Hearing the Disaster – On the Sonority of Maurice Blanchot’s Writing

Ann Smock ascribes her difficulty in translating Maurice Blanchot’s *The Writing of the Disaster* to the rhythm created by the words themselves, the sonority of Blanchot’s writing.[[1]](#footnote-1) And, indeed, it seems that Blanchot, perhaps more in this work than in any other, occupies himself with sounds, as this sonority plays an important part in his philosophy of language, his very writing being sonorous.

While much has been written about the visual aspect in Blanchot’s writing,[[2]](#footnote-2) I would like to focus on the auditory, on the sonority of his works in this brief piece. I would like to demonstrate that this sonority can be found at the very foundation of Blanchot’s language, functioning as its source. The sounds grant the disaster presence, make it audible, and Blanchot demands that we hear them.

However, since spoken language, with its empty concepts, does not allow the disaster to be heard—Blanchot asserts that the “echo of a language”[[3]](#footnote-3) cannot be heard in it—he chooses to make it audible through his writing. He says, “To write is to make oneself the echo of that which cannot cease speaking.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Writing makes the echoes possible. It successfully allows readers to pay attention to the disaster, and it is this writing, which is written—as it were—by the disaster itself, that is broken, indistinct, fragmentary, truncated, and sonorous. It disturbs the order of things, and in so doing allows attention to be turned to the Other and to the disaster.

The primary source that I will use in this paper is Blanchot’s 1980 book, *The Writing of the Disaster*. His other works, including *The Space of Literature*, *Death Sentence*, *Thomas the Obscure*, and *The Infinite Conversation* will also help us elucidate the role played by sonority in his writings. While Blanchot does not refer to music often, I believe these references are both crucial and relevant to understanding his concept of sonority, so I will also use them, especially his article entitled *Ars Nova*, in which he defends Arnold Schönberg’s atonal music.

**On the Elusiveness of the Disaster and Language Which Is Not Disastrous Enough**

Even though disaster has a name, it does not reveal itself through language, says Blanchot.[[5]](#footnote-5) Elsewhere he argues that when we speak about the word ‘disaster’ we feel that it misses the mark.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The gap between the disaster and its nominal use can be explained in two interconnected and interwoven ways. The first is the elusiveness of the disaster itself. The disaster Blanchot is discussing is one that cannot be pointed out or experienced, and, therefore, the “I” does not feel threatened by it.[[7]](#footnote-7) We cannot situate it at a certain point of time in the future because it has always already been and is always already present.[[8]](#footnote-8) It destroys everything and simultaneously leaves everything whole.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Therefore, Blanchot’s disaster is different from the disaster we are used to. It is not a specific event with a beginning, a middle, and an end, but rather a cloud that constantly envelopes us, taking place in the background of our lives. And precisely here, asserts Blanchot, are the disasters concealed. The inherent disasterlessness and the fact that we cannot say “here is the disaster,” “the disaster is over,” or “we have overcome the disaster” is what turns them into this. Therefore, it makes sense to assert that the word “disaster” misses the mark. It simply cannot delimit the disaster, to situate and attach it to a singular point in time. Following in Derrida’s footsteps, Blanchot asserts that “The disaster is the improperness of its name and the disappearance of the proper name.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Taking an even broader approach, Blanchot also argues that words themselves fail to match reality. Words cannot be kneaded into one simple sentence,[[11]](#footnote-11) he said, and their use “turns language away from itself.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Reason, he asserts, strives to partition reality into systems, searching for positive knowledge to grasp and respond to,[[13]](#footnote-13) so that we must say everything, by speaking without surcease.[[14]](#footnote-14) However, in practice, language theories are useless, and we should forget this knowledge. Words exchange their meanings with one another constantly,[[15]](#footnote-15) and, therefore, there is no point in endowing things with unambiguous and permanent names.

Blanchot does not even stop there, however, he takes another step forward stating that not only do words fail to match reality but there is also a danger in the way we use words today. The danger, he explains, is the possibility that we will be unable to hear the “’ be silent’ addressed to those who have known only partially, or from a distance the interruption of history.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Elsewhere he claims that the disaster leads to the fact that the people who have been exterminated (without being exterminated) are silenced, and if they speak, it is always with the voice of the Other which blames them, interrogates them, and “obliges them to answer for a silent affliction which they bear without awareness.”[[17]](#footnote-17) These quotes might lead us to conclude that Blanchot reckons that the discourse structures a relationship based on power between those who have been exterminated and silenced and those who have only experienced the disruptions of history from afar. However, I believe that Blanchot would reject this claim. The disaster envelopes all of us, and “the exterminated people” and the “silenced” are included in ‘all of us,’ some more and some less. The disaster, its elusiveness, and the fact that it cannot be situated and pointed to leads us to believe that the disruptions are seemingly irrelevant to us, that they give us a miss, when in fact they are eternally present in every one of our backgrounds. Either way, Blanchot charges us to hear the disruptions, to hear the disaster—and not just from afar—and to silence both the unceasing talk and those “useless theories.”

**Sonority as the Prelinguistic Basis for Language – Intentionalessness and Anonymity**

So, how does Blanchot suggest we speak? First of all, he asks us to forego using words in their familiar way, employing them instead in the negative,[[18]](#footnote-18) in a manner that forces us to renounce the customary channels and the authority that is manifest in knowledge. He asks that we forego language that “knows” and “appropriates.” Only by losing what we have to say—in the context of the disaster— do we speak, says Blanchot.[[19]](#footnote-19) He proposes that we speak of subjectivity devoid of the subject and about the wounded place, the body that has already died, that of which no one can say “my body.”[[20]](#footnote-20) He wishes to present us with a question, instead of an exclamation mark, reminding us in this case of Socrates who “interrupts himself without cease.”[[21]](#footnote-21) In his *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot makes a similar appeal, asking us to use “indirect” language because, in his opinion, this form of speech reveals the vagueness that precedes clarity.[[22]](#footnote-22) Near the end of the book, he adds that ambiguity is a positive value,[[23]](#footnote-23) from which we can learn that, in his opinion, ambiguous language is preferable to clear language.

Blanchot also notes that silence can take the place of speech which appropriates and distances language from itself. Thus, Blanchot writes that silence exists outside of language and is distinct from it, [[24]](#footnote-24) and elsewhere he writes that in every utterance, we are silent.[[25]](#footnote-25) One of the arguments that Blanchot makes about silence seems of particular interest and relevance to this paper: silence is linked to a voiceless cry, “which is addressed to no one and which no one receives.”[[26]](#footnote-26) This line of thought implies that the absence of an utterance, the silence, allows for another type of communication to arise, a nonverbal communication, in this case, the cry. However, I believe that Blanchot is far more interested in proposing that language should take a crucial step backward, to its sonorous form, rather than proposing language in which error speaks or in proposing silence. As he writes, “a word that is almost deprived of meaning is noisy,”[[27]](#footnote-27) and this I believe is what he means when he talks about stripping language of its meaning, reducing it to a prelinguistic state of sounds, of noise that refuses to locate the meaning of the word. It seems to me that sonority is foundational for Blanchot (albeit a temporary and shaky foundation). Sonority is that which “draws language close to itself.” Language that has its meaning or message extracted from it becomes matter, music, pure sounds, tones, rhythm. Blanchot, as mentioned above, notes the cry and declares that it is that which is found “beneath the word,”[[28]](#footnote-28) and elsewhere he writes that the cry “exceeds all language” and “does not simply reduce to nonsense.”[[29]](#footnote-29) The cry repeats throughout Blanchot’s works, for instance, in Anne’s cry in *Thomas the Obscure*.[[30]](#footnote-30)

However, in addition to the bitter cry, Blanchot recalls several additional sounds, among them the yell or the scream, the call, the lament, the murmur, the voice and its reverberation, and in a few places, laughter and prayer. In *The Infinite Conversation,* Blanchot discusses the murmur which relinquishes its place to the reverberation in which the murmur grows, and which speaks from within the murmur while being “entirely outside”[[31]](#footnote-31) it. Elsewhere he writes about “the voice that exists behind the words,” that “which is neither heard nor speaks.”[[32]](#footnote-32) In *The Writing of the Disaster*, he describes murmuring as “not language, but enchantment,”[[33]](#footnote-33) and in *The Space of Literature*, he describes this as the murmuring which language develops into, speech that is described as profound and flowing with abundance but also empty.[[34]](#footnote-34) The description of the “empty abundance” that exists behind the words repeats itself in many of the scenes in *Death Sentence* wherein Blanchot charges the reader to hear the voice of the night or in *Thomas the Obscure* where he addresses the boundary between silence and sound and the acoustics of death. The sounds in these works are both heard and unheard; they are intrusive and disrupt the never-ending discourse that does not allow us to hear the command—“Be silent.” The sounds disrupt history, allowing us to turn our attention to the disaster, to its disasterlessness. In her translation of *The Space of Literature*, Smock declares that art is a “murmur, the source of creativity,”[[35]](#footnote-35) and, in so doing, she also stresses the fact that sonority is not only the source of language but also the source of creativity.[[36]](#footnote-36)

It even seems that the sounds in some way undermine the power of sight, for in each of these stories the ear is called upon to question the outsized emphasis granted the eyes. In one of the passages in *The Infinite Conversation* Blanchot even notes that “speaking is not seeing,” and it seems like he is opposing the senses of sight and hearing. He claims that for sight, “speech is war and madness.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Likewise, he links speech with forgetfulness when he writes that seeing means forgetting to speak, and speaking means drawing upon an inexhaustible forgetfulness.[[38]](#footnote-38) In other words, while the eye remembers, photographs and affixes, speech appropriates far less.

In making this argument, Blanchot takes the opportunity to advance speech as a means to shake off the tyranny of light. He asserts that for thousands of years the Western tradition has subjugated its thought to the tyranny of light and that speech can liberate us from this optical imperative.[[39]](#footnote-39) While sight is vital because it allows the subject to measure and effectively verify the space that separates him from the objects or other subjects, Blanchot presents hearing as a way to collapse, or at least to diminish, this defensive distance, and in so doing he challenges the subject’s ability to control his environment. We might say that a hierarchy is created wherein speech is privileged over sight and sonority is privileged over speech.

To whom do these sounds belong? Do they belong to language itself? To my body? Or, to the Other? It seems like there is something impersonal in this sound, which lacks meaning. It does not belong to me (and, so we are speaking of subjectless subjectivity);[[40]](#footnote-40) rather it comes from outside, from the Other. The Other, however, in Blanchot’s description is both plurality and everyone, and simultaneously it is also no one. It is present and absent. It is here and it never comes. It is like a reverberation whose provenance we cannot know, a sound without end that has escaped from nowhere, and its primary significance lies in its creation of echoes, which we can hear but whose point of origin we cannot detect. Blanchot makes a similar point in *The Space of Literature* and *The Infinite Conversation.* In *Death Sentence,* the characters’ first names are truncated incessantly, as if the characters were being castrated and rendered anonymous.

This sonorous anonymity serves Blanchot’s demand that we hear the disaster. He declares that in my not knowing where the sounds come from, to whom they belong, and to whom they are addressed, I cannot justify my lack of response to the supplication that is not addressed directly to me in particular.[[41]](#footnote-41) Or, in other words, there is an overarching, infinite obligation placed upon me to hear the disaster, and to make audible the voices of “the exterminated people (who have not been exterminated) who are silenced.”[[42]](#footnote-42) In taking this step, Blanchot approaches the infinite obligation that the French philosopher Levinas spoke of, and later in the book, he even mentions Levinas by name. He also mentions Bataille. Both these men addressed our unending obligation to the Other.[[43]](#footnote-43)

So Blanchot’s sonorous language enables paying attention and hearing. “Hear, just hear,” Blanchot demands in *The Infinite Conversation*,[[44]](#footnote-44) and it seems as if the auditory imperative is directed at several targets simultaneously—hearing the disaster, hearing the Other, and hearing my own body. And since the disaster is elusive and it is not heard in words, sonority is what allows it to be noticed. Blanchot interprets the myth of Narcissus and Echo, a not unproblematic example, but one which he believes stresses the infinite paying attention to one’s self and the Other that nonverbal sonority makes possible. Using this myth, in which Narcissus encounters a voice without a body, a mimetic, rhythmic voice, “a semblance of language,” Blanchot stresses the nature of the lovers who connect through speech described as “not a language.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Connection after the disaster is only possible when we lose what there is to say,[[46]](#footnote-46) when we do not use words, but the various instantiations of sonority.

**On Musicality, Rhythmicity, and Repetitiveness**

While a-verbal and sonorous communication brings language closer to itself and makes it possible for people to pay better attention to the disaster and the Other, it is considered an insufficient alternative, whether as a form of communication or as a life choice (Remember that ultimately, the goddess Nemesis punished Narcissus for his arrogance, and he died from malnourishment and dehydration because he ceased eating and drinking). So Blanchot proposes another alternative—writing—and as this paper emphasizes, not just any writing, sonorous writing.

However, before we delve into writing, I would like to pause and consider the role that Blanchot proposes for music. One of the first musicians who influenced Blanchot was the French composer Claude Debussy, who belonged to the Impressionist School of music.[[47]](#footnote-47) Debussy was an important figure for Blanchot because his music is described as penetrating the space between the world and the word “using sound” and as “the environment in which every form of art takes place.” Sound is what allows the Other “to understand the movement of beauty and art.” Sound manages to successfully capture what the word cannot, and sonority is like the “glue” which binds words to things. While the word is binary and frozen, sound is full of motion, and, therefore, succeeds in more accurately capturing the world, its beauty, and its variegation.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Another thing that caught my eye in Blanchot’s early articles is the notion that art can transcend the world, a concept that he seems to have drawn from early Romanticism. The Romantics posited that the individual could reach transcendental truth through art. For them, the primary path to the infinite, the absolute, is art as it makes the transcendental accessible.[[49]](#footnote-49) A work of art is the primary, particular expression. It is whole in and of itself and lacks nothing. Therefore, it is one possible pathway to reach wholeness in a post-Kantian world where the only wholeness possible remains in the plurality of the particular. The young Blanchot agreed with this idea; however, as I will explain in greater detail below, in his later years, he changes his mind, arguing that there was never any wholeness and that any attempt to reach such wholeness is doomed to failure.[[50]](#footnote-50) And, indeed, in one of his later articles entitled *Ars Nova*, Blanchot defends Schönberg, Berg, and Webern’s atonal, fragmentary music. He argues that this music succeeds, precisely because it calls the whole into question and shines the spotlight on the disrupted nature of things, including that of art and literature. The atonal music ushers in this change, Blanchot declares, shattering the illusion of harmony, the illusion that music organically develops as the reflection of an objective, rational, organized reality. Such a reality does not exist, so music must reject it.

In this context, it is certainly appropriate to cite Theodor Adorno who praised Schönberg’s atonal compositional strategy, the 12-tone row, which in his opinion succeeds in undoing a sense of coherence and organicism, thus opening up the conceptual space for wretched reality. This technique eschews the tonal, hierarchical system characteristic of Western classical music written during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, it changes the order of the tones in a work, so that the hierarchical system is broken. According to Adorno, this re-organization serves as a declaration of opposition to the classical method of composition and likewise expresses opposition to the social structure. Blanchot even mentions Adorno in his article, agreeing with him that this type of music disrupts the existing order and also “breaks up the blind constraint upon musical materials.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Like Adorno, Blanchot believes that music must have a repetitive character that emphasizes the non-developmental and non-organic nature of society, describing reality more faithfully than any harmonic music does.[[52]](#footnote-52) Reality, as Blanchot describes it, is “painful,” and atonal music expresses “something very much like sorrow itself, sorrow which is heard and sorrow seeking to be heard.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

Blanchot extemporizes on how the artist should compose his work. He believes that the author should compose in a manner that will most effectively convey how he believes philosophy, literature, or poetry should be written, and, as I am arguing in this paper, he should write in a sonorous way. According to Blanchot, we should constantly empty the sounds of the interpretations and meanings given to them, so that they can constantly be imbued with a new one. “To keep them empty, and so to a meaning yet to come.”[[54]](#footnote-54) The artist must renounce the totality of the work and instead use language which first rejects the current linguistic conventions and then reformulates them anew. Having done so, the composition can “progress through analysis, through division into more and more subtle structures” through a compositional style that employs “distinction and dissociation.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Later in the article, Blanchot adds that musical language must appear broken and even as if it has been smashed up into fragments so that it can welcome another meaning which depends only upon how we want to rewrite the composition anew. Just like in an unfinished work, the concepts will never be whole, coherent, or contiguous.[[56]](#footnote-56) Based upon these insights, we may conclude that music must be fragmentary so that movement, as defined in Blanchot’s early articles, is possible and so that the concepts can constantly be recreated anew, thus providing the space for new meanings that arrive and that will constantly arrive in the future.

Truly listening to such music is different than listening to harmonic music. For in contradistinction to harmonic music, which allows the listener to take pleasure in the sense of familiarity, to comprehend the musical structure and follow the melody, atonal music does not allow for comprehension of this sort.

Blanchot asserts that this type of music enables its listeners to almost immediately hear the gap between culture and reality, as they really are, and the work of art.[[57]](#footnote-57) While atonal music undermines the listener’s sense of wholeness, culture attempts to present a false state of harmony. Maintaining this façade requires works of art whose wholeness can be venerated—works that can be displayed in those warehouses of civilization which we refer to as museums, concerts, academies, and record and library collections.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Though Blanchot does not explicitly address music in *The Writing of the Disaster*, he does speak about rhythm and rhythmicity in ways that are similar to how he speaks about music. We may note that rhythm fulfils a crucial role for him in creating the longed-for movement, the movement that he also wishes to create in his writings. This occurs because rhythm in combination with the sonority, mentioned above, allows us to hear the Other and the disaster. Thus, for instance, Blanchot cites Hölderlein’s words “All is rhythm,” and he explains that even though rhythm seems to follow certain rules, it is really a threat to them.[[59]](#footnote-59) When Blanchot uses the word ‘rhythm,’ he does not mean something that flows in a direct line but rather “the welling up and sinking back” of what is flowing, the dialectical movement that repeats itself again and again. In making this assertion, Blanchot echoes his demand for a repetitive cycle of writing and erasure in musical composition. He even mentions the archaeologist-anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan who Blanchot reports wrote of “a series of ‘small notches’ arranged at regular intervals” because there is “rhythm at work.”[[60]](#footnote-60) I believe that according to Blanchot these intervals, this repetitiveness, contain an energy that brings forth art, primarily art in the forms of both music and writing.[[61]](#footnote-61) Where does rhythm come from? As in sonority, the answer is from the rhythm of the Other and of the disaster. Blanchot asserts that this is a “negative rhythm” which causes “constant repetition,” where the Other is destined to become the signified, the signifier, and once again the signified.[[62]](#footnote-62) Repetitiveness enlarges, and here Blanchot again echoes his writings on the a-hierarchical atonal music: it must be complex, but not due to its hierarchy, rather due to its repetitiveness and penchant for adding to those readily existing dimensions.[[63]](#footnote-63)

To summarize this section up till now, music, sonority, and rhythmicity make movement possible, something that speech, which affixes and appropriates, does not. In an atonal work of art, the sounds, which are positioned in an a-hierarchical and repetitive fashion, break the illusion of harmony and unity, an illusion that prevents us from hearing the disaster, which even without this additional interference is always already elusive. Sonority, as mentioned above, acts as an “outlier” or “exception” to this sense of a-disastrous harmony, reminding us that the disaster exists, wafting constantly above us. Through writing, as I will soon demonstrate, Blanchot succeeds in expressing this musicality and rhythmicity, and in so doing, sonority in its most present and ‘audible’ form.

**Sonorous and Musical Writing that Advances the Plurality of Meanings and Otherness**

Blanchot offers writing as an alternative to speech, and as I will now demonstrate, he is primarily referring to a writing style proximate to art—sonorous, musical, rhythmic, and repetitive art. Writing, which “is per se already violence,”[[64]](#footnote-64) first manages to annul speech, emphasizing the absurdity of language and emptying it of its contents.

Second, Blanchot, in his writing tries to fulfil what he denotes as “differentiations and separations.” In this context, it is appropriate to recount all the oppositions Blanchot uses, among them: patience without time (WD, 31), arriving without arriving (WD, 34), death in life (Ibid.), disaster without disastrousness (WD, 60), gaiety without laughter (WD, 76), arrival that does arrive (WD, 89), and many, many more. These attest to the empty and disastrous nature of language, they are emptied, differentiating and separating language from itself, desecrating it, depriving it of its identity, and so transmitting the sense of loss. Blanchot states that when everything has already been said (without having been said), what remains is the disaster, the fragments of the words, the failure of writing.[[65]](#footnote-65) Elsewhere he argues that we can only let fragmentary writing be written in language.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The fragments inform us of the absence of totality[[67]](#footnote-67) and remind us that nothing ever pre-existed as a whole.[[68]](#footnote-68) In voicing these conceptions, Blanchot distances himself from the romantic notion of the fragment as representative of the whole. Later he adds that such writing “leaves behind lacunae, gaps, tears, and other interruptions.”[[69]](#footnote-69) He believes that fragmentary writing can overwhelm the interruptions which we so easily ignore—like music, which Blanchot demands be broken up and pulverized so that new meanings can emerge, so too writing.

Blanchot, indeed, happily takes his advice. Blanchot’s disastrous text is composed of an anthology of fragments, voices, and languages. We cannot place them together in a coherent form because they are not always related. Blanchot moves between various topics, addressing being, time, language, literature, poetry, psychology, and more. His texts possess the same sense of anonymous, unrelenting sonority, truncated murmuring. The sonority and the noise, interrupt the text and history. We do not know where these sounds have come from or what their role is, but we sense the unrelenting disruption. The fragments carry with them the trace of disaster, says Blanchot.[[70]](#footnote-70)

This polyphony of voices, fragments, and languages creates repetitiveness and confusion which is impossible to contain in speech, and so we again return to Blanchot’s charge to music—be repetitive. Blanchot seems to instantiate this very repetitiveness and confusion not only through his fragmentary writing but also via his sonic repetitiveness. In many fragments, he repeats words with similar sounds, for instance: converse, presence, and present appear in one sentence (WD, 34); sense and nonsense, non-experience and patience (WD, 51); inattentive, intensely, intentionality (WD, 55); region, regulation, direction, erection, insur-rection (WD, 56); and proper of appropriation…plummets into improperness (WD, 99).

Blanchot even addresses the type of reading that the text requires and in so doing reminds us of the experience we have when hearing the atonal “new music”. Thus, for instance, he calls for reading without reading, understanding without understanding.[[71]](#footnote-71) He pleas for this reading to be active and not passive, for if we read passively, we may inhabit the illusion that the text exists objectively as a whole. Reading this way must take place joylessly, without happiness, and it must elude understanding and compassion.[[72]](#footnote-72) I believe this way of reading occurs naturally, in light of the sonority that bears “the trace of the disaster.” Blanchot’s other works, not written in fragmentary form, do contain narrative and plot, but they also thrust us into confusion when we read them. For instance, in *Thomas the Obscure* there is a scene in which objects appear in a random, disconnected way, or they startlingly disappear and appear out of thin air. In *Death Sentence,* there are truncated visions and disorienting experiences related to the positioning of the rooms.[[73]](#footnote-73) Confusion is the lot of anyone who wishes to shatter the illusion of unity and turn their attention to the disastrouslessness of disaster, to its vague, anonymous sounds which we too easily ignore.

The disaster that Blanchot reveals is social, political, and historical. It has no place, boundary, or time, and it does not pay any attention to us. This is one of the reasons that we find it so easy to ignore. Blanchot, however, charges us to pay attention to it, to awake from our comatose indifference, to hear it, and in this paper, I have argued he makes this possible through the sonority inherent in his writing. Writing, like the “new music” which he valorises, makes possible another rhythmicity—an a-hierarchical repetitiveness. It breaks the illusion of unity and harmony, as in its background there constantly wafts an anonymous sonority that commands us “to hear, just to hear.”

1. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*. Trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1995), vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Many studies on this topic have been published over the last few years, including J. Fort, “The Look of Nothingness: Blanchot and the Image” (2018); M. Blanchot, “’The Dictatorship of the Eye’: Henri Lefebvre on Vision, Space and Modernity” (2017); A. Cools, “Blanchot’s Windows” (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*. Trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln/London: U of Nebraska, 1982), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 1, 36, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*. Trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1993), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*. Trans. Robert Lamberton (NY: Station Hill, 1999), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *The Infinite Conversation*, 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid., 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *The Space of Literature*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid.*,* 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Notwithstanding their many differences, perhaps it is appropriate to mention Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem who emphasized language’s sonorous side and believed that it was this sonorousness that allowed language to manifest truth. These two authors, in contrast to Blanchot, also addressed the revelatory aspect of language and sought to demonstrate its presence in language’s auditory, musical, and sensual aspects and in its ability to express ‘internal’ and potential meaning via its tones, echoing, and rhythms. Language, according to Benjamin, the master of language, is the reincarnation of the creative word of God, the absolute, which as a linguistic force, shapes and instantiates via sound. See, for example, Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and the Language of Man,” 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *The Infinite Conversation*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid., 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *The Infinite Conversation*, 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Blanchot wrote *The Homage to Debussy at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées* in 1932, the day after a monument honoring Debussy was unveiled in Paris. That evening, Blanchot attended a concert at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, where not only Debussy’s music was celebrated, but, as Blanchot writes, there was “a celebration of music itself.” He waxes enthusiastic about this evening, describing the works that were played, including *Preĺude à l’apres̀–midi d’un faune*. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Michael Holland who translated the critique of the Debussy concert which young Blanchot had written for the newspaper *Le Journal* *des Debats* claims that what is interesting about Blanchot’s article is how he airs, at the age of only twenty-five, “the basis for the relationships between literature and politics which he would develop in his later writings that made him famous.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 30-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Maurice Blanchot and Donald Schier, “Ars Nova,” *Perspectives of New Music*, 1979, p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid., 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *The Writing of the Disaster*, 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid., 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid., 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid., 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Blanchot declares…. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. “This is writing that is outside language…. the end of knowledge, the end of myths.” (WD, 47) When Blanchot uses the term ‘myths’ he refers to both the perception of the transcendental subject, who shapes all, who organizes the sensual material according to a priori categories and annuls what does not fit into them as if it had never been, and to the conception that words are totality. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid., 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid., 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ibid., 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid., 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid., 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid., 101-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Maurice Blanchot, *Death Sentence*. Trans. Lydia Davis (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1998), 48-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)