness is developed with each question demanded by God: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (38:4) and "Have you commanded the morning…and caused the dawn to know its place" (38:12) or "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail" (38:22) and "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?" (41:1). The expanse between Job and God grows to emphasize the finitude of humankind and the boundlessness of the Divine.

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[13] The text *Nine Talmudic Readings* is done in dialogue with the exegetical work of Martin Buber. See Buber's *On Judaism* for his discussions on how God and human beings address one another.

Throughout the last chapters, God lists all the things he has made, the work of his hands in creation, and his sovereignty in sustaining life on earth. He replies to the question about "how comes this suffering?" from Job with imagery of the expanses of creation. God's response in sum is: "You cannot understand my wisdom and all that goes on because you are not God." The repetition and the correlatives between God's creation and his power set this section of the text up as the closest thing that the Job will receive to an answer. The speech instead leaves us with a greater understanding of the Other-ness of God, with the mystery of Job's suffering still remaining.

Prior to the whirlwind speech, in the midst of Job's request for understanding of his sufferings, an interlude appears that halts the rounds of interrogatory questioning by the friends. The interlude acts as a brief reflection on the capacity and breadth of human understanding. The text explains that although one may look deep in the sea, through deep caverns holding precious minerals and jewels, and high above the earth amongst the birds of the air, wisdom is "hidden from the eyes of all the living" (Job 28:21). It is only God who understands the way to it. Then, *following* the whirlwind speech, Job responds to God by saying that he "uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3-5). He then repents for the intrepidity he showed in demanding that God answer for the cause and purposes of his suffering.

Wisdom: Where Shall It Be Found?

It is important to note the placement of *Job* among "The Books of Wisdom" within the Bible. It sits among other texts like *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes,* and *Song of Songs* in the Bible because, before being a book about suffering, it is contextualized to be a text focused on finding wisdom and understanding. The friends' deliberations are propelled by their thirst for understanding and their questioning consumes more than three-quarters of the text. The focus of

Job centers on attempts at answering an unknowable problem only to find out that their pursuit is futile; it is beyond the scope and finitude of their existence.

Job's friends approach his suffering with the assumption that understanding is theirs if only they deliberate. This approach reflects a contemporary philosophical assumption: that knowledge is ours for the taking. Yet, to ask for reasoning and rationale in the midst of suffering is to assume that there is a totalizable and comprehensive structure underlying human experience. Emmanuel Levinas takes significant umbrage with that assumption. He argues that "all intelligibility--and even the 'sense' of God--lays claim to knowledge, that intelligibility seeks in knowledge the support of a presence" ("Transcendence and Intelligibility" 150). The reason that we find reflections of the various types of theodicies in the book of *Job* also in contemporary culture is because Western Philosophy trains us within the same desires and expectations of the friends: that knowledge is at all times accessible and can be made present. Job's friends claim to know how God thinks and works. They claim an intelligibility and sense over him. Levinas argues that theodicies force order where there is no order and assertion where only perplexity exists. He explains that there is a philosophical, religious, and moral problem with theodicies. In light of the extremity of the Holocaust, the only certitude that Levinas announces is his assertion that justification of a neighbor's pain is "certainly the source of all immorality" (163). To create a unified narrative of another's extreme trauma only ignores the radical alterity of their pain**.**

Levinas critiques the "ego of knowledge" ("Transcendence and Intelligibility") that he observes in philosophy, and his work centers on uncovering how that egoism reveals itself. Then he challenges that egoism by pointing the places for which knowledge cannot account. He calls upon infinity to disrupt the finitude assumed in philosophy. He explains that there is, in fact, otherness present in all ways of thinking, being, and understanding. Otherness transcends and

breaks with the view of totality in thinking. This view sees otherness beyond all conceptualizations as the makeup of our very subjectivity.

Western philosophy blocks the presence of radical alterity. We have grown accustomed to a "philosophical tradition…[which] posits a unified structure of subjectivity that excludes genuine otherness" (Langenthal 36); instead of looking to the vast otherness of disaster, we look to theodicies. The disaster found in the Holocaust would come to challenge and disrupt that structure of philosophy. Levinas explains that across European philosophy "knowledge [is] esteemed as the very business of the human to which nothing remains absolutely other" ("Transcendence and Intelligibility" 153), and he draws out the implications of this mistaken assumption to create his beliefs about phenomenology and ontology. He suggests that we cannot fully know the infinity of existence through meditations on philosophical concepts, and, more importantly, we cannot fully know another. Levinas decries thinking which assumes no Other, no in-determinability, and satisfaction in resoluteness. Levinas' reference to the Other is a reference to the infinite and the non-integratable. The infinite is that which lies beyond being, or that which is knowable, delineable, synthesizable. We cannot fully imagine the extent of infinity; though we try to conceive of it, or make it come into Being, is to try and make have presence and concreteness that it will not allow us to have. It is beyond human comprehension. It does not fit within our framework of finite thinking because it lies beyond as a mystery, an alterity, an Other. In fact, it is the Other which is most vital in upending the egoism of knowledge because the "relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence, and leads us to a relation totally different from experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist" (*Totality and Infinity* 193). The attempt at a theodicy or a *logos of disaster* displays that same egoism. Attempting a *logos of disaster* spurns the great obscurity of pain, suffering, and trauma, trying to

fit it into a knowable rational object. Those attempts are exposed as the egotistical offspring of a philosophical lineage where all things are assumed knowable. Levinas writes that "since Kant, philosophy has been finitude without infinity" (36). The work of theodicy reflects this same objective by trying to provide rationalized explanation for suffering. Ultimately this way of thinking closes off indeterminacy from the experiences of pain and suffering.

Responsibility for the Other

In the friends' attempt to lay claim to knowledge over Job's suffering, they try to eliminate the otherness of Job, God, and suffering, but no explanation could account for the extreme pain of losing all of his children and then suffering under the excruciating bodily pain of boils. Job interrupts their suggestions with a strong dissension. He exclaims,

> Look, my eye has seen and […] my ear has heard and understood [your theories]. What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you. But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God. As for you [Job's friends], you whitewash with lies, all of you are worthless physicians. (Job 13:1-4)

Job cries out to be freed from the lies, accusations and speculations of those around him. He argues that although the friends claim to be adept "physicians" diagnosing his circumstances, they have no knowledge or wisdom over his suffering. It is beyond the scope of their understanding.

In his defiance towards his friends, Job defies their empty words of reason, instead he requests to speak with the Almighty God suggests his belief that God's alterity, his otherness than his friends, is the only access to knowledge of a suffering so outside of their limited knowledge. He suggests that the sameness between the friends disqualifies them from speaking to the scope and severity of his suffering. Their words are worthless as they are equals, privy to

the same reality as each other, without wisdom to see beyond their present. Much of the Job speeches show Job trying to reconstitute himself in the world after having all that he knew torn from under him. Job argues with them throughout the text in order to re-establish himself as different and apart from their conceptions and theories. Levinas writes that "the disaster awakens us to a transcendence or a reality infinitely distant from my own reality," (*Totality and Infinity* 41). It forces one to see a somewhat sens-ible "manifestation of the non-integratable, of the non-justifiable" (*Excess of Evil* 173). He explains that we are perpetually responsible, or consistently aware and impressed upon by the Other. This responsibility comes from the impression that the other is not "I." To attempt to make the other "I" or "me" or the same is to eliminate their infinite Otherness and force them into the same. Suffering and pain reside in the Otherness of experience and being and allude explanation. Attempts at reasoning in the disaster are doomed to failure because our words, or what Levinas calls "our text" does not resolve the problem of suffering because "the answer here would be indecent, as all theodicy probably is" (qtd in *Excess of Evil,* 187). His identification of theodicy as not only insufficient but indecent points to the failure he sees not only of reason within the field of philosophy but specifically ethics. To attempt theodicy is to misplace responsibility within suffering. Instead of speaking to the great alterity of the other and their suffering, theodicy attempts to cover over that suffering with explanation and reason. Levinas warns that humanity must not leave suffering to its own explanations, political or other. He asks, "Is humanity, in its indifference, going to abandon the world to useless suffering, leaving it to the political fatality—or the drifting—of the blind forces which inflict misfortune on the weak and conquered, and which spare the conquerors, whom the wicked must join?" ("Useless Suffering" 164). Instead Levinas asks,

> must not humanity now, in a faith more difficult than ever, in a faith without theodicy,

continue Sacred History; a history which now demands even more of the resources of the *self* in each one, and appeals to its suffering inspire by the suffering of the other person, to its compassion which is a non-useless suffering (or love), which is no longer suffered 'for nothing,' and which straightaway has a meaning? (164).

Levinas calls for an end to the theodicy, and instead argues for responsibility for the Other. "It is in the inter-human perspective of my responsibility for the other person, without concern for reciprocity, in my call to help him gratuitously, in the asymmetry of the relation of one to the other, that we have tried to analyze the phenomenon of useless suffering" ("Useless Suffering" 165). Levinas's main concern was not only to propose a new way of thinking about knowledge but also to advance new vision of an other, a neighbor, a self separate from the "I" which consumes and forms so much of our thinking. Philosophy and ethics were interchangeable, as they informed and gave purpose to each other.

Conclusion

Confusion and indeterminability in the face of the "why" of disaster serves as a breaking point for many who hold onto any hope of faith or belief. Levinas saw how that could happen. He wrote that Nietzsche had declared God's death, and the Holocaust only confirmed it. But, he said that for the Jew to give up Judaism as a result of their suffering during the Holocaust would only affirm the project of the Nazis, that to "renounce after Auschwitz this God absent from Auschwitz—no longer to assure the continuation of Israel—would amount to finishing the criminal enterprise of National-Socialism, which aimed at the annihilation of Israel and the forgetting of the ethical message of the Bible, which Judaism bears, and whose multi-millennial history is concretely prolonged by Israel's existence as a people" ("Useless Suffering" 163). Levinas encouraged the Jews to defy that total annihilation through a continued belief in the

teachings of Judaism. That act of defiance demonstrated the beyond being-ness of faith, God, and existence.

Levinas' discussion of a renunciation of God after Auschwitz suggests a skepticism about belief, trauma, and what one can do in confusion or pain. Why speak, why write, why participate in argumentation and philosophize, particularly in moments of extreme loss, pain or trauma? Why not remain silent? Job admits that he "uttered what [he] did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42). What does that imply about the activity of writing, thinking, speaking within a disaster? Should one abstain from reasoning through disaster, and instead simply reflect upon the otherness of their disaster?

Job presents a dilemma between the desire to provide an account for the experience of pain and the inexplicability of suffering. Job and his friends present a variety of attempts at theodicy by grounding his experiences of pain within the context of divine providence and goodness. They search for explanations to account for the suffering, and their search is fruitless.

Theodicy's objective is to provide a rationalized explanation in the midst of inexplicability. Ultimately this way of thinking closes off ineffability from experiences of pain and suffering. Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar attempt theodicy with their mechanical conceptualization of God and their dedication to the idea of retributive justice. Their speculations about God in Job's suffering show that they believed God only works within the systematic confines of cause and effect: Job must have sinned in order to cause his suffering. The friends' explanations result only in the total alienation of Job in his suffering.

Yet, at the end of the book God finally speaks, and in his speech come no answers. There is only excess, mystery, and otherness. No attention is paid to answering the question of why. The speech provides more openings than conclusions; it is ambiguous and refuses to follow the

line of reasoning that constrains the other speeches in the book. The *logos of disaster* presented by the friends is challenged by the non-integratability of the whirlwind speech which upends their arguments. Trauma and suffering interrupt the pursuit of understanding because extreme suffering leaves no room for theodicies that seek to fathom the unfathomable. The whirlwind speech contrasts with all other expressions from the friends because of their emphasis on the "mechanical view of God" and the association that the characters have about the sovereignty of God.

This review of *logos* is meant to illuminate and expose a *logos of disaster* built into the text of Job and the ways in which those arguments fall short and fail to recognize the complete other-ness that is God, Job, and the extreme severity of Job's suffering. The arguments made in this text are indicative of commonly held views on the causes and purposes of suffering, and these same ideas continue to define much of modern day thought on suffering as well. The *logos* of the theodicies in *Job* work on behalf of integrat-ability and finitude. Levinas proposes a new vision of logos, one in which

> The original function of speech consists not in designating an object in order to communicate with the other in a game with no consequences but in assuming toward someone a responsibility on behalf of someone else. To speak is to engage the interests of men. Responsibility would be the essence of language" ("Toward the Other" 21).

Any attempt at understanding and conceptualization can display a drive to dominate difference through sameness, making genuine transcendence impossible. Ultimately the disaster, which has fallen upon Job, is beyond the proposals of philosophy and explanation. Theodicy fails in the face of disaster.

After the Disaster, Disrupting Writing and Philosophy

"May words cease to be arms; means of action, means of salvation.
Let us count, rather, on disarray."
–Maurice Blanchot, *Writing of the Disaster*

After a lifetime dedicated to writing, Elie Wiesel describes his ambivalent perspective on the potentiality of language. In his book, *A Jew Today*, Wiesel describes a request to participate in the creation of the Holocaust museum in Washington D.C. He writes that he knew "the role of the survivor was to testify. Only I did not know how… [one describes] the indescribable?" (15). Wiesel struggled to reconcile his full faith and simultaneous skepticism in the promises of the written word. He asks, in writing about the Holocaust as a disaster, "How does one use restraint in recreating the fall of mankind and the eclipse of the gods? And, then, how can one be sure that the words, once uttered, will not betray, distort the message they bear?" (15). Wiesel finds a very clear purpose in writing yet remains doubtful about the extent to which he is able to achieve that purpose. There is a reverence towards writing in Wiesel's work; he assumes that the potentiality of the written word is the ability to bring things before the eyes, yet he acknowledges its shortcomings all the while.

Through the course of this chapter I investigate the troubling question about how the disaster disrupts the supposed capability of language. I present Plato's founding philosophical arguments alongside some of the most prominent phenomenological (Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Maurice Blanchot) and structural and post-structural (Saussure, Derrida, and Barthes) critiques of language. In light of these theories, I consider how the disaster influences and disrupts the foundational theories of rhetoric. In the following pages I investigate how the disaster reveals fractures in expectations put upon the act and the potentiality of writing.

Wiesel speaks of the impossibility of "recreating the fall of mankind and the eclipse of

the gods," (*A Jew Today* 15) marking the space in which the disaster revealed the fracture between his expectations of writing and the capacity of language. He recollects on his attempt to "transmit" all that he "received from my masters, present and gone," (*Open Heart* 42) in his writing; although he tries—"Involuntarily, unwittingly, my experience of what some among us so poorly call the Shoah, or Holocaust, slipped in, here and there, between the lines, into the silences that surround a text. Just as I inevitably situate my novels in the shadow of invisible flames. But have I been prudent enough?" (42). Wiesel's use of the words "prudent" and "transmit" suggest that there is a disciplined and bridled approach that will allow him to speak his experience into being for his reader. There is a potential for him to affirm in print and word what it is that he experienced, if he only works at it. This potential suggests that there may be a veracity and accuracy that can be spoken into testimony,[14] allowing for the truth to be told. There is a burden of proof present in these sentiments by Wiesel: it is the suggestion that a testimony of suffering can speak to and against suffering. But, the disaster unveils the fissures in linguistic imaginings and forces us to consider new propositions for the potentiality of language.

The Holocaust disrupted the ability to think and write about the disastrous event; in fact, thinking and writing would never be the same. Western philosophy as it was known in the 20th century, forever changed. Therefore, Blanchot asserts that the Holocaust was

> the absolute event of history—which is a date in history—that utter-burn where all
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> history took fire, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up, where the gift,
>
> which knows nothing of forgiving or of consent, shattered without giving place to
>
> anything that can be affirmed, that can be denied. (*Writing of the Disaster* 47)

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[14] Of course, Wiesel is not alone in his questioning of the power of testimony and witness. See also the work of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: *A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Michael Bernard-Donals' *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* and *Witnessing the Disaster: Essays on Representation and the Holocaust*, James Young's *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* to name a few.

and later asks, "How can it be preserved, even by thought?" (47). Levinas too would claim that

Auschwitz signaled a "break with the normal and normative, with order, with synthesis" and the

suffering of that cataclysmic moment showed that "Suffering qua suffering is but a concrete and

quasi-sensible manifestation of the non-integratable, the non-justifiable. The quality of evil is

this very non-integratability" ("Transcendence and Evil" 180). And most famously, Theodor

Adorno would proclaim that "There can be no poetry after Auschwitz"[15] (*Cultural Criticism and*

Society 34).

One initial note to make at the outset is that although the Holocaust served as the

catalyzing event informing Levinas and Blanchot's critical work, the importance and scope of

their thought goes beyond the horizon of that event. The theoretical proposals presented by

Levinas and Blanchot speak to the larger implications of disaster for writing and philosophy at

large; therefore, my investigation does not concentrate on the Holocaust as its primary focus in

the discussion of disaster. But it does acknowledge the Holocaust at the turning point, which

forced so many epistemological, theological, and rhetorical conceptions to be re-evaluated. I turn

to the Shoah as a disaster that significantly exposed the failure of subjectivity as it pertains to

writing and philosophy, and so it is important to address it within the parameters of this chapter.

Additionally my research points to many of the same assertions proposed by Blanchot and

Levinas, but my research does not look at the limits or finitude of memory, in the disaster, as

others do.[16] Instead, through this chapter I focus more specifically on how the ineffable and in-

describable challenge the limit of writing and philosophy toward a proposal of new thought on

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[15] Some note that the actual translation of the quote is "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" or "No lyric poetry after Auschwitz."

[16] For more extensive work on the Holocaust, memory, writing and the disaster see the research and writing of Michael Bernard-Donals (specifically *Between Witness and Testimony: the Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (2001), "The Rhetoric of Disaster and the Imperative of Writing, (2003), *Essays on Representation and the Holocaust* (2004)). His research has added much to the discussion of writing and memory and their limits in the wake of disaster.

rhetoric post-disaster.

The Expectation of "Presence" by Plato and Heidegger

Representation lies at the heart of much of Wiesel's questions concerning the potentiality of language. Is pure representation possible? How is it achieved? Because representation lies at the heart of his questioning, and those of this project, we should turn to those original discussions concerning representation and the act of writing. Plato began the conversation of representation in the *Republic* with Socrates' discussion of the contrast between "creating appearances" and not "actual real things" (596e). Socrates describes three different beds, one made by a "divine craftsman, one by a "joiner," and one by a "painter." He asserts that only God "produced the one real bed" (597c). The other two are only "representers," a title reserved for "someone who deals with things which are, in fact, two generations away from reality" (597e). In Socrates' estimation, the representer's work can only ever deal with appearance and not truth, and they are a considerable distance apart. Socrates argues that an image-maker, or a representer, may understand "only appearance, while reality is beyond him" (601b-c). It is the delineation of what is "beyond him" that proves to be most important in this discussion of writing and its limits.

Eric Havelock provides an important reading[17] of Plato's *Republic* by pointing to the significant shift in thought that was made available with the advent of writing. Literacy is what made the critical/analytical perspective possible; this contrasted significantly to pre-literate discourse and forms of thought, as a rhetor could not inquire into specific passages or lines in an argument. Havelock directs us to see Plato's arguments in the *Republic* about critical thinking as separate from the passivity and submissiveness of the spell of poetry that he saw in Greek culture at that time. Havelock suggests that Plato associated the poet with "the representer," and believed that his poetry portrayed that which was not good or true and would only serve to corrupt the

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[17] See Havelock's *Preface to Plato.*

minds of the Greek people. Critical thinking is the panacea for false realities, appearances, and that which only seems to be, but isn't really. It allowed a person to reflect upon the word as separate from himself or herself. In critical thinking philosophers are able to ask questions and weigh whether statements are in fact true. According to Havelock, Plato's aim was to criticize the lack of analysis that came in the absorption of the words and experiences that the poets of the oral tradition provided. But, with the advent of the written word came higher, conceptual thinking that Plato associated with the work of the "philosopher." That conceptual type of thinking could allow them to think on that which was "beyond him," that is, the ability to communicate thoughts and ideas.[18]

Of the many arguments found in Plato's writing, one of the most significant was the division of the true from that which only "seemed" or "appeared." It is the dichotomy between "seeming" versus "being" which founds the model of language as a correspondence between thought and word. Plato's discussions of "seeming" and "being" was appropriated by neo-Platonists to argue that that which "seems" is base and destructive because it is empty, fading, changing, and not real or true. In contrast, "being" (the abstract or conceptual) was then propped up as better than the material and physical things that only appear because those concepts do not change or fade and correspond with thought. It is this oppositional principle which set up the idea of the ideal forms, and what would later be read, in metaphysical thought, as the possibility for referents to which all thought referred. Language as correspondence to referents then became the model derived from Plato's philosophy on language. Words were seen as having potential access to thoughts, and thereby had the potentiality to portray or represent thought, the very question that Wiesel considered in the later stages of his writing: is language the representation

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[18] See the work of Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* for more on this perspective on critical thinking and epic poetry.

of thought? Can my writing represent my testimony?

In the 20th century Heidegger questioned Western metaphysics because of its roots in the neo-Platonic principle which propogated the correspondence theory of truth. Heidegger challenged that theory through an etymological study of technology and its rooted origin in the terms *technē, alētheia,*and *poiēsis.* Heidegger interrogated the idea of language/truth as correspondence and language/truth as un-concealing, showing, revealing, and he came to argue that our modern era is dominated by a new definition of technology as it relates to *technē* and language as it relates to *logos* and *alētheia.* Heidegger writes that Western metaphysics separated us from the original understanding of the Ancient Greeks where the arts "brought the presence [*Gegenwart*] of the gods, brought the dialogue of divine and human destinings, to radiance. And art was simply called *technē.* It was a single, manifold revealing. It was pious, *promos,* i.e., yielding to the holding-sway and the safekeeping of truth" (*Question Concerning Technology* 34). As a result of the technical tyranny dominating our world, we are both separated from, and ignorant of, the original notion of *technē* and the conception of revealing truth (*alētheia*) that originally connected the Dasein to "Being," and truth.

The modern world is also separated now from an understanding of truth as understood in *technē* and *logos.* Today our understanding of technology as a "tool" or "means" is substantially different from the original understanding of *technē,* as a "revealing" or "unconcealing," (*QCT* 12). Additionally "the Greek understanding of *logos* was not oriented to the words we say in discursive interaction, but rather the meaningful world that is capable of being talked about linguistically" (Wrathall 131). And for Heidegger language "uncovers" being. He notes that there are moments that fall outside the scope of language; in fact, those moments which are most essential to the structure of *Dasein* (translated from the German as "being"): namely, death and

the nothing. For Heidegger there is an ontological difference between Beings and being; they are two fundamentally different things. Big B Being is the nothing. Nothingness is what frames being. What brings a being into presence, is that it ends; there is nothingness around it. Therefore, nothing empowers "big B" Being, but is in fact not being. Being is what presences, but itself is not present. The nothingness to which all things are moving is Dasein. Language is the realm of being. We have a way of conceptualizing things because of language.

The unity in the structure of language points to the nothing, the big "B" Being that presences, but is not itself present. We find elements of Heideggar's expectation in the common supposition that language's significance and purpose has been to make present. We suspect that discourse hold the promise of unity (a remnant of "Being"), and that unity will become known through the "presencing" possible through language—what Wiesel referred to in questioning his writing's ability to "recreat[e] the fall of mankind and the eclipse of the gods." Towards the end of his work Heidegger took to striking out Being (putting it under the sign of erasure) to demonstrate how language can never disclose Being (it is impossible to speak of nothing). What it can do, however, is presence beings. It is in fact the origin of all that is as that which separates and defines beings. For Heidegger there is no big "B" Being, as the Being of beings is the nothing. Hence the "disaster" which demarcates all beings is their dissolution. The nothing that Heidegger points to is where we can take up the discussion of the disaster, and that which is not itself present.

Blanchot and Levinas find the "presenc-ing" of language, argued by Heidegger, to be specifically problematic. In their estimation, it is in the disaster that language struggles to make present and is destabilized, opening up a greater view of the ineffable, unbounded essence of suffering. They do not altogether disagree with Heidegger on the capability of language to

presence; instead, what they're troubled by is precisely what language does and how disaster troubles that. For example, if we were to think of the ways in which we use language after a trauma to make sense of the world and ourselves again, we may picture an open wound that we are attempting to heal and cover. We wrap the wound in "language" in an attempt to close the wound over again and to create a coherent whole again. But, this is for Levinas precisely to privilege the synchronic again, hence his suspicion of rhetoric and narrative. It is an attempt to make an ineffability into a knowable object, which is an attempt at the impossible, but also an attempt which debases the full otherness of that ineffability.

Levinas's Expectations of Language

Levinas following Heidegger, would argue that language, as the house of being, is precisely the place where potential totalization happens: that presumption of wholeness makes all difference into the same. Levinas fears language's ability to be used to recreate a totality, and hence his impulse to remain silent, or to allow the "saying" to take precedence over the "said." Levinas writes that the history of philosophy "can be interpreted as an attempt at universal synthesis, a reduction of all experience of all that is reasonable, to a totality wherein consciousness embraces the world, leaves nothing other outside of itself, and thus becomes absolute thought" (*Ethics and Infinity* 75). And for Levinas this bent towards a universal sameness is an evil because it extinguishes subjectivity under the power of totality.

Levinas sees a profound danger in language: the temptation to cover over and hide the trauma again. In making space for the alterity undeniable in the disaster, the Other is introduced. The Other is not recognized just for alterity's sake, or just to challenge the idea of Being and presence. Levinas makes the Other the focus of his writing because for him, ethics was in fact the ground – the condition for the possibility of thought. Moreover, it is a ground which

perpetually disrupts and disturbs what it is established upon it—hence, the incomplete-able of the project of language and reason. The Other is infinity and alterity. He explains that "The face [of the Other] is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched—for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content" (*Totality and Infinity* 194). The face rebuts the calls for a neatly organized order. A face is both the presenc-ing of an Other, and it refuses comprehension or limit and "remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us" (*TI* 194). The suffering of the Other announces itself through the face because the face is that otherness which bears witness to the singularity of a person, much like a fingerprint. The face is an encapsulation of the otherness of that person; it is a metaphor for the concrete expression of any singular human. Otherness announces itself in the face and in disaster, but Levinas warns of language's attempts to cover over the face and to deny the alterity of the other.

"The face of the Other" was most important to the philosophy of Levinas because of the extreme danger he said could come through making the same from the Other. The principle of infinity was meant to combat the power of "the Same" which dominated the history of the metaphysics of the West. In a rare insight into Levinas' experience in a prisoner of war camp, he finishes a chapter text with a short narrative where he describes the way in which the camp dehumanized the Jews. He, along with other prisoners of war, were considered to be "subhuman, a gang of apes"; who, after a hard day's labor, would march back to the barracks, their "coming and goings, sorrow and laughter, illnesses and distractions" passed as if "in parenthesis" ("The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights" 153). But one day, after returning from their work, a dog

appeared, barking and jumping in recognition of their group. Levinas acknowledged the dog as the "last remaining Kantian in Nazi Germany without a brain to universalize" ("The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights" 153). The picture of the dog leaping for joy in expectation of the men's return speaks to the crux of Levinas' arguments about the Other, responsibility, and totality and infinity. The Nazis had taken all alterity from each Jew in order to allow for their dehumanization and extermination. The universalized ontology of the German Nationalist party allowed for them to erase the "Other-ness" of each Jewish man and woman and so turn them into a sub-human "gang of apes." Levinasian philosophy may all be read in light of an argument for responsibility, for the Other, and for an unwavering reverence for the infinite alterity of the other. The reverence for the alterity of the Other challenges the thinking which could lead to an ontology capable of exterminating the individuality and humanity of an entire people.

The attention to the Other was the principle driving Levinas' challenge to the established philosophies on language, epistemology, and ontology. He re-defines language as that which "engages the interests of men," or the Other. Responsibility, is Levinas' call to "care" for others, but it is not care in the sense of help or aid, but instead, an attention to the extreme difference or "disproportion between the Other and the self" which provided a moral consciousness. In "Toward the Other" he writes that

> the original function of speech consists not in designating an object in order to communicate with the other in a game with no consequences but in assuming toward someone a responsibility on behalf of someone else. To speak is to engage the interests of men. Responsibility would be the essence of language. (21)

The potentiality of that moral consciousness was incalculable for Levinas. He argued that attention to the Other "can be affirmed as the very bond of human subjectivity, even to the point

of being raised to a supreme ethical principle—the only which it is not possible to contest—a principle which can go so far as to command the hopes and practical discipline of vast human groups" ("Useless Suffering" 159). Reasoning and discourse in a living being "is therefore not the unfolding of a prefabricated internal logic, but the constitution of truth in a struggle between thinkers, with all the risks of freedom"(*TI* 73). In *Totality and Infinity* his ethics of language continues: "Language does not refer to the generality of concepts, but lays the foundations for a possession in common. The world in discourse is no longer what it is in separation, in the being at home with oneself where everything is given to me; it is what I give: the communicable, the thought, the universal" (76). Power in language emerges from a more primal source: namely the Other. Speech is not a singular act communicating the thoughts of one person's mind. And yet, it can be used this way. Often one speaks for oneself, precisely as a way of covering over, silencing, and murdering the other. And therein lies its potential for harm. For example to have a child is to become responsible for them—that is an ethical demand. But becoming a parent doesn't mean that the parent will use that responsibility well. They could very well abuse that responsibility and do harm. Likewise, language is a mode of responsibility for the other (literally the ability to respond to the Other), but that does not mean that it is always used responsibly.

The possibility of language being used irresponsibly belongs to the fact that language, for Levinas, is still situated within the realm of being. Language is dangerous because language has the power to totalize, to reduce back into being. Trauma and the disaster exceeds language and signals the alterity of the Other, but there is a violent potential in language to reduce that alterity of the trauma and suffering, and so Levinas warns that it is better to not speak, better to listen. Traditional philosophy assigned "supra sensible perspectives" to suffering. It would try to assign meaning to disaster in light of a "plan for the whole" or compensation or recompense at the end

of time," but Levinas explained that that could not happen. The disaster, in its essence, is "gratuitous and absurd" absent of a "signification and order" ("Useless Suffering" 161). The work of theodicy, mentioned in the earlier chapter on Job, takes up this type of work, the defense of meaning, significance, logic, but the disaster escapes it. The deep-seated desire to make order where there is chaos and a proper representation where this is only a seeming shadow of appearance reflects the legacy of the ideas originated in early Western philosophy.

At Auschwitz, the disproportion between suffering and theodicy was established "with a glaring, obvious clarity" (162). The Holocaust revealed in its very "quiddity" the inability to explain and understand. It rendered "impossible" proposals and thoughts aimed at providing an account. The disaster obstructs the project of justification. He explains that "It is in the inter-human perspective of *my* responsibility for the other person, without concern for reciprocity, in my call to help him gratuitously, in the asymmetry of the relation of *one* to the *other,* that we have tried to analyze the phenomenon of useless suffering" ("Useless" 165). Levinas' writing calls for a constant attention to the asymmetry of the Other in any assessment of the suffering of another individual. In the same way, writing is not a singular endeavor, but a communal act, always meant for an-other. And so the nature of disaster *demands* that we must respond, transmit, and overcome the limits of language in the name of "respons-ibility" for the other.

To try and compile meaning and a completed narrative framework to something as atrocious, evil, and devastating as the Shoah is to deny the Other and to deny the infinite as it exists in all and everything. This is not only an improper conception of our being in the world, it is ethically wrong. It silences the other by forcing it into the limits set by the "I." This silencing acts as just another form of evil as Levinas would see it. And he would find the attempt to put meaning to pain and suffering as not only futile but against the very nature of pain and suffering.

Auschwitz is not describable in the framework of understanding, presence, and totality, and it should not be. Which is precisely why it is ethical here not to speak, but merely to witness. And yet—one must speak—but speak without hope of saying it all.

The Holocaust, as a disaster, instructed Levinas' perspective on the extreme paucity and perilousness of philosophy centered on closed, unified, totalizable truth. Infinity stood as a direct challenge to totality as "Infinity is produced by withstanding the invasion of a totality, in a contraction that leaves a place for the separated being" (*Totality and Infinity* 104). He argued that infinity could open "the order of the Good. It is an order that does not contradict, but goes beyond the rules of formal logic" (104), rules which characterized so much of Western philosophy which was complicit to the thinking which fostered the rise of Nazism. Levinas explains that he has attempted a "phenomenology of sociality based on the face of the other" as the basis of his work.

Levinas held the Jewish faith in high esteem, writing several texts discussing the hermeneutic consequences and implications of the Torah for ethics and philosophy at large. In one such text, *A Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, Levinas pauses to ask, "What does Jewish thinking concern itself with? A whole host of things….But its basic message consists in bringing the meaning of each and every experience back to the ethical relation between men" (*Difficult Freedom* 159). It is attention "to others and, consequently, the possibility of counting myself among them, of judging myself" which defined his philosophy. Levinas did not write as a reprimand, but a call reminding himself and his audience of the imperative of responsibility.

Blanchot's Expectations of Language

What is at stake for attempting to provide an account for that which is ineffable and non-totalizable? Maurice Blanchot points to the collapse of representation that presented itself in the

Holocaust. Blanchot would theorize about the impossibility of writing of pain and suffering in disaster (famously in the text *Writing of the Disaster*), but unlike Levinas, he would argue that trauma's resistance to representation by language is revealed precisely in its incapacity to get at the root of experiences in the disaster. Blanchot concurred with Levinas in finding that language can be used powerfully towards the possibility of good and bad, but he differed from Levinas in thinking that language totalizes experiences. Blanchot believed that it is only in poetry or the figure of the fragment that the disaster can be expressed because language stutters. The idea of the concept and the proposition, the assertion, and the statement, which form the foundation of philosophy, are left bereft in the wake of the disaster.

According to Blanchot language is characterized most prominently by its inabilities. Levinas maintains that some things escape descriptions, and we have to bear witness, but Blanchot explains that language can never cover over description of suffering or disaster because language is never complete. Blanchot impels us to keep writing, keep talking, but remember, that we can never recover agency, because we as writers are subject to language, and therefore subject to the impossible passivity of language.

Through the theory of the disaster the inherent nature of writing is revealed. Blanchot believed that disaster impoverished meaning and withdrew "from experience all authenticity; it keeps its vigil only when night watches without watching over anything" (*Writing of the Disaster* 51). It is the ultimate testament to the incapacity of language to represent and present. Disaster meets both "presence" and "limit" to frustrate and disrupt them. After the disaster of the Shoah: "movement of Meaning was swallowed up" and "shattered without giving place to anything that can be affirmed" (*Writing of the Disaster* 47). Thought, which for so long was perceived to be whole, fixed, and unified, was "shattered" and "swallowed up" into silence in the event of

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disaster and suffering. Because of the disaster, the character of writing as that which "seems to be concerned only with itself—which is without identity—and, little by little, opens up entirely other possibilities: a nameless, wayward, deferred and dispersed way of being-in-relation," (*The Infinite Conversation* 360) is revealed. Because of the disaster, Blanchot is able to explain how

> Writing is not accomplished in the present, nor does it present, nor does it present itself: still less does it represent, except to play with the repetitive that introduces into the game the temporally ungraspable anteriority of the beginning again in relation to any power to begin, as if the re-present, without anticipating a presence yet to come" (*Step Not Beyond* 32).

Blanchot explains that the marks or words left in writing are not the presence of the author, but instead are "cut off from that of which they would be the traces, having no other being than their plurality, as if there were not *a* trace, but traces, never the same and always repeated" (54). The marks are deflections with no stable ground. There is no revealing or un-concealing in words.

Disaster, is that unknown, the one that refuses to be understood, an "alien to naming" (*Writing of the Disaster* 47). The experience of extreme pain and suffering presents breaks with the promise and relief that could come from unity and understanding to that which cannot be spoken or explained. Blanchot explains that in the wake of the Holocaust, people read books on Auschwitz, and the "wish of all, in the camps, the last wish" was to "know what has happened, [to] not forget" but "at the same time never will [we] know" (82). It is that way for the disaster. It escapes a totalizing conception of language that privileges fixity and unity. It reveals the "Other"-ness of suffering and pain by its inability to be integrated into a framework, making it comprehensible.

For Blanchot the Holocaust marked a time of fragmentation, ruin, failure, and emptiness.

It exposed the excesses of evil—a nod to the ideas laid out by Levinas—which cannot be described or inscribed in writing. It cannot be represented through the frailty and emptiness of words. Blanchot suggests that one must avoid words like "signifier," "symbolic," "text," "textual" and then "being," and then "all words," a bold and perplexing claim.[19] But Blanchot argues this because words cannot be "constituted as a totality," and therefore words are not things that could be "captured by a subtracting operation; it is irreducible by reduction" (*Writing in the Disaster* 87). Blanchot says that the feeling of the need to think coherently or to unify our knowledge is simply a reminder of "ordinary standard of unity" (*Writing in the Disaster* 140*),* which dominates our thinking. It is "a circle eternally bereft of the center" (*Writing of the Disaster* 41*).* For Blanchot, there was an irreducibility which could not be contained within the parameters of writing and thought, as the fields of epistemology and linguistics and philosophy had thought. The limits of writing bring the sentiments of Blanchot together with the voice of Socrates in the *Phaedrus.* Socrates notes that "writing cannot bring the object of knowledge to the reader, any more than the lover can bring about the perfection of the soul. But writing does *remind* the reader of it, but does not represent the object" (77). Like Socrates, Blanchot believed that writing is not a matter of allowing what is beyond being or totality to arrive. The failure of writing to cover over the wound is precisely the way in which totality is resisted. The disaster thwarts that arrival from every surfacing or coming into appearance.

Fascination and play are important to Blanchot's imaginings about writing, because they usher in alterity and infinity instead of totalization. Blanchot redefines writing by arguing that "To write is to let fascination rule language. It is to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular figure, becomes an allusion to that which is without figure" (31).

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[19] *Writing in the Disaster* 87

Here Blanchot proposes that the "thing becomes image again." Writing has no figure, and as such, it is the basis of a new proposal where the Other overshadows Being. This new imagining of writing brings the figure-less to the forefront, a move towards alterity. Blanchot's theory here contrasts the "ideal forms" and the theories of representation that were speculated upon from Plato's *Republic.* He leaves us with places of absence in discussions of philosophy and writing, unable to touch things or access them. Similarly, in the presence of the disaster there is only otherness and excess, which does not provide for understanding and comprehension, because otherness goes beyond the totalizable project of comprehension. This is a turn away from the particularity of writing as representation. There is a disruptive power in disaster which frustrates the foundational expectations of writing by obstructing the capability and potential to speak and explain in the aftermath of suffering. In the wake of those frustrations, we are left with the absence and play that Blanchot calls out.

So how did Blanchot continue to write in the disaster while simultaneously philosophizing on writing in this way? The limit of writing brought Blanchot to the fragment. In *Writing in the Disaster* Blanchot interlaces fragments with enjambed lines and breaks in space on the page to bring the claims of his writing to bear on the formulation of it. Fragments guide Blanchot's writing because fragmentation best reflects Blanchot's belief that words and signs do not build but instead refract and deflect meaning. Blanchot used the fragment to show how writing refers to nothing and has no referent. Fragments demonstrate that there is no whole but only separation and isolation. Fragmentation allows Blanchot to stylistically approach alterity in writing because the fragment reflects that which is incomplete and left over. The fragment "refers to nothing and has no proper reference, nevertheless attesting to it, pieces that do not compose themselves, are not part of any whole, except to make fragmentary, not separated or

isolated, always, on the contrary, effects of separation, separation always separated" (*The Step Not Beyond* 49). The disaster is best expressed through fragment because as Blanchot suggests "the 'disaster,' [is] a rip forever ripping apart" (75). Fragments best portray the disarray that disaster brings and exposes simultaneously. Language doesn't bear witness but language falls into the infinite power of the good, precisely because it can't finish. Language cannot cover over because language is never complete, it refuses completion and exposes alterity and otherness just as the disaster refuses theodicy and refuses representation. Our language in writing is always a testimony to our passivity.

The Structuralists' and Post-Structuralists' Expectation of Meaning in Writing

Just as we have come to see in the work of Heidegger, Levinas, and Blanchot, the questions about the limits and power of language to express were not new to Wiesel. This problem had been put forward in phenomenological terms through the thinkers previously mentioned, and it would continue to be theorized in the linguistic movements of Structuralism and Post-Structurlism. As Western philosophy evolved in the 20th century, Structuralism[20] and Post-Structuralism,[21] as seen in the work of theorists like Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, would redefine language against the notion that words and grammar represent reality. Structuralism would redefine language as a self-referential system of signification that differentiates between concepts. People do not master and use language to refer to the world. Meaning is constructed and not found in a work of art or writing; furthermore, any piece of writing, or signifying system, has no origin; instead authors simply assume pre-existing structures, or "*langue*," that then enables them to create a text, or "*parole.*" Structuralists sought to undo previous representational, correspondence theories founded previously in the work of

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[20] Also see the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, and Gérard Genette
[21] Also see the work of Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and Jürgen Habermas

Plato. Then, as many Structuralists evolved their ideas into what we now know as Post-structuralism, theorists like Ferdinand de Saussure posited that signs do not represent pure and absolute forms. Instead, signs are given the ability to say various things based on their positions in relation to other signs in a larger system. This system is what allows words to have meaning.

These theorists do not specifically address trauma, suffering, and the disaster in the same manner that Blanchot and Levinas do, but their work on meaning and the limits and power of language speaks to the same question about transmission that Wiesel posed about the uncertainty of knowing how or if words, "once uttered, will not betray, distort the message they bear" (*A Jew Today* 15)? The work of Structuralists and Post-Structuralists exposes how language resists and defies transmission, and the disaster demands to be transmitted and known, yet the very essence of the disaster maintains that it can never be known or transmitted.

Saussure established much of the field of linguistics and semiotics for the 20th century and the theory of a "system of signs," similar to the "tissue of signs…infinitely deferred" referenced by Barthes. In his *Course in General Linguistics,* Saussure delineates the linguistic model of the sign, made up of the signifier and the signified, and provided an exploration into the ways in which language operates. A sign could be broken down into the signifier (which could be a sound, smell, object, symbol, written word, etc.) and the signified (the concept which the signifier represents). Saussure argues that signs exist within a larger contextual system and "a word only truly exists… by being sanctioned in actual use by speakers of the language"(56). Saussure's writing established the view that language consisted of a series of relationships whose meanings were potentially infinite, rather than fixed and limited. He maintains that it is the system of signs which gives signs meaning and in fact, signs and meaning should be thought of as "two forms of the same mental concept" (66). Saussure's writing questioned the assumptions

about foundational, essential, unified truth by interrogating the ways in which we conceive of meaning and language. He contended that there is no higher, perfected "true" and "real" thing to which words point. Instead there is just difference and a polysemy of meaning. His perspective offered the opportunity to re-evaluate assumptions about language based in notions of origin, absolutism, clarity, and purity of author intentionality which denied the totalizing and limiting effects of hierarchies of what Derrida would later call "logocentrism." Saussure's discussions of value and signification established the influential theory that situated words in a larger linguistic system where meaning was established through the use of signs in different contexts.

With the *Death of Author* Barthes explains that although the Author is "thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffer, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child" (145), in fact "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (142). For Barthes, "writing can tell the truth on language but not the truth on the real" (203). Barthes' arguments challenge the idea that writing provided insight into the inner thought life of the writer. Writing was no longer a representation of the author, it did not provide direct access to the interiority of the author, but instead was "a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred" (147). To give a text an Author, thought Barthes, restricted a text and closed it off from its potentiality; it set a limit where there was none.

Jacques Derrida rebuts the assumptions made about language and representation by asserting that "all free reflection on the origin and status of writing" lean upon "a mythology and a metaphor of natural writing" (*Of Grammatology* 43). He argues that this elevation of speech over writing was defended, not only in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure but also in that of

Plato, Heidegger, Husserl. According to Derrida, their theories assumed a natural proclivity in speech to portray the spirit, intention, and meaning of the thought it represents. Derrida denied the subjugation of writing to speech by arguing the "iterability" of words. He argues that

> Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender new contexts in an absolutely non-saturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any centre of absolute anchoring.
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> (*Margins of Philosophy* 320–21)

For Derrida this idea of iterability allowed words and signs to function "in the absence of the receiver and in the absence of the sender" *(Limited Inc.* 7). He argues that iterability is present in both oral and written language, and signs do not represent pure and absolute forms. Instead, an infinite number of contexts provide signs the ability to say various things. This is what allows words to be used in different performative contexts whether it be a play on words, a theatrical performance of another's words, or what Derrida calls a serious performative act.

Derrida's most significant argument about language was based on the difference between signs. He argued that it is in the space of "*différance*" a sound or word come to mean one thing and not another. For Derrida, that difference between language is indicative of a wholly other view of meaning and significance. *Différance* represented the de-stabilized place where there in fact was no "thing" or referent which each word, sign, symbol pointed to. According to Derrida, the predominating framework, which had founded much of Western philosophy's beliefs on language, had subjugated the material and the experiential beneath the absolute and abstract. It favored speech over writing because it is in speech that one can ask questions (the Socratic

method) and an audience can understand the true intentions of a speaker because of their presence (this is potentiality made possible through literacy). Derrida sought to deconstruct all of the assumptions and frameworks proposed by logocentrism in order to explains that "there is no stability that is absolute, eternal, intangible, natural, etc" (*Limited Inc.* 151), and there is no tie between words and things governed by meta-contextuality.

These post-structuralist approaches to the margin of play, openings, and systems rather than distinct forms with limits destabilized not only notions of language, but philosophy more generally. The assertion that "there is no true writing" (Derrida) and that a word "only truly exists" within the system of signs for its speakers (Saussure), and that writing cannot tell the "truth" on the real (Barthes) reflected a larger deviation towards the subversive power of the material, the contextual, the ephemeral. They challenged the presence of Being so important to earlier perspectives in not only language theory, but epistemology as well. In a Heideggerian sense, Being presences precisely by not-appearing, and this is precisely where Blanchot and Derrida derive the idea.

Poststructuralists like Derrida spell out the consequences of the failure of representation and logocentrism: arriving at true understanding is a fatuous enterprise where language is concerned. Wiesel, Blanchot, and Levinas work within this same framework, and would affirm that the pursuit of understanding is disrupted all the more so where disaster is concerned. But, Wiesel, Blanchot, and Levinas still worked against that disruption precisely because the nature of disaster *demands* that they respond, that they transmit, that they overcome the limits of language—but at the same time, that they not view language, writing, etc. as a way of *totalizing* the other.

The Demand for Comprehension and Theorization

Wiesel describes that desperate wish to know and the demand made by the disaster to respond in his play *The Trial of God.* The play echoes the same demands for understanding and figuration that we have been reviewing in this chapter, and also voices the frustration towards ineffability that the disaster ushers in. The play describes an obscure Ukrainian village, where three minstrels seek out a small tavern to which they have been called to enact a play on the Jewish celebration of Purim. The minstrels, Avremel, Mendel, and Yenkel, soon discover that the tavern owner, Berish, is in no mood for celebration or play; the town has been devastated by a pogrom. Berish is overwhelmed with grief, tormented by the loss of friends and family and the rape of his daughter, Hanna. He suggests that in light of recent events they stage a trial of God for his injustice and failure to protect his family, instead of a celebration honoring the deliverance of the Jewish people.

They go about choosing who will play the prosecutor, the defense attorney, the judge and jury, but struggle to fill the role of the defense attorney. As the group grapples over a nomination for the defense the first minstrel, Avremel, implores them:

> Avremel: "Misery of miseries. In the whole world, from east to west, from south to north, is there no one to plead on behalf of the almighty? No one to speak for him?
>
> Yankel: "No one to justify His ways?"
>
> Avremel: "No one to sing His glory?"
>
> Mendel: "Poor King, poor mankind—one is as much to be pitied as the other… In the entire creation, from kingdom to kingdom and nation to nation, is there not one person to be found, one person to take the side of the Creator? Not one believer to explain His mysteries? Not one teacher to love Him in spite of everything, and love Him enough to defend Him against His accusers? Is there no one in the whole universe who would take

the case of the Almighty God?" (109).

The whole of the play, *Trial of God*, is an indictment of God for the atrocities of the pogrom.[22] Berish acts as the antagonist driving along the persistent demand for justification and clarity for the disaster, which has devastated his life and the life of his family. The forensic rhetoric of the text calls for more than a ruling of guilty or not guilty; it begs for understanding to alleviate the immense injustices suffered. The trial calls for someone "to speak" for God, someone "to explain His mysteries." The play ends with a devastating and disappointing relinquishment: Sam, who takes up the role of defense, points to the limit of language and understanding: "Faith in God must be as boundless as God Himself. If it exists at the expense of man, too bad. God is eternal, man is not" (157).[23]

So much of Western Philosophy was founded on the idea of systems, righting chaos into order, and the ultimate pursuit of reason. Theoretical work is necessary, of course, and pivotal to daily interest in investigation, discovery, and communication. Yet there are ways in which reason is useless, limited, and unable to provide all, at all times. We are at an impasse, or mired in a paradox: on the one hand, disaster demands to be "transmitted," to be "known," yet language resists and defies transmission (Heidegger; Post-structuralism) and disaster destroys the possibility of knowledge. Blanchot notes that "Theories are necessary: necessary and useless. Reason works in order to wear itself out, by organizing itself into systems, seeking a positive knowledge where it can posit itself, pose and repose and at the same time convey itself to an extremity which forms a stop and closure. We must pass by way of this knowledge and forget it" (*Writing of the Disaster* 76). Levinas, like Wiesel, understood the propensity towards trying to

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[22] Wiesel is clearly rewriting the Job story here. Placing God on trial is a common trope in Jewish literature, and the book of *Job* is the basis for many of the replications.
[23] This reference shows an admittance of God's complicity in suffering – it is a condemnation of the absolute.

speak to and explain the Holocaust in light of a larger system of meaning. But, he would argue

that that attempt to totalize its meaning was one more manifestation of the domination of totality.

Those attempts to explain the Holocaust and ascribe meaning to another's pain or suffering was

to try to fit it into a conceivable, unified framework that denied the otherness of that person's

experience.

> To think suffering in an interhuman perspective does not amount to seeing it in the
>
> coexistence of a multiplicity of consciousnesses, or in a social determinism, accompanied
>
> by a simple knowledge that people in society can have of their proximity or of their
>
> common destiny (*Entre-Nous, Thinking of the Other* 100).

Pain and suffering are, as Levinas puts it, non-integratable. The fragility and vulnerability on

display in suffering puts an end to talking. We groan and cry instead. Language can only be used

to soothe and therein lies its power to be ethical and dangerous. If it soothes what needs to be

responded to, it is an instrument of Holocaust. The disaster of the Holocaust displayed that. It

should not and could not be framed within those perspectives meant to make it more manageable

for understanding and co-existing within the epistemological, theological, and ontological belief

contemporary to Levinas.

Conclusion

In the climactic scene of Wiesel's *Trial of God*, Maria, the barkeeper's daughter

describes the rape of her younger sister, Hanna, and the abuse of Berish, her father, after the

minstrels had begged and pleaded. The description is grievous and graphic. After she finishes,

the minstrel Mendel responds by saying: "Now I no longer imagine, now I know" (108). The line

hearkens back to Job's final lines in response to the God's "Whirlwind Speech." He says,

"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand. Things too wonderful for me to know…My ears

had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3, 5-6). Job implored God to know the origins of his suffering, the causality of his disaster. In the same way the minstrels had begged and pleaded with Maria to know the particulars of Hanna's grief. The three men demanded the atrocities of that evening be unveiled, revealed and spoken. But in the moments following Maria's account, Berish contends that "You think you know; you don't. You never will" (109). Disaster eludes the grip of understanding.

In exploring the assumed potentiality of language, my goal has been to explore the supposed expectations put upon writing and language at different points in the study of rhetoric. Yet there are ways in which reason is useless, limited, and unable to provide all, at all times. This chapter has also focused on the disruptive power of disaster to frustrate those same foundational expectations by obstructing the capability and potential to speak and explain in the aftermath of suffering. Most notably, disaster cripples the potential and responsibilities typically given to writing and philosophy. After disaster, the parameters and expectations of writing and philosophy change. The parameters and expectations associated with writing have been tried and challenged in the wake of extreme suffering and ineffable devastation, forcing them to show the inadequacies of language despite the idealistic presuppositions about it.

The consequences of the arguments proposed by Blanchot, Levinas and Wiesel leave us to ask about the purposes and future of rhetoric and writing. We are left, it seems, to listen and bear witness. How can one write, particularly in the aftermath of disaster, after reading of the challenges that they all propose? What is there to do in light of these challenges? That will be the basis of investigation in the following chapter.

Writing through Mastery and Madness in the *Phaedrus*

"Wouldn't rhetoric, in general, be a kind of skillful leading of the
soul (*psychogōgia*) by means of words…?"
--Plato, *Phaedrus*

In the first two chapters, I examine two dominant modes for responding to disaster: theodicy and language. In the first chapter, I examine the theodicies—theological accounts of suffering and disaster—represented in the biblical account of *Job*. I summarize how Job's three friends offer two separate theodicy accounts of disaster, and how the Whirlwind Speech undercuts those accounts. The three friends' speeches are examples of theodicies whose purpose is to systematize and enframe suffering in order to make the disaster comprehensible, masterable. "Retributive justice," the first theodicy presented in *Job*, assumes that suffering and disaster are the consequence of some wrongdoing. I survey Phillipe Nemo's contention that this theodicy is based on a mechanical or instrumental view of God. The second theodicy is "educative" which proposes that disaster happens to teach an individual a lesson that may save them from future suffering or "decenter them from selfishness" (Lewis). These theodicies are ultimately overshadowed by the Whirlwind speech, which, according to Emmanuel Levinas, works as a profound rejection of the prior accounts. According to Levinas, the speech refuses to "make God innocent before the suffering of the just" (*Entre-Nous: On Thinking of the Other* 82). Accordingly, any attempt at trying to place suffering into philosophical, social, or theological schemata ultimately fails because disaster defies human understanding and causality. The whirlwind speech speaks to the complete "Other-ness" of God. Like disaster itself, God's ways, thoughts, and being are non-integratable, in-comprehensible, infinite, and not-totalizable. Thus "The Whirlwind Speech" interrupts the attempts at theodicy and gives voice to the place where understanding stops. Levinas critiques the "ego of knowledge," and challenges that egoism, by

pointing the places where knowledge fails. The failure of theodicy reflects the inadequacy of trying to provide rationalized explanation for the ineffability that by definition constitutes disaster.

The "break" that happens in *Job* through the whirlwind speech serves as a template for Levinas's and Blanchot's thoughts on writing after the Shoah, explored in Chapter Two. In the same way that the whirlwind speech shatters arguments that attempt to order and comprehend that which is non-integratable and in-comprehensible, the Holocaust is, according to Levinas and Blanchot, the disaster in our own time that shatters any prospect of providing answers through philosophical meditation and rational thought. It is the monumental twentieth-century event that escapes the writer's ability to describe, theologians' ability to explain, and philosophers' ability to understand. Chapter Two examines these arguments, and their contention that, in the Holocaust, an Otherness interrupted what was commonly understood about language, writing, theology, and philosophy. No longer could knowledge be conceived as "the very business of the human to which nothing remains absolutely other" (Levinas, "Transcendence and Intelligibility", 153). In other words, according to these thinkers, disaster cripples the potential and responsibilities typically given to writing and philosophy. Or, put differently, with the Holocaust "the movement of Meaning was swallowed up" (Blanchot, *Writing of the Disaster* 47) and with it came a "break with the normal and normative, with order, with synthesis" (Levinas, resp. to *Excess of Evil* 153). In the second chapter, through these thinkers, I examine how disaster challenges the limit of writing and philosophy, undercutting the basic impetus to speak and explain. Because disaster refuses to be understood and is "alien to naming" (*Writing of the Disaster* 47) writing is impotent to represent or capture it. Instead, Blanchot proposes that we let "fascination rule language" (Levinas, *The Space of Literature* 31).

In this chapter, I address the challenge posed to writing in the face of disaster. The disaster calls subjectivity into by questioning the prospect of "mastery" in the act of writing; the act of composing positions an individual (the writer) apart from the subject (the written word), so it then can be mastered and known. That setting apart then acts as a critical distance necessary for a sense of objectivity in knowledge of a subject. This understanding of writing can be traced all the way back to Plato's *Phaedrus*, and typically this dialogue has been read as an exposition on how writing acts as a means of critical distance or objective knowledge to the Ancient Greeks, who were more acquainted with experiential knowledge that came under the epic poet's spell.[24] In the following pages, I review how the perspective about the curative ability of objective knowledge, which comes through writing, expresses itself through Phaedrus' and Socrates' conversation and speeches. But, I also propose another new reading, taking the lead from Derrida's argument about the *pharmakon* (the ambiguity concerning whether the word signifies cure, poison or both) which suggests that writing can be, at one and the same time, the poison that kills living speech, the cure that kills irrationality and madness, and the poison-cure provokes the ecstatic and passive discourse of divine madness. In cases like disaster, this ambiguous discursive element is the only fitting response.

With the suggestion of dual potentialities for writing, I suggest that we may come to see writing as a provocation to divine madness. It is not a controlled, critical distance, which Socrates gains through writing, but instead, a state of mind that subsumes Socrates under a "rhetorical passivity" in which he loses the very objectivity that writing previously seemed to provide. As the *Phaedrus* dialogue unfolds, the three speeches, one by Phaedrus (composed by pseudo-Lysias) and two by Socrates, stray further and further away from the original, as they

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[24] This view of Plato's *Republic* was most notably made by Eric Havelock in *Preface to Plato* and Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy.*

grow more grandiose in both topic and form. Phaedrus' text is a controlled, stilted text with organizational vocabulary making a list of formal arguments; alternatively, the final palinode by Socrates elaborates far and beyond the original topic of gratifying a lover or non-lover to expand upon the ideas of the gods, the soul, knowledge, and love. The final palinode whisks the listener up and away into a whirl of varying expansions upon what seems to be myriad levels of extrapolation.[25]

The first speech is defined by exposition, singularity, formulation, and control, while the final speech appears as its very antithesis, resulting in Phaedrus' adulation and announcement that this final palinode would most likely humiliate Lysias (257c) if performed in contrast. There is a linearity to the evolution of the speeches, as they are all linked to one original form: the written speech. In this chapter I look at how that written speech, Phaedrus' speech, is formative to what we see unfolding in the dialogue concerning inspiration, invention, and analysis, and how *that same speech* is also significant to what Plato may be saying, more broadly, about the very act of writing and the state of madness.

Objective Distance in Writing

The *Phaedrus* saw the potential for writing to create distance for reflection by setting apart that "it" (or the text) from the "I" (the speaker). The first written speech, performed by Phaedrus, illustrates the objective distance achieved in both form and content, which can only be achieved in writing. The speech is a calculated, categorical speech on love, focusing how love affects people from all sides of the "issue." The speech acts as an evaluative checklist considering the gratifying the non-lover rather than the lover. Phaedrus' text represents that

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[25] Socrates palinode, also known as "The Great Speech," "owes its epithet to its sustained brilliance, expansiveness, imagination, and intensity, and also to the fact that within the dialogue it is presented as both a *tour de force* of rhetorical display and, in a challenge to the genre of rhetorical display, a deadly serious discourse on love and the pursuit of knowledge" (Yunis 102).

critical distance that writing provides through 1) its medium (a methodically formatted list) and through 2) its content (the speech compiles an enumerated list on the benefits of gratifying a non-lover).

The Phaedrus' speech emblematizes critical distance that comes through writing by using repetition of transitional markers throughout his speech. The text proves to be the most stilted text with the organizational markers: "moreover" (231a,b; 232a; 233d), "also" (231d; 232c,e;), and "now" (231e, 234b), formatting a formulaic checklist of points. These markers organize the speech into marked segments of argumentation to foreground his speech to seem as if he is reading through a series of syllogisms. The terms "again" or "also" is a connective "empty of logical force" but it is used four times in the speech, "as if the speaker is able to score clever small points in the order in which he happens to think of them, but in unable or unwilling to arrange his thoughts with logical coherence or cumulative force" (Ryan 109). As Phaedrus reads through the speech, many different points are made on considerations for gratifying a non-lover, yet, there does not seem to be an order to the reasoning, as the speech seems primarily bent on considering all sides comprehensively. This speech's formulation exposes the effects and influences of writing as the ability to move between each point, ordering the connections in this manner, are specific to a literate author.

Because of the permanence of the word that writing afforded them, Socrates and Phaedrus could rearrange and experiment with the arguments contained within their speeches. They no longer needed to worry about being formulaic because the importance of preserving knowledge was no longer at risk. Phaedrus is able to talk about love in a way that opposes the traditional *topos* or expectations of love.[26] He talks about reasons to gratify a non-lover rather

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[26]   See Thomas Cole's *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece.*

than a lover (*Phaedrus* 227c), later in the dialogue Socrates speaks of praising a miserable donkey as if it were a horse (260b), and then further on he describes an orator who tries to persuade a city "to act badly instead of well" (260c). This turn on the head of typical reasoning is possible because of the ability to write down a specific line of reasoning and change what is typical to what is not typical. "[P]rior to the rise of literacy and the craft of the sophists" says Robin Reames in *Seeing and Being in Plato's Rhetorical Theory,* "it was the epic tradition that preserved the conventional wisdom—its history, customs, ethics and social codes" but the "Lysianic speech demonstrates an inversion of this wisdom" (58).[27] Through literate lenses, speakers were able to speak of gratifying non-lovers, poor men rather than rich, and elderly ones rather than young ones in a way dissimilar to their predecessor's intentional work of conservation. This ability to alter what would be expected is available because of the critical distance, reflection, and objective knowledge available because of writing.

Finally, the distance that Phaedrus is able to take when discussing love in the speech is an objectivity specifically afforded to him because of writing. Phaedrus' written speech reifies the object of the discourse (love) so that it may be mastered and known by an autonomous subject. He is not sentimental or emotional about the lover or love. Missing from this account is any sort of attempt to provide an experiential, intimate, or impassioned account of love. Phaedrus speaks of an individual who is not "driven by an irresistible force" (231a); he is a non-lover "who is in control of himself" (232a). The content of this speech reinforces the objective, critical distance that defines the form of the speech as the speech itself praises the one who is indifferent (a perspective mimicked in the analytical tone of the speech). The tone of the speech is best

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[27] Eric Havelock led the way in scholarship on the influence of literacy on the Ancient Greeks. His text *Preface to Plato* is important to the discussion on the key characteristics of Ancient Greece pre and post literacy.

depicted through this excerpt on the comparison of lovers to a dinner party for friends: "the same goes for our private dinner parties too: we should not invite our friends, but those who beg for food and need filling up, because it is they who will be appreciative, who will follow us around, call at our house, feel the greatest pleasure, be extremely grateful" (234c), and so the analysis looks at the ratio of costs versus benefits in factoring who and how to care for other people. And so the speech ends with "I think that I have said enough to make my point" (234c) which is the very purpose of the speech, to merely be comprehensive (a trait discussed as being most important in the latter discussion of rhetoric).[28]

Introducing Analytical Awareness

Because of the advent of literacy, Phaedrus is able to step back at the end of his reading of Lysias' speech and ask: "how does the speech strike you, Socrates? Isn't it extraordinary, especially in its use of language?"(234c). Both admiration and criticality are available to the speaker and listeners, different from the immersive, experiential involvement[29] elicited by oral poetry before writing's advent. Phaedrus reads the speech, word by word to Socrates, and Socrates then provides automatic analysis saying, "He certainly seem to be nowhere near doing what we wanted to *see* him doing [my emphasis]" (264a). This faculty is only accessible to them because of the advent of writing.

The ability to analyze the speech and look to certain sections for specific expectations was a Greek skillset possible only after the advent of writing. It wasn't until the late 5th century that there was a need "to find fault with poets for the form in which their message [was]

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[28] Socrates and Phaedrus discuss the "comprehensive view" (265d) necessary to true oratorical skill, knowledge necessary to discern through the "division and collection" (266b) of all things, and the difference between an "expert practitioner" versus just an "experiential knack" (268a-270d).

[29] See more on the experience of oral poetry for Ancient Greeks in Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato.*

couched" and no poet was "criticized for being dull, or prosaic, or clumsy, or unclear" (Cole 34).

Prior to the *Phaedrus*, Cole suggests, there was not really interest in looking to "successful or effective presentations of material(s)" (Cole 35). In this section of the *Phaedrus* (262e-264e), we see an entire section dedicated to critiquing and analyzing whether or not the speech is good or bad, successful or unsuccessful, and why. What follows Phaedrus' speech is a critique of the appropriateness of the speech and an assessment of its talent in presenting ideas in the correct order. His speech is found to be severely lacking, "all thrown together indiscriminately," and starting where he should end and ending where he should start (264b). As they read back the written speech, they could interact with it as an external object, pointing to the sections of the speech where "his composition lack[ed] expertise" (262c) or contradict Lysias's main arguments as ones coming from "people who'd been brought up among sailors" (243d), and that the "writer just said whatever came to his mind, in a rush of generosity [without] a cogent principle of composition" (264b); this is an exercise that would only be possible through writing. This seismic shift in the ability to give direct, immediate feedback changes the purposes of inventing, delivering, and listening to speeches, written and spoken.

Contrary to the analytical exteriority the Phaedrus speech is the experiential interiorizing that was known to come through the songs of the epic poet. The poet's words were spoken over the audience, ushering the hearer in to internalize the story so that they experienced the journey as the hero did. But writing severed that unity between orator and audience because "sight isolates, [while] sound incorporates…sound pours into the hearer. Vision dissects" (*Orality and Literacy* 71). Phaedrus and Socrates see the text, and are separated from it, and thereby able to dissect it rather than interiorize it. Phaedrus' speech initiates the first discussion of writing in which they articulate what constitutes a fine speaker. Because of literacy Phaedrus and Socrates

are able to look at the original speech and explain how a speech should be organized (what should be in the beginning, middle, end, (264 a-e) and talk about dividing speeches into "topics" (265d) and give a comprehensive view of a thing based on all sides and views of the focused topic (265d).

It is precisely this analytical view of writing, developed first and foremost in the *Phaedrus*, which is problematic for Levinas and Blanchot. The power to be moved seemed to stop with writing, and so came the ability to take control back, to use that distance between mover and moved to analyze, withhold, behold, and critique. This newfound confidence in objectivity leads found its origin in the birth of literacy. Writing introduced us to the strong association that written words now have with static objects that can be known. The disaster calls that all into question because as an object the disaster refuses to be known.

In writings of post-Shoah testimony there is a repeated wrestling between "how can I write this down?" and "I must write this down so that it is remembered and does not happen again."[30] The conflict rears its head in almost every memoir, essay, short story, etc. between the desire for a reflective critical distance and the frustration found discovering that distance is impossible. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates' and Phaedrus perform an exposition on the act of writing and delineate the "mastery" and knowledge imperative to adept writing. This *Phaedrus* is the earliest text, in the history of ideas, to propose that through writing there is an object to be known and mastered by a separate knower. Phaedrus labels this mastery: "quite an arduous business" (272b) which requires laying out, step by step, "how many types of soul there are" while observing those souls "being affected by events." Finally, one must understand "the proper

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[30] See Elie Wiesel's *Open Heart* in which he wrestles with the question: "Have I performed my duty as a survivor? Have I transmitted all I was able to? Too much, perhaps?" (40), *Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Literature* for a collection of autobiographic short essays, and Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer's *Between Witness and Testimony: the Holocaust and the Limits of Representation.*

moments for speaking and keeping quiet" along with recognition of the appropriate time to arouse each of the emotions, then the speech writers expertise will be "perfected and completed" (271d-272a). It's a hefty task to say the least; one bent on showing how overwhelmingly complex and extensive the task is. The work is cumbersome not innate, but the result is the definitive split of the speaker from the language, of the knower from the known, the subject from the object.

Because it is not a naturally given talent, the gift of persuasive speech comes to be viewed as an outside object, which must be studied instead of a naturally given talent, which must simply be expressed. Blanchot and Levinas argue that the disaster cannot be made into an object, therefore critical distance cannot be produced. And so there is no reflection and objective knowledge that can ultimately be made. This task is not only arduous; it is impossible.

Towards the end of the dialogue, Phaedrus and Socrates consider writing through the lens of myth in order to conjecture the real and false capabilities of writing, and this section reveals a disparaging appraisal on writing as object. The myth elaborates on the problematic distance that writing creates as an object "outside of themselves." Socrates recounts "a story [he] heard,"[31] set in ancient Egypt, where the ancient gods considered different types of expertise. In the myth, the god Theuth maintains that writing increases intelligence, but King Thamous rebuts his description of writing and says that in fact

> trust in writing will make them remember things by relying on marks made by others,
>
> from *outside themselves*, not on their *own inner* resources (emphasis mine), and so
>
> writing will make the things they have learnt disappear from their minds. Our invention is
>
> a potion [*pharmakon]* for jogging the memory, not for remembering. You provide your

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[31] Robin Waterfield's translation explains that this story is actually a "Platonic invention" which he sets in Egypt because "Egyptians were famous for their records of ancient past" (*Phaedrus,* Trans. Waterfield 103).

students with the appearance of intelligence, not real intelligence. (275a)

Showing the pitfalls of writing as an expertise, King Thamous points to the ways in which those speaking through recorded writing "only appear" to be intelligent or knowledgeable, but in fact, their talents are a farce. Writing is simply a static object acting as a stable placeholder; writing does not inspire from within and does not nurture from without. It does not foster growth of knowledge, as it separates students from living "teachers"(275a) who can nurture their intelligence, and they are left with only written marks which, like paintings "maintain an aloof silence" (275d) when asked a question. Writing brings a great reliance on objects bereft of living knowledge of any true substance.

This elevation of that which comes from within, rather than extracted from without is echoed in the work of Alcidamas, a contemporary of Plato, where he defends a similar discrimination about extemporaneous speech which flows from the body over that which is predetermined and studied. Because writing is not part of the body, he believed it, therefore, to be inferior. He explains that he does not even think written speeches should

> be called speeches, but should be thought of as images and patterns and imitations of speeches, and we could reasonably have the same opinion about them as we have about bronze statues and stone monuments and depictions of animals. For…these are iterations of real bodies and give delight to the view but offer no use in human life. (27)

Alcidamas expected speech to be a "living" rather than a static "thing" (see here object, too) and therefore relevant and important to the situation at hand. This type of communication lacks the ability to engage in dialogue, critical thinking, and questioning, thereby placing it at a severe disadvantage to speech which can move, grow, and develop to fit the situation or issue at hand. Writing is unable to stand there "alive." Questions are only met with silence, so there is no

movement, there is no ability to breathe and move and interact—a great detriment to the potentiality of the discussion between the interlocutors.

The *Pharmakon:* An Alternative Reading

Up to this point I have addressed the typical reading of the *Phaedrus'* comments on the *pharmakon* and also on writing as object (as an analytical tool, as a mere placeholder helping to jog memory, as lesser than extemporaneous speech), but this idea of writing as the original catalyst of objectivity is not the only reading available. Rhetoric, though most often recognized in the *Phaedrus* for providing a means of rational analysis over experiential emotion, also acts as a powerful mode of inspiration for Socrates in the dialogue. The term *pharmakon* appears in the second half of the dialogue, within the Theuth myth as he describes writing as a "potion for memory and intelligence" (274e). This reference to a *pharmakon* (seen as a cure, poison, elixir, medicine) is interpreted by Jacques Derrida in *Dissemination* as ambiguous, a term with a double-meaning, turning the exposition of rhetoric and writing on its head. He suggests that while writing may kill the living memory, undoing the capacity for the individual to create extemporaneously, it simultaneously acts as a cure, with the potential to envelop that same individual and inspire the creation of even more discourse.

Derrida describes the *pharmakon* as a cure because it acts as an imitation. It attempts to catalyze the body to heal itself by acting as an imitation for a natural working of the body, but it is an imposter. And, as the *pharmakon* is simply an artifice acting as the body in its natural state would do, it is an artifice and therefore consequently an ill. Plato held the strong belief that natural disease "must be allowed to develop according to its own norms and forms, its specific rhythms and articulations" (Derrida 100). We see this in the *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus;*[32] those

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[32] "Now we must conceive of pleasure and pain in this way: An impression produced in us

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things working outside of a natural process are actually harmful to the healing and working of the living body. Writing is aligned with the *pharmakon* because it too takes something that is living—speech—and hollows it of its animating features. Derrida explains that writing was viewed as

> only apparently good for memory, seemingly able to help it from within, through its own motion, to know what is true. But in truth, writing is essentially bad, external to memory, productive not of science but of belief, not of truth but of appearances. The *pharmakon* produces a play of appearance, which enables it to pass for truth. (103)

Derrida's proposals undo a reading of writing as purely poisonous or curative. His insight into the duality and ambiguity, inherent in the *pharmakon*, compels us to consider what way the potion of writing might be something other than strictly poisonous (killing living speech) or strictly curative (harnessing irrationality and madness). Writing does not even try to present something that could be considered an imitation of a living thing. And that is partially why it is poison. Writing works against that which is living as it ensconces and stops that which is living and flowing.

Alcidamas, in his own turn, speaks of the supremacy of speech flowing from the living body because "speech spoken straight from the heart on the spur of the moment has a soul in it and is alive and follows upon events and is like those real bodies, while the written speech whose nature corresponds to a representation of the real thing lacks any kind of living power" (17). Writing is a naturally weaker representation of the true, empowered, relevant source: speech, and it's this that becomes the "object," externalized from the "subject." His perspective maintains

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contrary to nature and violent, if sudden is painful; and again, the sudden return to nature is pleasant; but a gentle and gradual return is imperceptible and vice versa" (55). And so in this case pleasure is the natural state of nature, whereas pain is a deviation from it.

that writing is not timely, relevant, or living, and therefore it is a feeble artifice. In the *Phaedrus,* an initial reading would see Phaedrus' speech as that same weakened impostor, which pales in comparison to Socrates extemporaneous speeches.

Writing overturns the presuppositions put forth about the lover and non-lover, madness, and writing as Socrates explains: "false was the tale" that you should gratify a non-lover rather than a lover…. Just because a lover is mad and a non-lover is sane" (244a). G.F. H. Ferrari argues that this is what the non-lover's argument depends on: "that madness is simply bad" (*Listening to the Cicacadas* 113). But Socrates follows his accusation of the false claim with a more nuanced view of madness; that it is not "simply an evil" but "in fact some of our greatest blessings come from madness" (244a). The written speech in the Phaedrus reifies the object of the discourse (love) so that it may be mastered and known by an autonomous subject but, at the same time, the it also prompts Socrates and Phaedrus to produce more discourse on the subject, to engage with it not as a means of *knowing it*, but as a way of letting oneself be stirred and moved "by streams flowing from elsewhere" (235d) (i.e. NOT from himself, but from the inexorable exteriority of writing and discourse). The most well-known view of writing in the *Phaedrus* is that it allows an object to be mastered and known: Socrates is able to inquire upon and analyze the speeches performed. But, we see at the same time, that writing is what allows Socrates to be stirred and moved to create his final palinode/ speech. Derrida finds that the *pharmakon* acts like an outside force moving inside as if "it doesn't come from around here. It comes from afar, it is external or alien: to the living, which is the right-here of the inside" (104). What is most interesting in this discussion of the potentiality of writing is that relying on these marks, things outside of themselves, is actually more than just for jogging memory. It helps create invention. It is the inspiration for invention, what spurs creativity *and* analysis. What

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generates the entire dialogue is being able to look at these marks, what is outside, and separate

what is and what is not a praiseworthy speech. They are able to do that because of the marks

made. So, in fact, writing functions not just as a medium affirming the subject/object divide, but

also as a medium which inspires a madness untamed and outside of that same divide. Thus

the *pharmakon* (drug/medicine) of writing may kill the living memory and provide a means of

rational analysis, but it also stirs and inspires inquiry, attention, more discourse.

In sum, the criticism of writing in the *Phaedrus* is "ironic" as Socrates is able to mimic

Phaedrus' speech and the epic poets because they are written down and because Plato writes

down his mimicry. Socrates uses Phaedrus' same focus on the lover and non-lover to produce his

second speech. Socrates ascribes his palinode to "Stesichorus the son of Euphemus, from

Himera" (244a) before commencing the speech. The palinode takes the listener up through a

journey to the upper realms of the heavens (246d-249d), and the final section of the palinode is

visceral in its descriptions of frustrated pain, surges of passion, and releases of pleasure (255c-

256b) much like the emotive language that characterized the epic poets' creations.[33] The theme

of appearance versus the real, or seeming versus being, displays itself here as it does so

frequently in many of Plato's works,[34] and in this case it emerges as a debate as to the assumed

and actual qualities of writing. It is a back and forth play, assuming one thing, yet at the same

time proclaiming the very opposite.

Madness, the Palinode, and Rhetorical Passivity

A cursory reading of *Phaedrus* may not suggest such things, but with a closer look, there

seems to be many ways in which these descriptions of the disarming and overwhelming nature of

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[33] Havelock writes in *Preface to Plato* that the epic poetry was provided "a range of experiences and the poet represents "a thousand situations and a thousand emotions" (5) along with "murder and incest, cruelty and treachery; of passions uncontrolled; of weakness, cowardice and malice" (10).
[34] See the *Republic* and the *Gorgias* as two important examples.

madness carries the same powerfully untamable descriptions found in discussion of infinity and the non-totalizable character of disaster. Disaster works, as we have discovered thus far, much like the whirlwind. It is an ineffable force, unable to be captured, tamed, and explained. The disaster foils any attempt at principled, disciplined study ending in reasoned syllogism. The whirlwind is a perfect metaphor to the disaster as an incontrollable entity, out of the reach of reason and understanding. I note that we must keep in mind the untamed and unanswerable nature of madness in looking at the final palinode and explore how the rhetorical passivity that comes at the hest of the Muses' madness reflects that same rhetorical passivity frustrating the objectification of the disaster.

Socrates and Phaedrus note that the first speeches they made were far inferior to the final, inspired speech: the palinode. Socrates argues that "anyone who approaches the doors of poetic composition without the Muses' madness, in the conviction, that skill alone will make him a competent poet, is cheated of his goal. In his sanity both he and his poetry are eclipsed by poetry composed by men who are mad" (*Phaedrus* 245a). He wishes to "wash away the unpleasant taste, so to speak, of these two speeches with a fresh one, and I'd recommend Lysias too to compose a speech as soon as he can" (243d). Therefore he creates the palinode as a gift to the god of love as his "means of atonement. It was as fair and fine as I could make it, especially in its use of poetical language, as insisted on by Phaedrus" (257a-b). He begs forgiveness for the failures and weaknesses of the first speech, and yet it was the first speech that inspired the passivity that Socrates begins to overtake him and lead him to the creation of the palinode. Inspirational forces create the final palinode through Socrates (the passive medium performing the speech): the scene where they are reposing (230b-c), madness (245), but most importantly the written speech, performed by Phaedrus.

In the production of this discourse, Socrates loses his subjectivity. Through the power of the Phaedrus' speech, Socrates is displaced. He finds himself adrift from his faculties as he declares, "My breast is full…[and] I didn't gain any of these ideas from my own resources, and so the only alternative…is that I have been filled, like a jug by streams flowing from elsewhere"(235d). Inspiration from "elsewhere" fills Socrates enabling him to create bountiful prose, outside of his "own resources." I suggest that the stream flowing from elsewhere finds its source in the written word. Writing is what provokes precisely that state of mind for Socrates where he's in the face of the discourse, losing his subjectivity. From the moment Phaedrus delivers the written speech, Socrates was "amazed. And you were the reason I felt this way, Phaedrus, because I was looking at your while you were reading," (235c) and he credits his enthusiasm to Phaedrus's enthusiasm that came over him. Surprisingly, though it seems that the Socrates' inspiration is coming from "flowing from elsewhere" (235 c), it's Phaedrus' written speech, which creates the emotive effect on Socrates.

While Phaedrus was reading Socrates notes that he "followed [Phaedrus'] lead, and so I came to share"(234d) in the same enthusiasm; therefore, they were both emotively moved together through the reading of the speech. Later Socrates notes it was in Phaedrus' written speech that "bewitched me into being your mouthpiece" (241e). The written speech provokes Socrates' own discourse, his new speeches. Socrates begins to note that he has started speaking in dithyrambs and then epic verse (241e), and that he cannot recall what he has just said because he is under the control of, or mastered by madness. He even notes that if he were to start "praising the non-lover (as the written speech did)…I'd certainly be possessed by the Nymphs to whom you have deliberately exposed me" (241e). We can see that the written speech exposed

him to a possession (a term typically reserved for supernatural entities)[35] but in this case it is the

delivery of a written speech by a fellow orator.

The theme of self-control versus submission appears repeatedly throughout the

dialogue,[36] but it operates very clearly in tandem as an exposition on the act of speech making.[37]

The Muses take over Socrates in speech and body as he creates the palinode, and he nods to the

madness and possession brought on by them during the speech as a force that "takes hold…and

stirs it into a frenzy for composing lyric and other kinds of poetry, and so educates future

generation" and therefore, "we should not be afraid of madness," as "this kind of madness is

given by the gods to help us achieve the greatest happiness" (245a-c). Socrates uses the

powerful, emotional language of the poets because as Phaedrus reads the written speech, and

Socrates comes "to share the ecstasy of your enthusiasm [*synebaccheusa*]" (234d). I noted this

section of the dialogue earlier, but it is important to understand that the use of the word

"enthusiasm" was most often used in concert with divine inspiration or interruption.[38]

Behind the notion of "enthusiasm" (or divine inspiration) lies the legacy of the epic poet.

The epic poet seemed to have a living, breathing, experiential power that capitalized on the

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[35] Dodds, E. R. "The Blessing of Madness." *The Greeks and the Irrational.* University of California Press, 1951.

[36] A larger portion of the palinode documents the good horse who "is tempered by self-control and respect for others…he needs no whip, but is guided only by spoken commands" (253d) and the bad horse, who is "an ally of excess and affectation… scarcely to be controlled with a combination of whip and goad" (254e). The speech navigates between the consequences of controlling and subduing that uncontrollable horse. Ferrari notes that "the lewd horse not only represents the pull of sexual appetite but offers a picture of what the whole person would become, how his life would degenerate into lechery, were the beats to gain complete control over him" (202).

[37] Socrates even asserts that "love [is] a kind of madness" (265a) thereby aligning the discussions of the inspiration of the Muses and the madness that comes in love.

[38] It is this attribution to "enthusiasm" [*synebaccheusa*] which signals the divine possession or madness associated with the Bacchic rites. Plato's use of the term links the oral epic tradition with the performance of cultic rites and highlights the frenzy and arousal present in both experiences.

power of the *kairotic* moment and was able to move their audience.[39] But with this power to move came the power to "manipulate" or control the audience as they were given over to the power their control. Epic poets overwhelmed their listeners, and their poetry "was a mechanism of power and of personal power. [The epic poet] was the medium of the Muse…and the Homeric audience submitted gratefully to the hypnotism of another" (*Preface to Plato* 145 and 147). The poet created an experience for the audience, which lulled them under his spell and control. In the *Republic,* Plato explains that when Homer or another tragedian represents the grief of a hero, "we surrender ourselves, let ourselves be carried along, and share the hero's pain; and then we enthuse about the skill of any poet who makes us feel particularly strong feelings (605d). We see a power to overwhelm Socrates in his various declarations of feelings of displacement, inability to remember, and spontaneous performance of oratory reflective of epic poetry. A madness seems to have overtaken Socrates much like that which was said to have stemmed from the Muses, through the poet, and onto the audience.

Homer's invocation to "Sing in Me, Muse" at the beginning of his epic poem, the *Odyssey,* illustrates the inventive responsibility that was given over to the Muses in ancient Greece. Epic poets believed the Muses would infuse them with the creative invention, and they were merely the voice and vessel for that story. As a result of the Muses' inspiration, epic poets would then go on to enrapture their audiences with sensational tales of adventure, interwoven with cultural wisdom and tradition, which was integral to the Greeks' knowledge of their own customs, social expectations, and history.

The effects of Homer as an epic poet cannot be overstated when analyzing ancient Greek texts and the origins of rhetoric. Homer was a storyteller unrivaled and imitated by all. Greek schooling by Sophists studied the oratorical prowess of the epic poet, hoping to harness those

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[39] See Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato.*

skills shown to be able to fill capture and move the audience through an experience that livened

all of the senses. This experience was powerful enough to move men and women to tears,

elation, ecstasy, anger, and excitement. It could move their judgments. This gift of speech was

understandably also dangerously powerful, and the movement towards *ekstasi*s, seen as a goal by

so many, was also seen as a threat to clear judgment, right thinking, self-control, and discipline

of the mind.

At the time poetry posed a "danger" to the minds of the Greek people as it consumed

them, making them unable to think of the poetry engulfing them as separate from their own

being.[40] Of course this meant that they were very easily persuaded by the power of the emotive,

sensually-driven poetry—thereby removing control and critical thinking from the immersed

audience. Poetry was an educational and moral danger. Plato writes about the dangers of the poet

most notably in the *Republic* with his assertion that poetry is "distorted (377e) "dangerous"

(378a) and should not "be told so casually to young people and people who lack discrimination"

(378a). One understanding of the *Republic's* warnings about meeting poetic passions without

discretion, analysis, and judgment, is that the text is proposing an ultimate proposition about

literacy (writing's introduction was starting to have widespread consequences at this time). This

understanding of the *Republic* suggests that the best defense against the dangers of poetry would

come through ability to see speech as an object outside of oneself, an object capable of being

analyzed and critiqued.

But the inspiration of madness was not a self-contained ill; indeed Plato explains through

Socrates that **"**If madness were simply an evil, it would be right, but in fact some of our greatest

blessings come from madness, when it is granted to us as a divine gift" (244a). In turning

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[40] See Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato.*

towards the vision of divine madness and inspiration as a gift instead of a dangerous, distorted ill, various sections of the dialogue reveal themselves as obvious proponents of a divine madness created through writing, and it seems as though this alternative view could very well have been what Plato is proposing.

From the start of the dialogue, the interplay between Socrates and Phaedrus is emotionally charged. They flirt and tease each other, with Socrates impelling Phaedrus to show him the "scroll" under his clothing" (228d), barely veiled in its suggestion. Socrates fawns over Phaedrus by saying that he "found a way to charm me outside…it looks as though all you have to do is dangle a speech in front of me and you can take me all over Attica, and anywhere else you fancy" (230e), and later, while reading, Phaedrus seems to "glow with pleasure" and so Socrates follows his lead and shares in "the ecstasy of your enthusiasm" (234d). All this adds up to a sexually charged atmosphere filled with inspiration. They are also notably surrounded by a lovely spot charged with flourishing trees, the full blooms of fragrant flowers, flowing streams, singing cicadas, and statuettes of the Nymphs and Achelous (230b). It is in this environment that Socrates first hears Lysias' speech and then begins to compose his own speeches. Elizabeth Belfiore notes that

> Socrates draws on themes and images in erotic poetry, drama, and the visual arts.
> Because the addressee is Phaedrus (257a5-6; cf. 243e), a lover of speeches who responds
> with the enthusiasm of Corybantes[41] or the Baccantes (228b6-c2, 234d1-6), Socrates uses
> the emotionally charged language of poetry to appeal to him (257a5-6). (194)

Socrates' speech is emotional in nature because it tells the story of conflict between parts of the

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[41] Corybantes was associated with "mental or psycho-physical disturbances," (Dodds, "The Blessings of Madness," (77).

soul; they are personified, therefore providing more dramatic interest. Belfiore points out that this type of rhetoric is what Socrates calls *psychagogia.* It is the form of speech used to address "a certain kind of soul and uses such techniques as the arousal of pity and fear (271c10-272b4). The imagery in the speech is an essential part of these rhetorical appeals to emotion" (Belfiore 194). In this understanding of the *Phaedrus,* madness and its disarming and inspirational properties defy critical analysis and will not stand still to be objectified.

Socrates notes that a "third kind of possession and madness comes from the Muses. It takes hold of a delicate, virgin soul and stirs it into a frenzy for composing lyric and other kinds of poetry and so educates future generations by glorifying the countless deeds of the past" (245a). The palinode eclipses the first two speeches with its grandiosity and fantasticality. As Socrates starts to speak of the chariots in his final palinode speech "his language loosens up, and seems positively florid compared with the rigor and economy of the previous passage" (Bett 3). Socrates speech is now taken up, deviating from the linear, enumerated form of the first two speeches because of the madness overtaking him. The palinode shows an appreciable difference from the first speeches through its florid language and "does not consider expediency…[and rather than giving the listener] sufficient, better or overwhelming reason to seek divine eros, Socrates aims to make the auditor *feel* [my emphasis] the attractions of divine eros so intensely that he will desire that eros himself" (Yunis 111). The palinode echoes the epic poet's desire which also sought to make listeners feel and identify as the heroes and characters of the story instead of detachedly observing. The palinode also comes closest to reflecting the form of the epic poets by its use of myth as form. Ferrari notes that the alteration in form displays how a "philosophic life can best bloom when rooted in what [Socrates] calls the 'divine' madness of love, as opposed to merely mortal self-control (256e3-5)" and it is for this reason that he "will

call upon the resources of myth" (113). Myth is a conspicuous sign of the epic poet, and, not only is the form of Socrates' palinode a nod to the epic poet, it is also a nod to the "divine" nature of philosophy, where the soul makes a journey towards its rightful goal of overcoming mortality to achieve the true knowledge of being. The palinode describes the hierarchies of souls (248d), the recollections of divine things, the rare work of philosophers (249d-251c). The palinode is often called "the Great Speech"[42] which portrays the pursuit of knowledge as an "intense erotic experience, triggered and driven by the sight of beauty—the sight of being itself and the parallel sight of the beauty of the beloved (251a-252b)" (112). Finally, the palinode contrasts with the written speech most definitively because Socrates extemporaneously creates his palinode in the *kairotic* moment (a feat that would be praised by Alcidamas) and the content of his palinode is not a copy or rote memorization of a previous speech (a defiance of the Theuth myth); instead, it is a moment that defies Socrates' reason, and this defiance of reason is sparked first and foremost by writing.

Conclusion

Control and madness operate as two brokering concepts in the *Phaedrus*. The dialogue presents unbridled forces (madness) facing off against the element of control, exposing the dynamism of rhetorical invention. Phaedrus' written speech appears to be the most controlled by temperance, organizational markers, and a steady determination to show the various syllogistic sides of gratifying a non-lover. But it is ironically Socrates' palinode which shows the most overwhelming control, and simultaneously the most impotency or passivity, as he is subsumed under the power of madness. The duality exposed by Derrida through the *pharmakon* may be an important guidepost suggesting the obvious ill of frustration that comes in trying to capture the disaster through writing, but also the not-so-obvious curative potential of writing in the disaster.

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[42] See Harvey Yunis' article "Eros in Plato's *Phaedrus* and the Shape of Greek Rhetoric."

Writing, far from trying to rationalize and manage disaster by making an object of it, in fact provokes the very passivity that is the only discursively appropriate response to disaster.

My proposal in this chapter has been to suggest that we take the view of writing as *pharmakon,* offering both curative and problematic, and apply that same possibility to the rhetorical passivity that comes through the disaster. Instead of seeing the disaster, singularly, as a frustration to the field of rhetoric and writing, what if the disaster helps point 1) to the object-centered paradigm which guides so much of the discourse on suffering, trauma, and pain, but also 2) to the inevitability that it must exist outside and beyond the limits of that paradigm? The disaster refuses objectivity; only passivity lies in its wake. My next chapter will explore how the field of writing and rhetoric allows and disallows writing to be overcome by that passivity in order to "let fascination rule" (*Space of Literature* 31) as Blanchot suggests. Is such a thing possible? Is it prevalent in the discourse of rhetoric or is it blatantly absent?

After discovering the "curative" possibility of writing in this chapter, we must move on to consider how we can approach writing in the classroom. Adorno later rescinded his saying about poetry[43] after Auschwitz by saying, "A perennial suffering has just as much right to find expression as a victim of torture has to scream. For this reason it may have been wrong to write that after Auschwitz poetry could no longer be written" (355). So what is left for expression? We'll discuss that further in the next chapter.

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[43] Adorno is famously noted for saying that poetry after the Holocaust is "barbaric" and that it is "impossible to write poetry today" in his 1949 essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" printed in the larger book *Prisms.*

Blanchot and the Problem of Passivity for Rhetoric and Writing Studies

"To write is to be absolutely distrustful of writing, while entrusting
oneself to it entirely."
--Maurice Blanchot, *Writing of the Disaster*

Buttressing the expanse of Maurice Blanchot's thought on the act of writing is one repeated notion: passivity. "Passivity" finds its root in the Latin *"passivus"* from the verb "*pati"* which means "to suffer," to suffer at the hands of. Blanchot use of is not only fitting for his theorization of attempts to write of trauma, pain, and suffering in *Writing of the Disaster,* but it is also especially significant to his consideration of the act of writing as an act of death, absence, and neutralization. Through his discussion of passivity Blanchot reconfigures the capacities of not just language but agency in the world by uncovering our vulnerability, our ultimate lack of control.

In the course of this project, I attempt to show the disaster foiling attempts at theodicy and preventing attempts at understanding. In its wake are the broken remnants of a perceived subjectivity that turned out to in fact be a very powerful passivity. In the first chapter on Job, I write about Job's friends and the act of creating theodicies in the midst of disaster. In the second chapter I write about language philosophy and the response of philosophy to presence and the said. In the third chapter I write about rhetorical passivity and the response to madness if we were to see the disaster as the limit where madness reigns above control. Madness as rhetorical passivity overtook Socrates leading him to create a fantastical account of philosophy. In this chapter I discuss how subjectivity is the reigning master of rhetoric and writing theory and pedagogy, but passivity is suggested by Blanchot. Through this chapter I hope to clarify Blanchot's perception of the writer and the act of writing and discuss the conspicuous absence of the notion of passivity in the field of rhetoric and writing studies. I explore how passivity seems

to be overtly subjugated by the field and consider why that is the case, and whether passivity can fit into the reigning framework of the field.

Interrogating Blanchot's idea of passivity brings about several principal questions. Is writing a creative, active act? What is the role of the writer? Often in rhetoric and writing we speak of passive audiences being acted upon by agents (the speaker, writer), but very rarely if ever do we speculate upon the act of writing as passive. If passivity is missing from rhetoric and writing theory; what are the consequences of seeing writing as passive for the field? What does that serve to sacrifice? Is passivity an aspect of the human experience that we would do well to recover, especially when we think about writing? And we may well know of the disaster ruining attempts to write, but what of Blanchot's continual proposition to keep writing?

Blanchot lays out two identities in his theorization of writing in the disaster, which he calls "the man of faith" and "the man of science." He explains that between "the man of faith and the man of science, there is little difference" as both "guard against destructive chance and reconstitute the requirements of order; both appeal to a constant which they pray to or theorize about; both are men of accommodation and of unity for whom the other and the same are complementary" (*Writing of the Disaster* 90). This chapter explicates the framing of passivity and the bent towards agency and intention in prominent rhetoric journal articles from the past 30 years.[44] Through this chapter I investigate if rhetoric and writing studies is situated in the same category as "the man of faith" and "the man of science." How does the field show itself to be

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[44] The majority of articles cited and considered in the following section come from the journals of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, CCC,* and *College English.* A thorough review of articles mentioning the term "passivity" in any of its forms from the years 1990-2020 inform the latter half of this chapter. A trend within the articles shows the prioritization of ideas of "dignity," "activity," and "voice," over the concept of passivity. This prioritization leads to the subjugation of the idea of passivity as well as its general lack of presence in the field.

that which, despite its attempts to reject or buck the influences of subjectivity,[45] continues to

appeal to the accommodations of unity and the requirements of order that that subjectivity seems

to bring?

Blanchot's Conception of Passivity

To what is Blanchot referring when he speaks of passivity? There are many notions that

will come to mind in association with the passive. The passivity seen in Blanchot's discussion of

writing speaks to a passivity that alienates the writer from the writing. Passivity is posed as the

self's effacement in language, a kind of self-neutralization through writing, and "if there is a

relation between writing and passivity, it is because both presuppose the effacement, the

extenuation of the subject" (*Writing of the Disaster* 14). Blanchot would say that writing does

not lead to a conservation or constitution, but instead to a death. He explains that

> To write is no longer to situate death in the future—the death which is always already
>
> past; to write is to accept that one has to die without making death present and without
>
> making oneself present to it. To write is to know that death has taken place even though it
>
> has not been experienced, and to recognize it in the forgetfulness that it leaves—in the
>
> traces which, effacing themselves, call upon one to *exclude oneself from the cosmic*
>
> *order*. (*Writing of the Disaster* 66)

To write is to undergo a certain type of death, as the writing or work one creates surpasses

oneself. It is therefore not constituting the self's thoughts, as referenced previously in the chapter

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[45] Scholarship is growing in the field on the dissolution of the subject object divide. See in
particular Thomas Rickert's *Ambient Rhetoric* or Byron Hawk's *Resounding the Rhetorical:
Composition as a Quasi-Object (Composition, Literacy, and Culture)* which questions agency
and its theorization. Rhetoric scholars are opening new lines of inquiry into what is called "New
Materialism" which investigates subjectivity in light of research in ecology, digital technology,
and new media.

considering Wiesel's questions on testimony and representation. Even though one comes most naturally to writing typically as a movement towards self-preservation, Blanchot would say that one should come to writing with the expectation of death: "the writer, then, is one who writes in order to be able to die, and he is one whose power to write comes from an anticipated relation with death" (*Space of Literature* 93). We write to establish and set down on paper a thought or think through our ideas and help them develop. But, in Blanchot's imagination of the act of writing, the writer is no longer able to access his or her writing; Blanchot calls attention to a de-stabalizing effect negation has on these products "where every linguistic construction is based on nothing but absence" (Pender 15). It is an "other" to him or her as soon as the writing begins.

Historically, subjectivity has acted as the cornerstone of the study of rhetoric where a speaker is trained up to influence a waiting, passive audience. Rhetoric and writing studies has foundational roots in creating/facilitating active subjectivity in the speaker or writer.[46] Aristotle and Quintilian sought to systematize the rhetorical power displayed by the Sophists, imitators of the epic poet, in order to provide an educational road map towards wielding that same prowess. Rhetoric became a mainstay of Greek education and was integral to the formation and execution of discourse in their civic life. The ability to speak well in the public forum was not only important but also expected of Greek citizens. Cicero voiced the large-scale opinion that the development of civilization was the direct consequence of speech. He notes in *de Inventione* that

> after cities had been established how could it have been brought to pass that men should
>
> learn to keep faith and observe justice and become accustomed to obey others voluntarily
>
> and believe not only that they must work for the common good but even sacrifice life
>
> itself, unless men had been able by eloquence to persuade their fellows of the truth of

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[46] Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, and Quintilian's *Insitutia Oratoria,* and Cicero's *de Oratore,* foundational works significant in the development of rhetoric as a field of study, position the speaker as an actor (subject) affecting or acting upon the audience (object).

what they had discovered by reason? (7).

It is through the orator that faith could be established, obedience ordered, and common good founded. From this foundational legacy rhetoric continues to find its identity as a discipline established in the ideas of potency, activity, and agency.

In place of the common early descriptions of writing, where criticality and subjectivity seemingly came to be established,[47] there is an erasure of the subject in Blanchot's theory of writing. This paradigm contrasts distinctly with Blanchot's imagining of the writer where the written word is no longer a space in which the subject is constituted; there is no power or control given over to the subject as a result of writing, "being a writer," or creating a composition.[48] Blanchot posits a new identity for the writer, and uses the term neuter, what he refers to as "le / il" or "he/it," to take the place of the subject in writing. This premise detaches the subject from its relation to unity and displaces it; or in other words the act of writing displaces the "I" because the he/it has no place, and the writer no longer speaks or has a presence. That displacement is passivity overpowering the writer in the act of writing, while also making writing possible. Writing introduces a rupture; composing may seem to be an attempt to bring into appearance, but that appearance is frustrated, as language denies access to any real "appearance."

One of Blanchot's theoretical contemporaries, Jacques Derrida, introduced iterability to the field, as the ability to "break with every given context, and engender new contexts in an absolutely non-saturable fashion" (*Margins of Philosophy* 320). Iterability allows writing to operate on the page and in the absence of the writer, and that theorization is helpful in understanding Blanchot's postulation of the writer. Derrida notes that iterability "does not

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[47] See more on analysis of criticality and writing in Ch. 3 which discusses the *Phaedrus.*
[48] It is important to note that Blanchot refers repeatedly to death and dying of self in *Writing of the Disaster*, but he is not referring to an event of death at a particular moment of disaster. In fact, the disaster, death, and passivity are terms meant to point to that which escapes into the infinite, not to return.

suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any centre of absolute anchoring" (*Margins of Philosophy* 320–21), and this absence of "any centre" echoes Blanchot's notion of writing in the disaster as "a circle eternally bereft of the center" (*Writing of the Disaster 41).* Like the writing we see in Derrida, Blanchot writes, "Literature has certainly triumphed over the meaning of words" but what it has found is "meaning detached from its conditions, separated from its moments […] the aggravation of what one cannot prevent oneself from understanding" ("Literature and the Right to Death" 387). And so writing does not present or accomplish appearance because it is not anchored to any context, condition, or moment. The instant a writer sets to writing its meaning is compromised because the context of its composition slips away.

But absence is different from passivity, so how does Blanchot get from this theory of death and the otherness of the writer from his or her writing to passivity? Language finds meaningfulness through both contextualization and the ability to be understood outside of its meaning. Negation, or that which allows a word to have a particular meaning in one case and then also makes language free from that meaning in another case, is important to understanding Blanchot's chain of thinking that links language's absence and the death of the writer to passivity.

Meaning and Meaninglessness

Blanchot received much of the influence for his linguistic and literary theory from Stéphane Mallarmé's writing on quotidian versus literary language.[49] Mallarmé distinguished "*parole brute*," everyday language, from "*parole essentielle*," literary language. [50] In *parole*

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[49] See Mallarmé's "Crise de vers" ("Crisis in Poetry") for a fuller exposition of *parole brute* and *parole essentielle.*
[50] Blanchot makes reference to these types in both *The Space of Literature* (1955) and *The Infinite Conversation* (1974).

brute words are used to create meaning for everyday language. For *parole essentielle* language is

freed from a role of utility and instead brought to materiality (meaninglessness is pure

materiality). The first branch of thinking on language (*parole brute*) secures meaning in

communication, while the second type (*parole essentielle*) happens through the undoing of

meaning. For Blanchot "language on the first slope [*parole brute*] fills words with meaning by

negating the concrete, singular reality of its object. Through this process words become

containers, and it's the content of those containers that matters, not the containers themselves"

(Pender 19). With *parole brute* the materiality of the word is suppressed to become "a

contentless container, the embodiment of emptiness" (Blanchot "Literature and the Right to

Death" 382) in order to constitute a concept to create meaning. Alternatively, on the second

slope [*parole essentielle*] language seems to be freed from the constitution of concepts or

meaning, we may think of this slope as linked to the language of poetry where the form of

language is obscured when "the proper determination of indeterminate and meaningless

existence" comes to into appearance ("Literature and the Right to Death" 387). Language on the

second slope is not viewed in terms of the utility of communicating ideas, instead it is seen as the

opening where words are freed from the requirements of representation. This de-stabilized

operation of *parole essentielle* is the space where one of Blanchot's most famous notes about

"letting fascination rule language"[51] stems from. Literary language becomes "meaningless only

when its meaninglessness coincides with language's inability to stop being meaning" (Pender

20). In other words, the capacity for language to "work for us" no matter the context, is aligned

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[51] "To write is to let fascination rule language. It is to stay in touch, through language, in language, with the absolute milieu where the thing becomes image again, where the image, instead of alluding to some particular figure, becomes an allusion to that which is without figure, and instead of a form drawn upon absence, becomes the formless presence of this absence, the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet" (*The Space of Literature* 31).

in tandem with its resistance to working; that paradoxical simultaneity is the passivity that we realize we have as writers when we set out to compose.[52]

Blanchot calls attention to the fact that these two slopes are not in fact distinctly different from one another, as *meaning* could not exist on slope one, as *parole brute,* if words were not empty (as signifiers which do not stand as the actual thing but a signification of the thing), and *meaninglessness* could not exist on slope two, as *parole essentielle,* unless meaningless things were endowed with some kind of fundamental meaning (language is endowed with the ability to signify). Or put another way by Blanchot, "an art which purports to follow one slope is already on the other"("Literature and the Right to Death" 388). Death meets the writer through the passivity that comes in the pure meaningless of language. To write the writer must encounter the escape of language into meaningless alongside the simultaneous use of empty containers of meaning (i.e. words).[53] Passivity is an inevitability in the act of writing as the writer comes to find that "he *can* write not by exercising personal will, but by discovering what the experience of writing compels him to write with all the fascination of the image" (Marshall 230). This "fascination of the image" is not in line with the wield-ability and careful crafting typically associated with writing as *techne* (skill or art) identified by rhetoric and writing studies.

If we are looking to find a form of writing which best exemplifies the notion of passivity in language, we need look no further than the fragment. Blanchot displays the concept of passivity in his writing through the fragment, a form of writing which only fractures, or bursts,

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[52] Put another way by Blanchot: "Writing marks and leaves traces, but the traces do not depend on the mark and, at the limit, are not in relation to it. The traces do not refer to the moment of the mark, they are without origin, but not without end in the very permanence that seems to perpetuate them, traces which, even in becoming confused and replacing each other, are there forever, and forever cut off from that of which they would be the traces, having no other being than their plurality, as if there were not *a* trace, but traces, never the same and always repeated" (*Step Not Beyond* 54).

[53] For a fuller explanation of Blanchot, and Mallarmé, and negation in writing, see Kelly Pender's article "Negation and the Contradictory Technics of Rhetoric."

"the little by little suddenly" (*Writing of the Disaster* 34), without actually fully presenting or stating anything. Fragments best depict Blanchot's view of the passivity of writing because passivity is that which "cannot make itself present, or enter into presence, and is still less able to be represented or to constitute itself as a basis for a representation" (33). The fragment works well in displaying Blanchot's theorization of passivity in writing because the fragment doesn't connect beginnings or ends of ideas, and as soon as the semblance of an idea seems to be presented, it is broken. Blanchot posits that language continually fail in its ability to communicate, and that failure is best put on display in the fragment which "mobilize the repetition and multiplicity that will un-work and destabilize the reification that all writing tends to achieve and keep eternally in circulation the openness of language to what cannot be captured" (Brogan188). In writing with the fragment Blanchot exposes the lack or impossibility or deficiency in writing to wholly present or be, as we may assume writing does. "The fragmentary promises not instability (the opposite of fixity) so much as disarray, confusion" (*Writing of the Disaster* 7). The understanding promised through revealing that seems to come from writing is challenged in the fragment. In order to open up the possibility of writing of non-writing and "disrupt the totalizing grasp of the system of language and its conceptual formulations" (Brogan 188) one must direct his or her sight towards fragmentary writing.

Two enigmas distinguish Blanchot's discussions of death, disappearance of the subject, and passivity. First, paradoxically, we learn that in Blanchot's theorization, it is death and disappearance that make writing appear in order to be known, read, and understood. It is death that makes writing come into being. Blanchot argues that through negation we come to have meaning, art, communication, identity, and understanding. His theory of writing maintains that it is "only in the obliteration of events, in effacing them from the realm of the sayable and by

acknowledging them as irretrievably lost to knowledge, that the writer is brought to language" (Bernard-Donals 91). Blanchot says that all agency is stolen from the writer in the act of writing. Writing comes to be seen as a risky affair, because the writer "commits himself to the risk of critical impersonality, surrendering his autonomy as a writer in order to let emerge within him a necessity of writing that comes from outside" (*Writing of the Disaster* 234). The *outside* forces, acting upon the autonomy of the writer, are what allow the writer to "pass away" in order to let language become declarable.

The second enigmatic notion important to understanding passivity in Blanchot's theory is that one cannot approach writing with the *intention* of "dying;" that would be, according to Blanchot "an affront to common-sense" (*The Space of Literature 95)*. To be intentional about passivity would of course deny the very state of passivity. The intentionality so often attributed to writing in rhetoric and writing studies is turned on its head in Blanchot's descriptions of the writing process. Yet, it is important to note that just because intentionality is displaced from its typical association with the creative act of writing, that does not mean that writing excludes "rigor or denote[s] a slackening of forces" (Suglia 241). Therefore passivity does not signal impotence or feebleness. Joseph Suglia notes that "Blanchot is the last theoretician who would advocate a lackadaisical interpretive approach toward the work of art. To allow the work to stand on its own requires the greatest strength…at the heart of passivity, there is an active dimension, pushing the meaning of the terms active/passive beyond their accepted signification" (241), while Walter Brogan explains that the task of writing will "ceaselessly contend with the disastrously impossible contradictions inherent in passivity, an intensifying passivity outside the schema of appropriation and expropriation, and the appropriative relationship of form and content, that can occur only when even the will to passivity is denied, so that the excess of

passivity…pluralize[s] infinitely the very process of propriety" (Brogan 186). I make note of this scholarship in order to be sure to show that passivity in writing is in fact not aligned with the typical synonymic concepts associated with passivity. It is not idleness, carelessness, or weakness which pave the path of passivity in writing. There is an active dimension of interaction with the passivity of writing. It may helpful to think back to the rhetorical passivity mentioned in previous chapters. As Socrates vocalized the palinode in the *Phaedrus* he explains that there is a "kind of possession and madness [that] comes from the Muses" (245a), which control his extemporaneous act of composition, not transforming Socrates into an idle puppet, but instead allowing him to become a fountain being supplied "like a jug by streams flowing from elsewhere" (235d). He creates extemporaneously, but passively, interacting with Phaedrus, the written Lysias speech, the Muses. But while making him wholly passive to its powers, Socrates's passivity makes him no less of an active orator. Nevertheless, his passivity does call into question the notions of his agency.

The Absence and Subjugation of Passivity in the Field

The state of "rhetorical passivity" stands in stark contrast to the founding goals of the discipline of rhetoric. This is as true today as it was at the inception of the discipline with Plato and Aristotle. Powerful epic poetry oration, as perceived by Plato, was seen as a dangerous tool that could be wielded to confuse and distract Ancient Greeks from true knowledge, as mere representation. He spent much of his writing in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Gorgias,* writing about the potency of language of the epic poet to deceive and move people in powerful, and potentially harmful, ways.[54] For Plato "Homeric poetry was dangerous not only because it imprecisely imitated the Forms, but because it also anesthetized its auditors into a non-critical state of total acceptance. This passive recall of the surface content of the epics [was] a mnemonic

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[54] See Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* for more on the power of the epic poet.

necessity to preserve Greek culture" (Frentz 248).[55] The epic poet stood as a striking figure that powerfully molded Ancient Greek culture for years, and the ability to mimic that same mastery and dominance was highly appealing. The poet was recognized as a compelling actor (agent) influencing the emotions and thoughts of the audience (passive observer) with his moving epic tales.

What then are we to think when reading through Blanchot's discussion of language where "the will to sovereignty is transformed unwittingly into an experience of extreme paralysis, powerlessness, and subjection" (Suglia 241)? Is this not the opposite of the agency and intentionality found in rhetoric and integral to its imagination and use? Blanchot's work challenges and exposes many underlying conceptions of rhetoric and writing studies by entering into a conversation with philosophy, reason, and the power of the rhetor. The current rhetorical tradition most commonly communicated in rhetoric and writing programs takes form in the model of the subject, particularly within the context of American higher education. Subjectivity still reigns as the standard of analysis, critique, and composition in the field, despite many efforts to shed it. Subjectivity stands in contradiction to the imaginings of the writer for Blanchot, as he claims that "You can only become a writer, you can never be one; no sooner are you, than you are no longer, a writer" (*Writing of the Disaster* 61). A very prominent goal of rhetoric is expression or affirmation in order to unify or combine to order, but passivity subjugates the writer to displacement and frustration antithetical to the stability of the subjectivity.

In the course of my study of prominent rhetoric journals and articles mentioning passivity within the last 30 years, I have come up with some patterns concerning the concept of passivity. In the following section I focus on how the intertwined, but individual notions of "dignity,"

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[55] See Frentz's article for more on the power of myth in "Memory, Myth, and Rhetoric in Plato's Phaedrus."

"activity," and "voice," integral to the model of the subjectivity, form our standard perceptions

of rhetoric while subjugating the notion of passivity that Blanchot proposes. In my research,

these three notions seem to be the three most ubiquitous conceptions underlying the identity of

the rhetor, and they are the ones that seem to be the most jeopardized by the proposition of

passivity.

Dignity

Blanchot explains that "the search for knowledge [is] the so-called *dignity* (my emphasis)

of knowledge: that ultimate propriety which we believe will be accorded us by knowledge"

(*Writing of the Disaster* 82). This "dignity of knowledge" is what (and some would say, "rightly

so") defines the project of the university system, pedagogy, and education. Blanchot's

theorization of passivity and the death of the writer jeopardize the dignity that knowledge seems

to deliver. Rhetoric is special in that it became

> the first active attempt at…the formation of a metalinguistic skill set that broke
>
> considerably with [simple narratives and myth]. In this sense, rhetoric was the first
>
> discipline to fully acknowledge and take advantage of the unique cognitive advantage of
>
> humans to have 'active' access to memory rather than the 'passive' collection and
>
> recollection of sense experiences. (Pruchnic and Lacey 476).

The purpose of rhetoric is to move away from passivity and towards agency, as we see in the

case of the paedeutic spell cast by the oral poet. The rhetorician's goal is to claim "ascendancy

over the minds of his hearers" (Campbell 148). Critical thinking that comes through literacy

allows the individual to take power back and become agents rather than objects being acted

upon. In this there is dignity. The critical distance of the subject from the object is indicative of

not only knowledge but power.

Rhetoric and writing scholars, in their critical commentary about theory and pedagogy in the field, continually position writers and speakers as actors impacting audiences. There is a power structure set up there, and it is intentional and valued. Audiences are passive. Writers and orators are not. Higgins notes a sentiment I frequently observed in rhetoric and writing scholarship, that "When experts speak about subordinated groups, it is often in condescending terms--as passive consumers, deviant delinquents, or needy recipients…Expert discourse dismisses subordinated groups as incapable rhetors, as people not worth hearing" (Higgins 695). When passivity was mentioned in many of these articles it was in reference to how women, slaves, children, and minorities were spoken of.[56] In the course of research for this last chapter in fact, I've found that passivity is overwhelmingly relegated as a subordinate, deficient, inferior quality, always second to agency and activity. Passivity is synonymous in its usage with mindlessness or automatons. Passivity is most always used pejoratively, and it should be combatted for multiple reasons: as an enactment of freedom, pride, dignity, or to combat signs of weakness.

But for Blanchot there is no establishment of the subject empowering the individual speaker/writer. Suglia notes that Blanchot's "self" that writes "does not merely negate itself in order to allow the work of art to stand on its own, but is substituted by the consciousness of a non-'self' that is [not] conceivable as a subject" (243). Power is taken from the author in writing in Blanchot's estimation as the writing "de-authorizes itself [as] a testimony bereft of the authorial power of an experienced subject; it is an unauthorized testimony to a non-experience, to what is impossible to experience" (Brogan 186). There is no dignity here, and subsequently no power; this is the experience of writing.

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[56] See articles from Bizzell (2010), Henderson (2007), Higgins (2006), Mack (2019), and Mattingly (1999).

If we theorize passivity at its zenith, we will meet the disaster, as the disaster is "what remains to be said" (*The Writing of the Disaster* 33). The passivity of writing is just a small taste of the ineffability of disaster. When Edgar from Shakespeare's *King Lear* concedes, "the worst is not So long as we can say 'This is the worst'" (*King Lear* IV.I.25-27) he voices this inability in the face of disaster. Writing and speaking in the midst of suffering or pain are attempts to flip the power structure that the disaster places on the one "suffering" the disaster, to turn the sufferer into an active agent, no longer "passive," suffering from the disaster. The disaster brings subjugation, weakness, and indignity, and this is exactly what rhetoric and writing try to displace.

When writing classrooms provide a space for students to write about trauma, tragedy, or suffering it is with the intent to help them find agency where agency has been stolen from them (Bruns, Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, Danielewicz, and Haidu). The desire to write about pain whether it be inside or outside the classroom is make it into an object, to which one can stand apart; writing of the disaster is an attempt "to accomplish something and to bring something hitherto unknown into the orbit of received meaning," (Brogan 186) but language will not allow that meaning or accomplishment. Writing of the disaster is identified as "the haste of the Finite to which one longs to entrust oneself once and for all without foreseeing that the Finite is only the ebb of the Infinite" (*Writing of the Disaster* 31) by Blanchot. One longs for the solace of dignity in the disaster, but Blanchot cedes to the reality that we can only write in "ruined words" (*Writing of the Disaster* 82) because the disaster is most indicative of the indignity of passivity, that which happens in the unsayable. This can be frustrating to writers, teachers, and students (and may be one of the most significant reasons that it is avoided in composition classrooms), but it may also be a motivation to keep writing. We can be encouraged to write through "ruined

words" and fragments, while at the same time knowing that we will not have access to the "final word,"[57] a lesson that specifically comes through the notion of passivity.

Activity

Action is the second notion I'd like to call attention to as we explore why passivity is absent and subjugated in the field. In literacy's insipient stages, Alcidamas posed writing as an inferior act because it subdued individuals to processes in the mind that were "slow" and got "in the way of all that easy flow to be found in extempore speeches" (11). The ability to seize upon the moment, or act with the knowledge of *kairos* was recognized as the most superior form of communication. "For centuries the legend of Kairos has warned against passivity: a person must act in a single, decisive moment or suffer the consequences--the moment is quick, the suffering long" (Myers 11). We continue to see that legacy, which recognizes the rhetor who takes decisive action, dominating the classroom and critical commentary on writing.

Many rhetoric and writing scholars speak of passivity in coordination with the study of "the active," but as the negative counterpart.[58] Passivity is often absent from the discourse except in order to remark on types of writing or speaking that should be avoided. In one particular article passivity was metaphorically framed as a disease that could be cured through autobiography as "an antidote to passivity and a spur to action" (Danielewicz 443). We see a lot about passive learners, but very little about passive writers. "Passive voice" also exposes important sentiments about the subject in the discourse concerning the active and passive. When reviewing the field's perception of passive voice, we can take notice of the syntactical

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[57] "Language is not an instrument; it is not irreducible to any function of mediation, any work on behalf of meanings, statements, descriptions, narrations, expressions of feelings…It is rather a material that exposes me to the limits of my power. In writing I am no longer an agent but now an utterly passive subject" (Bruns 81).

[58] See in particular Dryer (2012), Johnson (2013), McKee (2008), and Micciche (2004), and Greer (1999).

significance and value that writers put on the subject in active voice, and while this significance

is not ontological in nature, as it does not reveal a greater conceptual notion about "being" in

language, it does expose the preference placed upon activity in language that we see across the

field of rhetoric and writing *and* in the structure of subjectivity that dominates the West. Passive

voice is noted in order to identify its grammatical inaccuracy. Passive voice is a mistake and

exposes weakness in the sentiments of the writer rather than desired strength. Both

grammatically and politically, passivity suppresses the subject. It is one of the primary faults

found in papers: "the many passive sentences that Mrs. Kaufman decisively underlined in red

and marked with a large P" (Santee 12-13). The arrangement of syntax is supposed to be active,

where the subject is the figure acting upon an object; a subject should not be acted upon. Like a

scarlet letter, it is one of the most obvious and pervasively known "sins" of writing, teachers

quickly identify passive voice as an obvious and easily marked error. Professional document

checkers mark the passive voice by default, easily flagging "passive voice and invariably

suggest[ing] to students that they turn the passive constructions into active constructions," even

if the passive voice in a certain case may be "appropriate or effective" (Selber 477). In a comical

reflection on correcting the passive voice, "When Faculty Talk about Writing," Mike Rose quips

that "faculty in psychology and sociology […] must spend time shoving the passive voice back

down the throats of students who have been conditioned in composition courses to gag over

hidden subjects" (274).

The subordination of the passive to the active in education is inherited from, among

others*,* John Dewey.[59] Dewey, who saw education fundamentally as a form of activity and

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[59] The philosophical tradition of Pragmatism is most often attributed to the work of John Dewey,
Paolo Freire, and Jane Addams, among others.

praxis,[60] acknowledged an open system of thought and action where ideas were in the process of development. He believed that experience opens up knowledge to be seen as in progress and active rather than static and fixed. In *Art as Experience* Dewey argues that "Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what has been isolated and singular" (244). He suggests that words are empty of meaning without the context of situation and the enacting of human interaction. It is situation and activity that gives words and discourse its meaning. Activity in community helps meaning to become "enhanced, deepened, and solidified" (*Experience and Nature* 205) and diversity gives way to an even greater richness of meanings. In Dewey's estimation

> If we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with
> ourselves. Because of converse, social give and take, various organic attitudes become an
> assemblage of persons engaged in converse, conferring with one another…Through
> speech a person dramatically identifies himself with potential acts and deeds he plays
> many roles…[and] Thus mind emerges" (*Experience and Nature* 170).

It is activity that gives words and discourse its meaning. For Dewey, it is through language, through conversation especially, that knowledge is created, which can then be acted upon and known.

The idea of *praxis*[61] does coincide with Blanchot's theorization of passivity in that *praxis*

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[60] Dewey did not actively use the term "*praxis*" in his writing, but instead wrote consistently using the terms "production," "action" as formative in his beliefs. We see this foundational theory set down in *Experience and Nature* when he writes that "In creative production, the external and physical world is more than a mere means or external condition of perceptions, ideas and emotions; it is subject-matter and sustainer of conscious activity; and thereby exhibits…the fact that consciousness is not a separate realm of being, but is the most manifest quality of existence when nature is most free and most active" (393). I use the term *praxis* as a reference to the larger field of Pragmatism which grew from his ideas.

[61] Paolo Freire emphasized action and reflection as the main tenets of his pedagogical approach

can be seen as "a giving over," but it distinguishes itself from Blanchot's notion substantially in the emphasis Blanchot places on death during writing, not life. In Blanchot's case it is the giving of oneself over that one writes or speaks. The act of writing produces the death and neutralization of the author, not the creation of active discourse. Writing expels the language from meaning, rather than ushering it forth or opening it up and revealing it. He explains that

> Every writer, every artist, is acquainted with the moment at which he is cast out and
>
> apparently excluded from the work in progress. The work holds him off, the circle in
>
> which he no longer has access to himself has closed, yet he is enclosed therein because
>
> the work, unfinished, will not let him go. (*Writing of the Disaster* 53)

In that enclosure, that passivity, he is rendered helpless, inactive, unable to work in the process of creating meaning through the work. The writer is not actively involved in the work *in progress*, as we see in Dewey's theorization of *praxis*. In contrast to Dewey, language undermines our familiar notions of human agency through writing instead of creating or progressing towards that agency. According to Blanchot, the need to write is linked to the approach toward this point at which nothing can be done with words.

Today we see more of Dewey in rhetoric and writing pedagogy than Blanchot as it "encourage[s] students to view writing as a material social practice in which meaning is actively made, rather than passively relayed or effortlessly produces… [it] demonstrates to students that language does purposeful, consequential work in the world--work that can be learned and applied" (Micciche 719). Dewey's thought on *praxis* was based in the ties he saw between

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just as Dewey did. For Freire *praxis* or problem-posing education does not look at knowledge, students, or writing with the burden of the "finished product." Instead it allows the potential of the process to unburden students by leading them away from a vision of truth as abstracted and complete. Freire notes that *praxis* is the "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 126), and that action is what lends to liberation of the oppressed.

education, discourse, and democratic involvement. Our academic institutions were also formed with this involvement in mind. James Berlin formatively suggested that the work of rhetoric requires that students must "become active agents of social and political change" (*Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* 112), where passivity is something to be taught out of and away from. Early education in rhetoric was purposed with preparing students for involvement in democratic public discourse, and it continues to be tasked with that same goal today. Terrill argues that "A pedagogy for citizenship that depends on the slavish copying of others would undermine a democratic culture dependent on the ability of its citizens to craft effective public address. It would see a recipe for a dull uniformity rather than a healthy agonism" (310). Active agency is important to the purposes of the university and crucial in preparing students for civic life.

Voice

Voice is the last bastion of the field that I'll touch upon in exploring passivity's absence. Peter Elbow, a scholar who could be labeled as the pedagogical champion on "voice," writes on the disciplinary trajectory of the idea in, "Voice in Writing Again: Embracing Contraries." He notes that in the 1960s so many scholars took up the topic of "voice" with the noble intention of empowering students. Then came the critics who said that any focus on the topic of "voice" was foolish; instead we are only constructions of the larger society, going so far as "to deprive individual persons of any agency to make a difference in the world" (169). Since that time Elbow says that we've seen a silence come over the field, fearing to say anything about voice in either direction. He notes that in most recent years you cannot find a writer "arguing for voice (much less 'true self' or 'real self') in any enthusiastic or non-ironic or noncritical sense" but, he notes that "the concept of voice keeps not going away" (169). And why is that?

Elbow explains that "voice" is a slippery idea, combining the qualities of "magic potion, mother's milk, and electricity" (*Writing with Power* 286), but if he were to try and define it, it "implies words that capture the sound of an individual on the page" (287). Voice is indicative of the personal; it is a manifestation of the "I" as subject. . It points to the intentionality and personality that we believe is integrated into making meaning in the writing process. We motivate students to find their own voice in their writing, and we prod students to analyze texts to find the distinctive ethos propelling the author's arguments forward.

Blanchot's theorization of writing negates the belief that the author's voice has the potential to shine through in his or her writing. He instead contends that the author "loses the power to say 'I'" (*Space of Literature* 29) in writing. The destruction of the subject in writing is what ushers he or she into a narrative voice, but different from common conceptions "voice," in this narrative voice "I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is; the outside, as that which prevents, precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation" (*Space of Literature 31).* The self that substitutes itself for the author is not a subject, and is "deprived of all of its historical and biographical traits" (Suglia 243), as "the writer surrenders him/herself in language to language for the sake of the disclosure of language as subjectivity without a subject" (246). This stands in very opposition to sentiments about discovering and cultivating an authorial voice, a distinguishable self. The non-self is what Blanchot says makes way for the possibility of expression. There is no self-consciousness in writing because the author has "died." This is illustrated more clearly through Blanchot's description of Socrates writing. He explains that Socrates did not "write" per se, but opens himself to the same disappearance and death of the "I" through questioning in dialectic. Blanchot writes that

Socrates does not write; but beneath the voice, it is nevertheless through writing that he

gives himself to others as the perpetual subject perpetually destined to die. He does not

speak; he questions. Questioning, he interrupts and interrupts himself without cease,

giving form ironically to the fragmentary; through his death, he causes speech to be

haunted by writing, and likewise limits writing to a single form: that of the testament

(without any signature, though) (*Writing of the Disaster* 65).

Socrates opened himself up to others in passivity and gave form to fragmentary language through

his questioning because in this questioning, he is *given over to* another. This giving of oneself

over is the ultimate signification of passivity, opposing any constitution of writing as an act of

conservation of self or establishment of "voice." For Blanchot this questioning is a "writing,"

and a passivity that allows writing to testify as the writer falls away. There is no establishment of

the speaker or writer, lending a dignity to the act. It is done as a "perpetual subject" who is

"perpetually destined to die." As established in this chapter's explication of Blanchot's work,

intentionality is absent, and passivity reigns over the writer as a self, individual, or subject. This

"break with the author's intentions in particular or with intentionality in general" (Hill 201) is the

working of language. It is through this discussion of negation, or lack of presence that Blanchot

comes to his theory on writing and passivity.

Instead of passivity, the larger trend in rhetorical scholarship and pedagogy discusses

how language and teachers attempt to instill or authorize "voice"[62] in order to "reconfigure

power dynamics," and "to motivate [students] to participate constructively in their education"

and introduce "into critical conversation the missing perspectives" (Cook-Sather 3-4) of those

marginalized in the educational system. These are valuable and important goals for the field. We

want classrooms to be spaces of empowerment and discovery, where minds are activated in order

to engage in study and "voice" is discovered to contribute it to public discourse. "Voice" is

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[62] See in particular Pederson (2010), Danielewicz (2008), Sohn (2003), and Trimbur (2000).

important to students because of the potential they have to find resonance and acknowledgment in discourse in academia and in their future civic lives. There is a very important and established legacy of the power given to the writer and speaker by influential theorists like Paolo Freire[63] and John Dewey.[64] Agency communicated through one's "voice" is important to our rhetorical duties as citizens.

Aristotle believed *ethos*, or the character of the orator, to be "the most authoritative form of persuasion" (*On Rhetoric* 1356a4), and the prominence of the self or character of the author continues to be one of significant import for the field. In addition, the influence of Western Philosophy in the formation of our academic institution is exposed through the notion of "voice." Notably, the "ultimate end of Western metaphysics has always been to locate some indubitable state of self-presence in which immortal being resides in pristine clarity" (Frentz 253).

Conclusion

Blanchot's proposals about passivity in writing are especially important to a greater understanding of the ineffability and overwhelming lack of agency found in the disaster. The ultimate lack of control is dramatized and embodied in the act of writing as the passivity found in language illustrates the ways in which we as humans lack ultimate control. We are vulnerable, lacking the power we often assume we have. Blanchot invites us to re-think the whole notion of human subjectivity, especially in contrast to the modernist/rationalist sensibility of the individual striving to control him or herself, nature, and others.[65] To give ourselves to others through writing as Blanchot proposes is to at once acknowledge and cope with that vulnerability, that inevitability of the disaster. Pain and grief bring us to that place of responsibility and otherness. There is a move in the discipline of rhetoric to carve a space for greater passivity (e.g. "ambient

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[63] See Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*
[64] See Dewey's *My Pedagogic Creed.*
[65] One cannot help but think of Nietzsche's *Will to Power.*

rhetoric," "rhetorical listening," etc.), but as the latter part of this chapter shows, very little filters down to how we think about writing instruction—an important consideration when we recognize that we are now training students who will face the potential planetary catastrophe in the coming generation.

Here is a final paradox, in the midst of the passivity of the disaster, Blanchot instructs us to write, but not for the reasons you may think. It's not to establish your claim, or to mark a stake in the ground, or to form a momentum. It will not do that for you. Instead he compels us to "Write in order not simply to destroy, in order not simply to conserve, in order not to transmit; writing in the thrall of the impossible real, that share of the disaster wherein every reality, safe and sound, sinks" (*Writing of the Disaster* 38). Through Blanchot's estimation there will be moments when you recapture a sense of self, and there are moments when you realize the passivity. Passivity allows there to be a continual call for things to be written. In language, Blanchot argues, there is no arrival, but because of that, there is also no end to the call to write.

Pathos, Propriety, and Perpetuation: A Lineage of Emotions and Expressive Writing

"Certainly the 'crimes' and 'offences' on which judgment is
passed are juridical objects defined by the code, but judgment is
also passed on the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities,
maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity."
--Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

An ongoing question ties together each of the respective chapters in this dissertation (how does one write of the disaster?), and this final chapter identifies the current pedagogical response to this question (expressive writing). This dissertation identifies the impossibility of language to respond to and account for the disaster, and in response, this chapter identifies how writing, *pathos*, and expressive pedagogy also fail in their attempts to represent the disaster through language. Expressive writing opens a space for students to write about personal extreme suffering, pain, or trauma through the Aristotelian appeal of *pathos*.[66] In the chapter I explore how *pathos* is typically described as less rational, cogent, and sound and therefore takes its place as the lesser-valued Aristotelian appeal. Expressive writing attempts to counter this disciplinary tendency by using *pathos* and experience as the main instructional subject matter. Expressivist pedagogies offer alternatives to the analysis and argument based projects which typically dominate college writing courses.[67] Yet, of all of expressive writing's goals, its most prominent is certainly its endeavor to recognize and restore appeals to *pathos* in the classroom as a viable rhetorical strategy. In doing so, writing sets out to overturn the paradigms inherited by Western philosophy, which have subjugated *pathos*. These paradigms sets reason as better than emotion, and logos as greater than *pathos*. This Western tradition of Platonic thought sets reason over

[66] As a pedagogical perspective Expressive Writing is known for its particular focus on "an individual's feelings, preoccupations, moods, or opinions (Irmscher 76-78).
[67] Expressive Discourse is defined by Jeanette Harris in "The Role of Expressive Discourse in the Teaching of Writing: A Review of Current Composition Texts" as "an approach that reacted against the traditional assumption that academic writing must be formal, conventional, and above all, correct" (2).

experience and the public over the personal.

This paper therefore sets forward a review of the Western tradition's view of *pathos*, and shows how *pathos* has been positioned as an inferior appeal, subject mainly to the derision and discipline of the rhetorical audience. Reviewing the history of *pathos* helps explicate the ways in which expressive writing is in some ways preserving the biases used to inhibit it. I trace the history of the relationship between *pathos,* the public, and propriety to explore how temperance and moderation came to bear on conversations of writing and emotion. Through this tracking I hope to show how developments in perceptions of the self and the personal have come to complicate our notions of *pathos*. The inherent complications about writing on the self, personal loss and trauma, and emotion further emphasize the fraught nature of writing of the disaster and its ineffability. I argue that we come to find that expressive writing pedagogy continues to reflect the same division and subjugation that it purports to fight by setting *pathos* apart, in its attempt to bring emotion into equanimity with reason. Even amidst the advantages and aspirations of expressive writing, we find that it has in fact continued to perpetuate the very mind/body split and subjugation of *pathos* that it has tried to subvert. In some ways expressive writing affirms the same biases it claims to fight, as it shores up the distinction between mind and body, subject and object, which can only lead to the problematic reification and reduction of disaster. I argue that for expressive writing to be able to speak to disaster, it must adopt some of the findings of post-Shoah thought (that has been reviewed in previous chapters) by questioning the tendency to treat writing as object, to reduce expression to *pathos*, and to view composition as an act of objective critique.

Pathos *and the Origins of the Mind/Body Split*

The history of distrust of emotions as manipulative and dangerously exploitive has a long

history which scholars have been responding to for years. Some argue (Ong 1982, Havelock 1963) that it began in reaction to Ancient Greek poetry, but built momentum through the development of early rhetorical theory, the teachings of the early Christian church, and the scientific investigations into rationality which were pursued during the Renaissance. The subjugation of *pathos* happened tacitly and explicitly as Platonic theories about transcendent and ideal knowledge evolved.

Plato's writing about *pathos* and poetry in the *Republic* reveals some of the earliest perspectives on emotional influence, audience, and rhetoric. In the text Plato argues that poetry cripples the mind (595b), by delivering a "lengthy speech of lamentation or dirge…and when we listen to all this, even the best of us… feels pleasure. We surrender ourselves, let ourselves be carried along" (605d). Plato established the scope and power and influence of the poet. Through his work, *Preface to Plato,* Eric Havelock established a radical, unprecedented analysis opening a groundbreaking analysis of the epic poet. Havelock's reading of Milman Parry's work on oral poetry[68] led him to argue that the spell of the epic poet could engulf whole audiences with the power of the sensual and the experiential.[69] In his estimation, audiences submitted themselves over to the audio and visual hypnotism of the orator as the poet tapped into the part of consciousness which is "non-rational, of the pathological emotions, and the unbridled and fluctuating sentiments with which we feel but *never think* (my emphasis)" (26). Havelock sets the rapturous experience of feeling, produced by the poet, as the motivation for Plato's railing

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[68] See Milman Parry's work on the oral tradition in *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (1971).

[69] "The audience found enjoyment and relaxation as they were themselves partly hypnotized by their response to a series of rhythmic patterns, verbal, vocal, instrumental, and physical, all set in motion together and all consonant in their effort." At times they would listen with their ears, and at times "limbs, lips and throat might perform slightly," and at other times during repetition of the poet's lines, the audience's "vocal chords and perhaps the limbs were fully activated to go through and perform in identical sequence what they had already sympathetically performed for themselves" (Havelock 152).

against poets in the *Republic*. In Havelock's estimation the audience was caught up, through the disarming spell of the poet, in a surge of enjoyment and relaxation through the poet's use of "rhythmic patterns, verbal, vocal, instrumental, and physical"(152), which were highly emotional, experiential, and uncritical. It is that assessment that the audience would "feel but never think" that was particularly notable in thinking about *pathos* as a lesser form. According to Havelock, Plato suggests that the Greek people were unable to think critically and separate themselves from the passivity and submissiveness of the spell of poetry.

The poet supplied a complete emotional life,[70] one which according to Havelock, required very little critical thought on behalf of his Greek audience. In addition to the emotional life set forth by the poet, it was also one established without self-examination.[71] Havelock argues that the *Republic* conveyed Plato's disdain for the ways wanted the Greek people to stop identifying and "re-enacting the whole scale of emotions, of challenge, and of love, and hate in which the characters of epic become involved. It must separate itself out and by an efforts of sheer will must rally itself to the point where it can say 'I am I, an autonomous little universe of my own, able to speak, think and act in independence of what I happen to remember" (200). It is only when the poetic spell is broken that "initial and essential acts of isolation separates a law or topic or principle or concept from its instances, or abstracts it from its context" (218). To be able to cut oneself off from the rapturous momentum of feeling, and be delivered to independent thinking where one could question, reflect, and consider things outside of their experiential context was the better way, the rational way, the way of the philosopher. It was this vision of

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[70] Havelock was also greatly influenced by Albert Lord's discussion of how and why the oral poets composed as they did in Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (1960).
[71] From the Plato's *Sophist*: "The art of contradiction making, descended from an insincere kind of conceited mimicry, [performed by the oral poet] of the semblance-making breed, derived from image making, distinguished as a portion, not divine but human, of production, that presents a shadow play of words-such are the blood and lineage which can, with perfect truth, be assigned to the authentic Sophist" (268c-d).

rationality and critical thinking that served and continues to serve as the guiding factor for Platonic thought about *pathos* and its dangerous potential. The subjugation of the body comes from this distrust about the vulnerability of the body to emotional appeals. This link between the emotional and sensual as opposed to the abstract and rational established one of the most influential and far-reaching ideas within Western Philosophy.

The work of Aristotle reveals more insight into the Ancient Greek belief on *pathos*. In *On Rhetoric* Aristotle finds emotions to be associated very naturally with the body, although the "thinking faculty of the individual" is not so naturally linked, and so when the individual's body perishes "there is neither memory nor love: for these never did belong to the thinking faculty, but to the composite whole which has perished, while the intellect is doubtless a thing more divine and is unaffected" (408a). Through his descriptions of the soul, Aristotle does not argue that the soul "pities or learns or thinks" (408a) instead it can be understood as embodiment of the potential for movement or potentiality that occurs inside the soul and starts within it. In *de Anima* Aristotle focuses on the potentialities of the soul and explains that "the affections of the soul all appear to involve the body: such affections as passion, mildness, fear, pity, courage" (403a). He finds that the emotions are "of the soul" and further, the body; therefore they are found to be material, or involving matter. As a result, "the affections of the soul… such as passion and fear, are inseparable in this way from the natural matter of the animals to which they belong" (403a). The passions are not transcendent attributes, and so emotions and feelings originate in the material body.

In her reading of the history of *pathos*[72] Martha Nussbaum argues that the inherited views of Platonism contrast with Aristotle's views on *pathos* and its link to rationality. She asserts that Aristotle does not distinguish and subjugate the cognitive and the emotive; instead Aristotle

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[72] See her important work on emotions entitled *Love's Knowledge*.

"restores [emotions] to the central place in morality from which Plato has banished them" (78). According to Nussbaum, Aristotle argues that action and feeling will work in tandem, as a "truly good person will not only act well but also feel the appropriate emotions about what he or she chooses" (78). For Aristotle the emotions are modes, which recognize and help guide response, and the passions are "responsive and selective elements of the personality. Not Platonic urges or pushes, they possess a high degree of educability and discrimination" (78). Nussbaum calls attention to the split that Platonism proposed, and Aristotle contradicted in his writing on *pathos*. While Platonism may have positioned *pathos* as a different and subjugated form of knowing,[73] Aristotle did not. Whether we take Nussbaum's position or not, we are able to see first that Aristotle was investigating how emotion worked as a vehicle of influence and how intellect did. Nussbaum's position is that the two (the rational and the emotive) work in tandem, not as barriers to one another. She would not distinguish the split being made through Aristotle as boldly as we will see others do.

St. Augustine's meditations on Christian doctrine reflect a Platonic dualism that finds its origin in the early Greek philosophies on the mind and body. Augustine's descriptions of mortality and transcendence most clearly articulate this dichotomy. Augustine described the body as linked to the alterable, faulted, and inferior, while the mind is linked to the spiritual and transcendent. In his hierarchical characterization of the nature of life he lists nutritive life (plants) as most inferior, then comes sentient life (cattle), while intelligent life (humankind) resides at the top (*On Christian Doctrine* 7). Man finds its place at the top of this classification, set in the

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[73] Plato's *Timaeus,* notes that "part of the inferior soul which is endowed with courage and passion and love contention they settled nearer the head, midway between the midriff and the neck in order that it might be under the rule of reason and might join with it in controlling and restraining the desires when they are no longer willing of their accord to obey the word of command issuing from the citadel" (60). Positioning the passions in such a way could be read as subjugation of *pathos* under rationality.

image of God, not because of the mortal body "in which he is clothed, but as respects the rational soul by which he is exalted in honor above the beasts" (13). Rationality reflects the divine nature of the God who created the human in his image.

Cartesian Dualism may be one of the most infamous expression of the mind/body split and subjugation. In this framework perceptions and senses do not provide the grounds for all that is true; thinking is the only faculty that can validate existence and reality. Descartes explains in the *Discourse on the Method of Reasoning* that

> we ought never to allow ourselves to be persuaded of the truth of anything unless on the evidence of our reason. And it must be noted that I say of our reason, and not of our imagination or of our senses: thus, for example, although we very clearly see the sun, we ought not therefore to determine that it is only of the size which our sense of sight presents; and we may very distinctly imagine the head of a lion joined to the body of a goat, without being therefore shut up to the conclusion that a chimaera exists; for it is not a dictate of reason that what we thus see or imagine is in reality existent. (18)

The sentiment of doubt expressed by Descartes establishes the senses as untrustworthy. It is only reason that can persuade us of truth. Descartes greatly influenced a tradition in which the passions are distrusted because they are considered to be base impulses linked to the body, which need the controlling direction of reason. Otherwise the human is at risk of diminishing to, as Gerard Hauser puts it, "acts that are bestial in character or that rest on deception or are primitive at best" (*Vernacular Voices* 108). There existed, in early philosophy, a consistent questioning of what separates the human from beast. Descartes addressed that question in "Passions of the Soul" by arguing that "since we can with a little industry change the movement of the brain in animals deprived of reason, it is evident that we can do so yet more in the case of men, and that

even those who have the feeblest souls can acquire a very absolute dominion over all their passions if sufficient industry is applied in training and guiding them" (356). Although we share a material reality with animals, rationality is the dividing character which separates us from the beasts. This answer substantiated the hierarchy of human potentiality. In this answer the passions appear below reason.

The Particular and Universal in Depictions of *Pathos*

Both Plato and Aristotle considered the body's ability to think and sense in terms of the particular and the universal, and in that estimation *pathos* was relegated to the particular, while knowledge came to be associated with the universal. Aristotle writes that "actual perception is always of particulars, while knowledge is of universals: and these universals are, in a manner, in the soul itself," (*de Anima* 417b) and Plato explains that "True being has no colour or form; it is intangible, and visible only to intelligence, the soul's guide. True being is the province of everything that counts as true knowledge" (*Phaedrus* 247c-d). The senses and perceptions can be read in Plato and Aristotle as associated with particulars while the universal, being, and knowledge associated with the intangible and the formless. The universal aspect of rationality allowed for its inevitable association with the public. Particularity, the senses, and emotion can only be understood by the individual, and are therefore inaccessible or incommunicable to the larger public.

The linking of *pathos* to particular and rational to universal is also found in the philosophical conception of the subject and the object. Plato's greatest objection to the experience created by the epic poet was the lack of discernment afforded to the individual within the situation. A life without self-examination was particularly dangerous for "young people and people who lack discrimination" (378a). When the spell was broken and poetry and the

individual were identified in separate positions, audiences could think about concepts that stand outside of time, morality which is not relativistic, and those things which are not just shadows or mere images, but true definitions. In this vision of philosophical thought "the invention of an abstract language of descriptive science [replaced the] concrete language of oral memory" (Havelock 236). That abstraction, away from the particular has had a profound effect in distancing pathos as a powerful appeal. The introduction of literacy allowed for "objective" distance, where an individual could gain a broader perspective outside the limited scope of their particular, personal frame of reference. Literacy allowed the audience to see language as a made thing that can be reviewed and reflected upon. Writing creates a subject: a separate self which thinks and knows from an object: a body of knowledge which is thought about and known.

Arithmetic is described in the *Republic* as one field that helps guide the mind upward to immaterial reality because it helps make the mind look upwards towards abstracted concepts and equations (529b-c). In Ancient Greece subjects like arithmetic and geometry were cited as intellectual work, which was "more exclusively mental. It belongs to the mind, rather than being shared with the body" (535c) because it does not require utilize the senses in its calculations. The material world is concerned with what the senses can see and touch, while the immaterial world is concerned with the abstract, the universal. The material finds itself aligned with decay, lower thinking, and passing away, while the immaterial coincides with higher knowledge which is not particular to the situation or person. It is a conceptual knowledge available to all who pursue it.

The Regulations of *Pathos* for the Public

As *pathos* came to be associated with the subjugated body, and only the particularities of the senses, it would also come to be highly monitored and regulated in its expression. In Ancient Greece, entrance into the public space of discourse was based in the notion that rationality would

lead in the act of invention, and appeals to expression and emotion would stand as stylistic accessories. This placement mitigated the significance of *pathos* and allowed it participation in the public sphere only upon certain conditions. For Aristotle proportionality was the leading guide in invention. *Lexis* was deemed appropriate if the expression of "emotion and character and [was] proportional to the subject matter. Proportion exists if there is neither discussion of weighty matters in a casual way nor shoddy things solemnly and if ornament is not attached to a shoddy word" (*On Rhetoric* 1408a). In his writing on Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle said that the study of moral virtue was concerned with excess, deficiency and the "middle term" (or balance). He argued that feeling fear, pain, confidence, and anger "when one ought and at the things one ought, in relation to those people whom one ought, for the sake of what and as one ought…belongs to virtue" (1106b15-25). The driving barometer of "appropriate-ness," and moderation was meant to keep rhetoricians from overwhelming their audiences with emotional appeals. This would only devolve into rejection by the audience or a demagogic manipulation. In order to form the best orators for these publics the study of eloquence needed to address the proper in each case.

In *de Optimo Genere Oratorum*, Cicero explains that the supreme orator should use words which are both "'proper' and figurative," and of those "they should choose the most elegant and in the case of figurative language…avoid far-fetched comparisons" (II. 4-5). Additionally, the most eloquent orator can say little things in a subdued style, in order to give instruction, moderate things in a subdued style, in order to give instruction, moderate things in a temperate style, in order to give pleasure, and great things in a majestic style, in order to sway the mind (148, *de Oratore 29*).

The "appropriateness" and "propriety" required of emotional expression was not limited

to the writings of the Ancient Greeks or Romans. Adam Smith's discussion of in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* draws out the conditions for expressing emotion within the bounds of the public life. His treatise on propriety and the moral came to bear on his view of experience, the human, and their relationship to one another. He considered mankind's most desired objective "to be respectable and to be respected" (58), and his philosophy centered on the idea that we are social creatures and the pain or pleasure of others can bring us pain or pleasure. Smith viewed human beings as driven by their passions but governed by reason. It is consistent acknowledge of the other which allows for respect among peoples and order. Smith writes that "In the command of those appetites of the body consists that virtue which is properly called temperance. To restrain them within those bounds…is the part of prudence. But to confine them within those limits, which grace, which propriety, which delicacy, and modesty, require, is the office of temperance" (25). Smith suggests that virtue is made manifest in the restraint of the body because it allows the individual to display grace, modesty, and delicacy, which are incumbent upon a person acting within the social sphere.

Smith's discussion of the self and the other guides the arguments of *Wealth of Nations*. He writes that,

> When our passive feelings are almost always so sordid and so selfish, how comes it that our active principles should often be so generous and so noble? … It is not the soft power of humanity; it is not the feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience" (132-133).

Smith believed that the sentiments were "highly idiosyncratic" and must be altered so that they

could become palatable to other parties not immediately involved. He argued that the man who, in the midst of great trial, could "command his sorrow" was worthy of "the highest admiration" (42-43). Through the command of reason though, emotional expression could enter into the public sphere tempered and appropriated. Nussbaum explains that for Smith the correct feeling could be "both morally *useful*, in showing us what we ought to do, and also morally *valuable* in its own right, as a kind of proper recognition of the ethical character of the situation before us" (339). Feeling under the guidance of correction was actually worth the highest admiration, for it showed an energy of feeling for one's expressions, but within the appropriate parameters necessary for widespread public understanding. Hauser defines Smith's principle of "approbation" as "the approval bestowed by impartial spectators—provided the basis for 'fellow-feeling.' As impartial spectators, our 'sense of propriety' elicited 'sympathy' for the joys and sorrows of others" (*Vernacular Voices* 23). Propriety showed the concern for the other by taking into account their potential perceptions of certain expressions. It also responded to the typically circumspect attitude of the spectator. If the rhetorician could prove that they accounted for the audience's reception of certain emotional expressions, the audience would respond in kind with respect and possible acceptance.

The Modern Inheritance of *Pathos*'s Subjugation

Today our association between the emotional as personal has led to, what Sharon Crowley calls, a "modern skepticism about the legitimacy of emotional appeals [which] stems from our assumption that emotions are private. Because we often experience them in private and keep them to ourselves, we tend to think of emotions as belonging to individuals" (*Ancient Rhetorics* 118), and as such, these associations lead to the consequent attitude that "depicts emotional response as both unimportant and inappropriate for public discussion" (118).

Emotions are particular and personal, while reason and logical appeals encompass the larger body of the public.

In addition, the recurrent linking of the body and the passions has led to our perception of emotion as a very personal phenomena, difficult to communicate and interpret. Elaine Scarry's work on pain and the body[74] reveals the difficulty that exists in communicating pain to another by using the example of a patient and doctor. The doctor may give a patient a scale of 1-10 in order to communicate their pain, but because it remains an internal attribute tied to their body, there is still little way to understand how each numerical figure translates into precise knowledge of their current state of pain. Scarry notes that "Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language….Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Emotion seems to continue to be positioned as a personal entity, distinct in its link to the body, making it an enigma to public interpretation and use as an objective form of communication.

In response to these subjugations of pathos, both historical and current, comes the tendency within the writing classroom to treat writing as object, to reduce expression to *pathos*, and to view composition as an act of objective critique. Nussbaum suggests that "the conventional style of Anglo-American philosophical prose" reveals our attitudes towards expressive discourse; that conventional style is "correct, scientific, abstract, hygienically pallid, a style that seem[s] to be regarded as a kind of all-purpose solvent in which philosophical issues of any kind at all could be efficiently disentangled" (19). Expressive discourse runs counter to the powerful current of this conventional style of prose we see still ruling academic compositions

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[74] See *The Body in Pain* (1985).

today.

The Response of Expressive Writing

Expressive writing developed as a response within the framework of critical pedagogy and pragmatism to the mind/body split, which falsely privileges discourses of rationality and dismisses essential part of our humanity. We see this most clearly, even at the beginning of the pedagogical movement, in the emphasis on "process"[75] and "voice" which descends from the lineage of Dewey[76] and Freire's principle *praxis* and Jane Addams' beliefs about narrative.[77]

Amid the partiality towards knowledge situated in logic and rationality, came a hiding and silencing of voice. As such, voice (personal expression) came to be associated with the personal, to be left at home, not brought into the classroom. The best insight we have of contemporary discourse on *pathos* and composition is found in the ways expressive writing engages writing, audience, and the public and the private, while at the same time rejecting the rules of modesty and discretion, which diminish the validity of emotional expression. The method advocates "loosely structured, subjective writing with a strong personal voice and suggested free writing and journals as productive ways of leading students to 'express' themselves freely" (Harris 2). Many composition pedagogues may not identify their methodology under the title "Expressive Writing,"[78] but this category covers many forms

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[75] For a thorough review of expressive writing and its link to Process Pedagogy, see Alexandria Peary's "The Hidden Ethos Inside Process Pedagogy" (2014).

[76] Dewey believed that academia would suffer if it continued to subjugate human experience and expression, and it could either begin to actively participate in the life and current issues of society or "stick to its traditional epistemological conundrums and thereby 'maintain an immune monastic impeccability,' without relevancy and bearing in the generating ideas of its contemporary present'' ("Ethical" 137).

[77] Addams used the power of firsthand experience, prose, and narrative voice in *Twenty Years at Hull House* to portray the life of the urban poor instead of the social scientific lens that characterized the work of so many scholars at that time.

[78] Peter Elbow, Ken Marcrorie, and Lou Kelly don't use the terms "expressive" when they describe their pedagogical approaches to this type of writing, although they are most commonly

including, but not limited to "personal writing, self prose, private writing, inner-directed writing, introspective writing, meditative writing, personal narrative, and reflective/exploratory writing" (2).

Expressive discourse is not just a branch of composition in the field of rhetoric; it is also well-known in the field of psychology,[79] particularly in the focus area of writing therapy, as an exercise that helps those suffering from extreme cases of trauma.[80] Individuals using the expressive writing method to process their experiences are told to "write about [their] very deepest thoughts and feelings about the most traumatic experience of [their] entire life" (Pennebaker and Seagal 1244). While writing, participants are instructed to pay no attention to grammar or spelling and write continuously without stopping, to "really let go and explore [their] very deepest emotions and thoughts" (1244). This instruction to "let go" is given to encourage patients to enter into a time of writing where they can focus on their emotion or experience without having to exert effort minding the clarity or format of the writing. These instructions attempt to situate the writer to compose, without inhibition, for the free flow of feeling.[81] Parallel to the directives given to patients undergoing writing therapy, expressive writing in composition classrooms endeavors to introduce students to a variety of practices aimed at liberating them from writers block brought on by fear of scrutiny. That fear or scrutiny and inhibition to edit

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referred to in the discourse of expressive writing.

[79]See the foundational work in health psychology on writing about pain and trauma by James W. Pennebaker and J. Smyth. See in particular Pennebaker and Evans (2014) and S.J. Lepore and J. Smyth (2002).

[80] In response to trauma "Expressive Writing can result in fewer doctor visits, fewer depressive symptoms, enhanced immune system functioning, better grades, and a host of other positive outcomes" (Pennebaker, "How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Words" 660)

[81] "Writing 'continuously' and 'off the top of your head' (instructions that Pennebaker suggests to patients) might be used at an early phase in the developmental creative writing process, a phase that might be referred to as 'letting go', in which the person writing learns to make a kind of internal gesture' in order to achieve a shift in consciousness from an everyday (more conceptual) state of awareness to a more felt and bodily one" (Nicholls 174).

while writing (in the classroom and also during a therapy session) are the inheritance of the long lineage of discretion and regimentation of *pathos*. The direction "let go" and pay no attention to form or style when writing about personal experiences attempt to counter that instinct. The writing process is meant to be a free form introspective discovery process of the self, where the subject and object of writing is the individual and their own experiences.

Ann Berthoff, Peter Elbow, and Ken Macrorie serve as some of the more prominent names associated with writing in an expressivist mode. They offer alternative perspectives on the purposes and potentials of writing in the classroom. Their work affirms the expressivist's potential to invite and include the marginalized priorities and voices of non-dominant groups of people. This vision of writing strives to "legitimate voices silenced in the traditional English classroom, voices of women, ethnic minorities, and other oppressed groups …to help make the academy more responsive to contemporary political issues" (Bizzell 182). Additionally, their form of pedagogy looks outside of the model argumentation to assist writers in expanding not only the content of their writing but also their outlook on how a writing is performed through appeals to *pathos*.

Ann Berthoff falls into the category of a social constructivist, and her work reveals the roots of Expressive Writing in process pedagogy.[82] She emphasizes meaning-making (a concept greatly influenced by I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden[83]) and the ways in which the self is composed of so many elements of one's environment, social group, past and current reading, etc.

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[82] See in particular Berthoff's *Forming, Thinking, Writing (1982);* and *The Making of Meaning (1984).*
[83] In the formative text *Meaning of Meanings,* I.A. Richards and C.K. Ogden suggest that "all definitions are essentially *ad hoc.* They are relevant to some purpose or situation, and consequently are applicable only over a restricted field or 'universe of discourse'" (111).

She ties the construction of text to the construction of self that goes on simultaneously.[84] The process of writing is something which is "nurtured and brought along" instead of being mechanically produced (*The Making of Meaning* 22). Berthoff believes that the fostering of imagination through nonlinear, dialectical processes of thinking and writing is one of the great responsibilities of all writing instruction because without an "imaginative mind capable of 'forming', composition becomes a mere act of drill, rather than an act of making meaning" (93). Expressive writing is performed, in Berthoff's estimation by allowing the senses which construct the self to be the focus of writing rather than just an accessory to a main argument. More often than not in the academy, writing is done on behalf of the audience, as the other's command shapes the moves made, passages cut, and styles fashioned to create an appropriately crafted piece. Writing for Berthoff is a process, which is open, uncertain, and ambiguous, a significant contrast to much of the knowledge emphasized in the classroom. The uncertainty and ambiguity are encouraged rather than mitigated in the name of forming and making meaning.

For Peter Elbow, his main goal is to undo the intimidation that often comes to students because of the relationship between writing, knowledge of a scrutinizing audience, and the mandate for propriety, temperance, and coherency in language. According to Elbow, that voice which "most people have in their speech [is absent] in their writing—namely, a sound or texture—the sound of 'them'"(*Writing with Power* 290), and he suggests that the evasiveness of voice happens because of our painful awareness of scrutiny. "Imagine," he writes, "if we were graded and judged and told all our smallest mistakes every time we opened our mouths. We'd get painfully awkward and unnatural in speech. For most people, that is how writing is" (290).

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[84] In this way, her work echoes that of Paolo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Berthoff eulogized and praised Freire's work in "Remembering Paolo Freire," and calls attention to the significant ways in which his theory on "conscientization" was so influential on her own work and pedagogy (307).

And while there are many social factors that keep students from overcoming their fear of writing, audience can be both a significant motivation and barrier in writing. Elbow argues that audience can create a great sense of anxiety particularly from judgments of *pathos*, a fundamental part of human expression. This judgment positions emotional expression as a lesser source of knowledge.

Elbow's work focuses on unburdening writers from the paralysis that often comes with entering into public, academic discourse.[85] The classroom often alienates experience and emotion as subject matters meant for private contemplation and reflection. This forces students to make distinct editing choices, while writing, in order to mitigate the entry of personal reflection and pathos into classroom writing. Elbow encourages writers inside and outside of the classroom to free write[86] as much as possible without making those editing choices because it allows writing to ignore the judgments and criticisms that stifle creativity and personal expression. This may allow for elements which are typically prohibited in essay and explicative writing to sneak into the writing process,[87] but Elbow argues that free writing is invaluable because of its focus on idea generation rather than deletion; therefore, it frees the writer to simply write without the responsibility of editing their thoughts simultaneously.

Finally, Ken Macrorie argues that the use of "Engfish" (overly-abstract, imprecise diction) appears in so much of students' academic writing because students don't believe that personal experience and expression belongs in formal papers. Macrorie exposes the "deadness"

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[85]   See in particular his most famous work *Writing with Power* (1981), *Writing without Teachers* (1998), and also "Closing My Eyes As I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience" (1987).
[86] Elbow's ideas are very often linked to the process pedagogy because of his focus on simplifying the brainstorming and drafting process before writing a final draft of a paper even begins. This idea of process is a common thread through both *Writing with Power* and *Writing without Teachers.*
[87] As Elbow notes, "to celebrate writer-based prose is to risk the charge of romanticism" ("Closing my Eyes as I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience" 55).

of academic language and hopes to break teachers "loose [to find] a way of enabling their students to write alive" (*Telling Writing* 261). His work outlines various exercises, which situate students in the world of personal experience and force them to use meticulously concrete description to prevent them from blowing away into the obscurity of their nebulous diction. In *Telling Writing* Macrorie explains that "the student cannot express truths that count for him. He learns a language that prevents him from working toward truths, and then he tells lies" (4). Macrorie proposes ways in which a student can "express truths that count" (4) for him or her, so that writers can incorporate all levels of experience into their writing and therefore open up more avenues for thinking and writing about the world.[88] Macrorie's book *I-Search*, is considered to be the seminal work of his career; in it Macrorie discusses how students can find their personal voice within the academic research process. His pedagogical approach is fueled by the desire to help students acknowledge that their language is important, valuable, and relevant to the discourse of the university, contrary to what most students assume when writing for academic audiences.

Denunciations and Defenses of Expressive Writing

Despite the merits that expressive writing proposes, many teachers still are reluctant to adopt this writing framework. Quite a few of the hang-ups that composition/pedagogy scholars have in writing about experience and emotion in the classroom resides a) in the reluctance that students have in sharing personal experience, b) in the difficulty that comes in assessing expressive writing with a kind of alleged objectivity, and c) in the uncertainty about how to facilitate conversation based in expression and experience while pursuing the learning outcomes required by the university. Expressive writing tries to take these oppositions and expose the prejudices that they reflect against *pathos*.

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[88] Also see Macrorie's *Writing to Be Read (1986)* and *Uptaught* (1970).

The criticisms used to censure and temper the passions in the presence of the public are also present in the criticisms of expressive writing today. Interestingly, the critiques are voiced explicitly by expressive writing detractors and are tacitly revealed in expressive writing support. This only goes to show that *pathos* is still stuck in the bind of its own subjugation, unable to be freed from it despite the best intentions of teachers and students alike.

The Lack of Rigor in Expressive Writing

The leading accusation is that expressive writing lacks the academic rigor present in other forms and genres of writing. It does not call upon research or the linear reasoning which requires students to focus on applying evidence for their arguments. The accusation that expressive writing is not challenging enough comes from a belief that instructors supply knowledge while students receive and respond in kind. But expressive writing offers a different vein of thinking, stemming from a Freirian conception of education,[89] where students explore and are accompanied by instructors in that exploration. Expressive writing uses a student's personal knowledge as material for writing and therefore does not need instructor's assistance in accessing it. This positions writing as an act of exploration rather than an act of accumulation (we may think of Freire's "banking system" in this case). It conceives of knowledge as experiential and personal rather than abstracted and externally extracted. Those who denounce expressive writing in this way see academic work as an activity of mastery rather than investigation.

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[89] Freire's vision of education: "The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 36).

In response to this critique, expressive writing pedagogues propose the sustained need for editing and analysis in the midst of free-writing. Students must continue to evaluate their writing within the larger structure of refinement. Expressive writing is said to be academically rigorous because of its continuous submission to the act of reflection, analysis, and improvement. Berthoff argues that we must reimagine writing and see "Composing [as] forming; it is a continuum; it goes on all the time. Composing it what the mind does by nature: composing is the function of the active mind" (36). It is in experimentation and experience that philosophy meets the material and is realized as knowledge. It is through the process rather than end product that humankind comes to know what they know. Gradin insists that "Exercising emotive and analytical processes, driving towards synthesis, writing for discovery, and demanding reflexivity—all components of an expressivist-based classroom—are intellectually demanding" (Gradin 93). Expressive writing sees the act of discovery and composition as never finished or complete. When writing is viewed against the backdrop of exploration of the intuitive, then rigor and difficulty will be found in the prospect of writing as a continual process never finished, a view which is very much in line with expressive compositions.

bell hooks is quick to note that free expressions of emotion do not mean that the classroom no longer provides any analytical framework and becomes a free for all therapy session instead. She explains that with engaged pedagogy there is still room for criticality, because she believes that "combining the analytical and experiential is a richer way of knowing" (89). But this criticality is not based in authority or a vision of the teacher as the authority. When this view of authority is broken down, students feel more at ease to share. There is no more fear and doubt, and reluctance. The view of propriety breaks down allowing for not only a richer way

of knowing, but a general floodgate of expression. It is only after that ease is becomes available

that the specific manifestation of authority that silenced and excluded is relinquished.

Self-Absorption of Expressive Writing

The second biggest objection is that expressive writing only focuses on the self and

ignores audience, leading to compositions which are self-centered and solipsistic. Andrea

Lunsford attributes airs of "egocentricity" as a bi-product of "authentic voice" ("The Content of

Basic Writer's Essays"). The supposition is that if students are only asked to write about their

feelings and personal experiences, it will preclude them from acknowledging the greater

community that Dewey proposed as being so important to the functioning of a great civil

society.[90] Many of these arguments against expressive writing are grounded in prejudicial

language against experience, *pathos,* and the body. Critics here claim that expressive writing is

"radically individualistic, resulting in a desire only for self-development and a naïveté about

social and political realities" (Gradin 91). This view takes umbrage with how expressive writing

envisions the self and seeks to rearticulate what is typically seen as "private" and "public." That

which is based on the self, is therefore deemed "selfish" in that it is too preoccupied with the

individual to be able to speak to the universal. Here the prejudice of the universal over the

particular rears its head.

Defense

Elbow explains that writing within the expressivist model does not propose that students

"never think about their audience. It's a question of when" ("An Argument for Ignoring

Audience" 51). The audience can serve as a barrier to innovation and imagination when it is

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[90] Dewey argued that philosophy had come to a crossroads where it could either begin to actively participate in the life and current issues of society or "stick to its traditional epistemological conundrums and thereby 'maintain an immune monastic impeccability,' without relevancy and bearing in the generating ideas of its contemporary present'' ("Ethical Subject-Matter and Language" 137).

serving as an ongoing censure in the writing process. But if writers are allowed to quiet that criticism for a time and allow for the free flow of though and ideas without editing, they can return to editing after words are placed on the page. If one is consistently worried about how to articulate the appropriate emotion or the most precise phrasing then the writing process will be halted, and may inevitably force a writer to inhabit a voice other than their own. Elbow says that

> Instead of letting the standards of the readers call the shots for you, gradually you come to make your own decisions as to what is good and bad, and use the responses of others to help you fulfill *your own* goals, not their goals. You are interested in their responses and you learn from them, but you no longer worry about them. This non-worrying frees your writing. (*Writing Without Teachers* 126)

Free-writing, as one mode of expressive writing, allows for students to start creating without worry and then respond to others after in the refining stage of writing. It allows for students' voices and emotions to invigorate their writing instead of alienating them as inappropriate and purposeless forms of knowledge.

Proponents of expressive writing explain that their vision of writing instruction exists in direct conversation with social constructivism because of its emphasis on reflection. Students involved in the act of expressive writing are actively engaged in reflecting on how their feelings and experiences came to be within their social spheres and experiences in the world. Berthoff suggests that it is only by looking inward that students are then able to look outward, as expressive writing's assistive invitations "make students constructively self-conscious about the resources available to their own writing in their society's repertoire of styles" (*Making Meaning* 190). Those feelings and experiences, although linked to responses in the body were never created in a vacuum separate from others. Meaning is found in the experiential and is not meant,

as Dewey argues, "to be regarded in evanescent private ideas, nor as 'ideal essences' in a timeless realm, awaiting designation by some articulate Adam; it is human actions that have the quality of meaning" (*Experience and Nature* 172). Expressive writing pedagogy maintains that writing from experience reflect the larger narrative frameworks and contexts in which they exist. Because language does not exist in a vacuum, all writing will certainly reveal the social relationships, histories, and situated knowledge that brought it about. Expressive writing must concede that writing finds a larger purpose and context in the meanings made by their situated-ness in society, which informs their reading and reflection on their own work. There can be no private without a public; they inform and substantiate one another.

Perpetuated Subjugation of *Pathos*

Expressive writing continually proposes the coordinated interaction of *pathos* and analysis, or self and audience, experience and criticism. There is a call for freedom of expression and a silencing of the critical eye of analysis in the creative stages of writing, but analysis must always return in the final stages of editing when a piece of writing is prepared to share with a public. When expressivist pedagogues pair free-writing and narrative alongside directives towards analytical editing and the purview of linear thinking, they maintain the status of *pathos* as an incomplete and deficient. This pedagogical theory wants to lift *pathos* from this false dilemma by arguing that analysis is not outlawed from the creative process, it just needs to lie in waiting until the author finds enough confidence in their voice to create. But this back and forth between *pathos* first, analysis second sets up a false dichotomy which fuels the perpetuation of *pathos* as an insufficient form of expression for the public eye. And in response to denunciations of self-absorption, scholars continue to confirm the relegation of emotion to the private by drawing attention to the private experience. Gradin notes that expressive writing provides an

127

"environment in which negative criticism is deferred until the writer has enough sense of self(ves) and voice(s), to alleviate the feeling that language is necessarily a weapon meant to silence" (143). This defense continues the dichotomy of private and public. These descriptions of emotion and experience do not liberate *pathos* as they would expect. It is stuck in the bind of the dichotomy between personal and public, which has perpetually subjugated the personal to stay as it is, outside the classroom, meant for personal purposes.

In the end expressive writing fails as an approach to grapple with the subjugation of *pathos* and therefore cannot begin to address disaster. The return to the subject/object, mind/body split only perpetuates the failure of language to meet the disaster. Some recent work in new materialism and the post human (Rickert, Boyle, Hawhee, et al), account for the "other-ness" of disaster, but not where *pathos* is concerned. What may be possible is a turn towards rhetorical listening (see the work of Krista Ratcliffe[91]), and this may be a possible avenue for future research. Nevertheless current rhetorical scholarship only continues in the insufficiency that language must acknowledge when faced with disaster.

Conclusion

We turn to expressive writing because it is the channel through which trauma is processed in the field of rhetoric and composition, and yet, expressive writing is ill-equipped to address the challenges of disaster. Expressive writing offers *pathos* as a suitable outlet for writing about personal experiences of trauma or pain, but it nevertheless subordinates *pathos* to the overarching organizational structure of argumentation. After students are allowed space to emote, they are asked to return to argumentation to polish and legitimize their work. This return reflects the much larger problem voiced in this dissertation: that trauma's resistance to representation by language is revealed precisely in its incapacity to get at the root of experiences

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[91] See Ratcliffe's *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (2005).

in the disaster.

Expressive writing leads us to the seminal paradox of the ineffability of the disaster: that trauma's resistance to representation by language is revealed precisely in its incapacity to get at the root of experiences in the disaster. We will continually fail in our attempts to mediate radical alterity through language. Attempts to recognize expressive moments of pain, suffering, or trauma into classroom writing continue to be resisted by the field of rhetoric and writing because of its reverence for the subject. Passivity, unwieldiness, and the ineffability of trauma and pain do not fit into the core frameworks of academic writing. The disaster proclaims language's inability to ever speak about the extreme suffering and trauma and declares writing unequipped and unable to respond. Why then, do we continue to turn to language as the most fitting response to disaster?

The concessions made by expressive writing pedagogues ultimately contribute to the confounding inappropriateness of language to respond to the disaster. They reveal the inabilities and failures of writing to respond to the disaster. Blanchot concedes to the failures of writing too, as he confesses that "One can see how, even when it comes to explaining silence, silence has its virtues. Is it not better to put off until later the explanation of a crisis whose true meaning is that we will probably never know it?" (Blanchot, *Into the Disaster,* 13). Not unlike Job's friends, we concede to failure as well, acknowledging that we cannot leave the disaster to the shelter of silence; instead we are perpetually confronted by the "the impasse between silence and speech" (Bernard-Donals, "Rhetoric of the Disaster," 73) that defines disaster. That impasse calls us to deny writing's ability in the face of the disaster *and at the same time* reveal the impossibility through our insufficient writing.

129

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Humanities and the Classics,* 3rd ser., vol.13, no.1, 2005, pp. 101-26.

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EDUCATION

PH.D. in ENGLISH, upcoming May 2020
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 Primary Emphasis: English Studies, Rhetoric
 Dissertation: "Rhetoric and the Disaster: Disruptions of Reason, Religion, and Writing"
  Committee: Robin Reames and Ralph Cintron (Co-Chairs), Todd Destigter, Rachel
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 Qualifying Exams: May 2016
  Exam Areas: Modern Rhetorical Theory and Criticism, Composition, Ancient Rhetoric

M.A. in RHETORIC AND WRITING STUDIES, May 2010
San Diego State University, San Diego, CA
 Primary Emphasis: Teaching of Writing
 Thesis: "Remember, Rebuild, and Renew": Constructing America's Collective Identity and
 the New World Trade Center Site in NYC

B.A. in ENGLISH, May 2007
Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA
 Primary Emphasis: English Literature
 Minor: Sociology
 Off-Campus Programs: Semester in England, Fall 2006

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Teacher, Oaks Christian High School   2016-2019
- Rhetoric & Style
- Grammar & Composition
- Summer School Programs: Rhetoric, Grammar, Argumentation

Assistant Director, First Year Writing Program   2015-2016
University of Illinois at Chicago

Placement Exam Reader, First Year Writing Program,   2016
University of Illinois at Chicago

Graduate Consultant, (Advanced Tutor), CHANCE Program   2015
University of Illinois at Chicago

Graduate Instructor, English Department   2014-2015
University of Illinois at Chicago
- ENG 160- Academic Writing I
- ENG 161- Academic Writing II

Graduate Teaching Assistant, English Department   Fall 2014
University of Illinois at Chicago
- Early British Literature

Graduate Instructor, Rhetoric and Writing Studies Department   2010
San Diego State University
- RWS 100- Rhetoric of Written Argument

Writing Assistant, High Tech Writing Center (Student Disability Services)   2009-2010
San Diego State University

Writing Tutor, Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies   2008-2010
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PUBLICATIONS

Articles and Chapters
- Co-author (with Robin Reames). "Writing the Manic Subject: Rhetorical Passivity in Plato's Phaedrus." in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. *forthcoming*
- "The Perks of Quote Integration." *DuringOfficeHours.com*, Composition webpage for UIC Students, Spring 2017.
- "'Yes We Can!': Identification and the Invitation to Collective Identity in Barack Obama's Campaign Rhetoric." *The Making of Barack Obama: The Politics of Persuasion*. Edited by Matthew Abraham and Erec Smith. Parlor Press, 2013, pp. 52-64.

Select Presentations
- "Commonplaces of Rhetoric and Education" Panel, CCCC, Milwaukee. March 2020.
- "Living Logos and the "Likeness" of Writing in the Phaedrus: A Middle Way between Poison and Cure." International Society for the History of Rhetoric Conference, New Orleans. July 2019.
- "Wisdom and the Whirlwind," Rhetoric and Religion in the 21st Century Conference, Knoxville, TN. October 2018.
- "Rhetorical Strategies" Workshop, Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington. May 2017.
- "Potential Poets in an Argument World: the Epistemological Battle of Logos-as-Assertion vs. Logos-as Poiēsis,"17th Biennial Conference of the Rhetoric Society of America Conference, Atlanta. May 2016.
- "Teaching Lit & Teaching Comp: Crossover Tactics," Panel Presentation, Brown Bag Sessions for First Year Writing Program, UIC. February 2016.
- "The Epistemological Battle of *Logos*-as-Assertion vs. *Logos*-as-*Poiēsis* and the Situation for Current Composition Classrooms," Midwest Winter Workshop. January 2015.
- "Plain Language and Questions Concerning Writing Technologies," University of Virginia Department of English Graduate Conference: "Reading Then and Now," Washington, D.C. April 2014.

- "'Yes We Can!': Identification and the Invitation to Collective Identity in Barack Obama's Campaign Rhetoric," 14th Biennial Conference of the Rhetoric Society of America Conference, Minneapolis. May 2010.

ADDITIONAL WRITING EMPLOYMENT

Public Information/Public Relations Specialist   2012-2013
West Basin Municipal Water District, Los Angeles, CA

Global Marketing Associate   2011-2012
Phenomenex Inc., Los Angeles, CA

Technical Writer   2009-2010
Covance Inc., La Jolla, CA

SERVICE AND DEVELOPMENT

Small Group Leader, The Bridge Church, Newbury Park, 2016-2017
Volunteer, Oaks Christian High School River Trip, 2016
Volunteer, Senior Connections, 2013-2016
Coordinator, Midwest Winter Workshop Conference, Northwestern, January 2015

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS

Khora, Rhetoric Society of America Chapter at University of Illinois at Chicago (co-founder)
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FOREIGN LANGUAGE

French (beginning to intermediate fluency)