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'WRITE, WRITE': TESTIMONY, JUDAISM AND THE INFINITE IN BLANCHOT, KOFMAN AND LEVINAS

All knowledge of what everywhere is intolerable will at once lead knowledge astray. We live thus between straying and a half-sleep. To know this is already enough to stray.

—Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

I.

ELIE WEISEL: "If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle and Renaissance the sonnet our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony" ("The Holocaust as a Literary Inspiration" 9). There have been other testimonies, other recountings of personal experience—e.g., travelogues, auto-biographies—but Weisel refers to the testimonies of survivors, to the unbearable books that reassemble a story and cannot be related too many times: a story that, indeed, can only be told from numerous incommensurable perspectives. These stories are necessarily fragmentary; they have an affective force, an immediacy which disappears when they are aggregated, settling into the dead letter of historiographical recounting. How then can one draw a lesson from these testimonies? How might one respond to events whose avowal demands an affective and immediate response from us?

Tensions lay in the very act of bearing witness, of bringing one's testimony to expression, and of rendering it public or making it public knowledge. The knowledge of an eyewitness never belongs to the order of objective knowledge; our experience of the same event will differ; we may both have been present, but it is *how* we are present that matters. To report *what* one experienced is already to constitute or reconstitute the experience in question. The constitution of an act of testimony will depend upon those to whom one speaks, upon the determination of acceptable forms of testimony, as well as upon the articulacy of the witness and the receptivity of his or her audience. Sometimes testimony will be perilously close to fiction. Sometimes it will be coerced or falsified. But attending to testimony is necessary; one has to learn to receive the testimonies of others however difficult they are to accept, in whatever form they are couched, despite the inarticulacy of the witness, despite their resistances. One must open oneself to their evidence if one is not simply to repeat what has happened over and again. To work through our experience individually and collectively, one must attend to witnessing with all the risks this involves.

To foreground an *aporia* in witnessing is to prevent the necessary processes of working through, but to attempt to answer to the singularity of the traumatic experience. It is essential to safeguard the dissension between the first-hand knowledge of the witness and knowledge in general, emphasizing the difficulties of teaching, learning and transmitting the experiences of witnessing insofar as they prevent it from becoming an 'object' of knowledge, a fact alongside other facts. This does not release us from the obligation of learning inherent in witnessing, an attempt to render it communicable. However, it does means that this obligation entails the experience of a certain paradox belonging to the very structure of testimony, that is, to the irresolvable tension between a singular experience and knowledge in general.

Witnessing may seem, from an epistemological perspective, to be merely deficient –a partial viewpoint that must be overcome. Yet this overcoming threatens to yield up the very singularity of that viewpoint. To claim that testimony and witnessing escape a certain epistemological framework is not to deny that it's important to recount experiences, to absorb them into a narrative, or to render them transmissible and teachable. A certain narrativity must be possible if the singularity in question is not to remain incommunicable. It must permit of some kind of translation, a transposition allowing it to become an object of discourse. Yet at the same time, this transposition must be thought alongside the *impossibility* of transposition—the singularity of an event that must be preserved in its singularity. On this account, the viewpoint of the one who witnesses must never be negated.

The witnessing at issue here is not an autobiographical 'remainder' that would resist incorporation because it cannot be captured by a linear recounting of events. It belongs rather to the order of the *traumatic*, in the sense that it points to an experience non-commensurable with other experiences, and standing out from the retrospective and constituting synthesis upon which recounting would depend. It is in order to attend to the singularity of witnessing that Felman and Laub call for a certain psychoanalytical practice, drawing on Freud's notion of the unconscious affect.[1] As Laub, a psychoanalyst who worked with victims of the camps, writes, massive trauma "precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction" (*Testimony* 57). It is necessary to allow the trauma in question to be narrated if it is to be witnessed as an experience. Witnessing begins "with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence" (*Testimony* 57). The psychoanalyst enables a testimony by listening empathetically, unobtrusively, and nondirectively, taking the lead in order to begin to affirm the reality of a massively traumatic memory. The story emerges and a true witness is born, who is no longer condemned to destructively re-enact or "act out" the trauma. This witness, in turn, is able to address others. As Laub and Feldman emphasize, "memory is conjured here essentially in order to *address* another, to impress upon a listener, to *appeal* to a community" (*Testimony* 204). Witnessing is, on this account, always a witnessing *with* others, an appeal that would permit an experience to be translated into terms that are more general.

Yet one should not assume the community of addressees could ever repair itself by acknowledging the horrors that occurred in its midst or at its borders. As Emmanuel Levinas warns us, acknowledgement itself will remain impossible for as long as trauma is understood to be something that can be witnessed narratorially, i.e., in terms of the synchronic order of individual or collective memory. Trauma would not have been uncovered in its original sense, which is to say, in the opening to the Other [*Autrui*] that would precede and give rise to the possibility of narration. Witnessing, according to Levinas, never simply indicates particular moments in which trauma precludes its reg-istration, but attests to a perpetual malfunction in the apparatus of memory, to a permanent and indeed *constitutive* difficulty with the recording mechanism.

Yet Levinas also insists that the very possibility of synthesizing our experiences and constructing stories—of addressing or appealing to a community—*depends* on this initial encounter. The traumatizing opening to the Other is not just the condition of experience that dissimulates itself from experience like, e.g., the *a priori* forms of intuition in Kant, since it refers to an *a posteriori* experience—toward an encounter with the Other [*Autrui*]. For Levinas, it is necessary to attend to this opening if we are to be prepared to respond to the most terrible events of our time. One must keep memory of the opening to the Other that is also the opening of the good and the ethical [*l'éthique*]—of a justice that would allow one to judge the community to which witnessing is addressed and even the language in which it is couched.

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[1] Felman and Laub's *Testimony* is one of several important texts on the phenomena of witnessing and trauma in recent years. *Testimony*, a collaboration between a literary critic and a psychoanalyst by drawing on texts of Celan, Camus and de Man as well as the film *Shoah* and other videotaped testimonials of Holocaust survivors, drawing together the literary and the visual, the psychoanalytic and the historical and the artistic and the autobiographical. The most powerful recent book on testimony is, I would argue, Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz*, which focuses on attempting to heed what he argues persuasively is a lacuna in the testimony of Holocaust survivors. Oliver's excellent *Witnessing* explores survivor's accounts of slavery, racism and the Holocaust, developing a general account of testimony that escapes a philosophical account of recognition. LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* explores the question of the possibility of historical representation and understanding of trauma, once again focusing on Holocaust testimonies. Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* explores the relationship between literary language and psychoanalytic language. Finally, Leys' *Trauma - A Genealogy* explores the genealogy of the concept of trauma, exploring the medical responses to shell-shock and combat fatigue as well as neurological and psychoanalytic accounts.

Levinas reserves the word trauma for an *a posteriori* experience of the Other—but what is it that allows him to determine the form of an experience that is never simply and easily available? Even if one is impressed by the seriousness of his attempt to attend to the terrible events of our time and his insistence that a historiography based upon the synchronic order of memory and narrative proves incapable of responding to trauma, there remains the question as to why one should follow him in determining the opening to the Other as the opening of the good, or, indeed, as indicating traces of the glory of God. But Levinas's text is not closed; its richness lies partly in the way it offers itself to be reread by those who remain unpersuaded by the letter of his argument. For readers alert to its ambiguities there is an extraordinary fecundity to his work.

In this respect, Blanchot's theoretical practice is exemplary.[2] For Blanchot, trauma and witnessing are more equivocal than they are for Levinas. They are linked to the *"il y a,"* a notion that Levinas renders explicit in some of his earliest philosophical texts, but that can also be found in Blanchot's fictions and critical essays of the same period.[3] Blanchot evokes the *il y a* in phrases like "the reverse of transcendence," "the incessant insistence of the neutral," the "nocturnal murmur of the anonymous," or "absolute indetermination" ("Our Clandestine Companion" 49). Unlike Levinas, Blanchot does not rigorously dis-tinguish the traumatic experience of the *il y a* from the traumatic opening to the Other. Yet in maintaining this ambiguity, Blanchot, like Levinas, also attempts to answer to the death camps—to the barbarous word *Auschwitz*, an event, which he writes: 'makes a ceaseless appeal to us, imposes, through testimony, the indefeasible duty not to forget: remember, beware of forgetfulness and yet, in that faithful memory, *never will you know* ('Do not Forget' 248).

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[2] Blanchot, a close friend of Levinas from their time as students at the University of Strasbourg, is best known as a literary critic, as the author of *The Space of Literature* and "Literature and the Right to Death." The translation of his major writings is nearly complete, but despite a growing secondary literature, his contributions to theory, to philosophy, have not been appreciated. Other figures, close to Blanchot, have obscured his importance in the Anglophone world – none more so, perhaps, than Levinas, with whose work Blanchot's own remains in conversation for several decades. The most reliable book on Blanchot's work in general in English remains Leslie Hill's *Blanchot — Extreme Contemporary*. Bruns's *Maurice Blanchot* is also significant. The best general study in French remains Françoise Collin's *Maurice Blanchot et la question de l'écriture*. Thomas Carl Wall's *Radical Passivity* and Gary D. Mole's *Levinas, Blanchot, Jabès* provide compelling analyses of Blanchot's relationships with other key contemporary thinkers. Jill Robbins's *Altered Reading* and Dennis King Keenan's *Death and Responsibility* whilst both ostensibly books on Levinas, contains excellent discussions of Blanchot. I have commented on Blanchot's work in "Cave Paintings and Wall Writings," "The Movement of Testimony," "Born With the Dead," and "Our Responsibility" and on the relationship between Blanchot and Levinas in "Literary Communism," "The Sphinx's Gaze," and "The City and the Stars." The present essay is intended as a sequel to "City and the Stars," which appeared in an earlier edition of the JCRT. I am indebted in the following essay to Jacques Derrida's study of testimony in Blanchot's *The Instant of My Death*, *Demeure*.

Like Levinas, Blanchot asks how one might one draw a lesson from the testimony whilst answering to the alterity of the trauma of the sufferer. To acknowledge that the testimony of a witness is singular, that it cannot be assimilated to the synchronic order of historio-graphical recounting, is by itself, insufficient. The question remains as to how it might be possible to gather such singularities whilst preserving them as singularities, as discrete and separate instants that awaken a response from us. How would it be possible to attest to a diachrony that has always and already interrupted the synchronous order of experienced time? As Sarah Kofman observes, Blanchot writes texts "which teach us (without making this the object of a lesson) to remember that which must henceforth constitute the ground of our memory; which teach us all, young or old, Jews or non-Jews, if this senseless breaking of the human race in two can, after Auschwitz, still make sense" (*Smothered Words* 8).

My aim, drawing both upon Kofman's *Smothered Words*, written in homage to Blanchot, and Levinas's account of trauma and witnessing in his *Otherwise Than Being*, is to sketch a general account of a practice of witnessing, of a writing that would allow us to respond to the singularity of trauma. I will argue with Kofman that Blanchot's practice of "writing without power" allows us to understand how we might witness the double movement of gathering and dispersion, which is the condition of possibility of rendering witness to the death camps.

II.

"Because he was a Jew, my father died in Auschwitz: How can it not be said? And how can it be said? How can one speak of that before which all possibility of speech ceases?" (*Smothered Words* 9). Berek Kofman was buried alive in

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[3] See William Large's "Impersonal Existence," for a useful discussion of the *il y a* in Blanchot and Levinas.

Auschwitz because he refused to work in order to celebrate the Sabbath. He refused not by opposing his power to the power of his captors. He knew what would happen if he stopped to pray. But work, for Berek Kofman, would neither liberate him nor provide his rehabilitation; he refused to perform his tasks *on the run*, but to refuse work was also to refuse the entire order of power of which such work was an emblem. He was not one of those who would hold himself back in the midst of his labors in order later to bear witness. It was left to his daughter to bear witness in his place, or rather to write of the witnessing of others, and of those who she argues teach us to witness and to learn from witnessing.

When Kofman first writes of her father's death, it is not in the manner of a straightforwardly autobiographical recounting. Her account of his deportation and his death opens her homage to Blanchot[4] and forms part of a broader attempt to reflect upon the event that, she writes, "must henceforth constitute the ground of our memory"—of the memory of Jews and non-Jews (*Smothered Words* 8). She also draws upon Antelme's *The Human Race*, in which he recounts his own experiences as a deportee, retracing Blanchot's own commentary on this volume.

It is as part of this complex text dedicated to the memory of her father, to Antelme and to Blanchot, that she inserts two pages from Serge Klarsfeld's textual memorial[5] of those killed in the camps where her father's name is listed, commenting:

> *It is recorded, there, in the Serge Klarsfeld Memorial: with its endless columns of names, its lack of pathos, its sobriety, the "neutrality" of its information, this sublime memorial takes your breath away. Its "neutral" voice summons you obliquely; in its extreme restraint, it is the very voice of affliction, of this event in which all possibility vanished, and which inflicted on the whole of humanity "the decisive blow which left nothing intact." This voice leaves you without a voice, makes you doubt your common sense and all sense, makes you suffocate in silence: "silence like a cry without words; mute, although crying endlessly." (*Smothered Words *10-11)*

It is a name among others, not the name in a list, like the lists of classification that the SS kept so assiduously, but a name on a list of those deportees; it is a list to help shore memory against the forgetting not perhaps of particular names of which Berek Kofman is one, but of the kind of naming that emblematized the extermination of a people. The memorial names names, but does so in order to let the names resound in a different manner than in the concentration camp roll-call, or the catalogues of the living and the dead kept by their captors. But is there such thing as a proper naming—an act untainted by shame? Proper names, Derrida reminds us, are always classificatory; the proper name is only "a designation of appurtenance and a linguistico-social classification"; it is always inscribed "with a system of linguistico-social differences" (*Of Grammatology* 111). No, there can be no *absolute* idiom; the immediate does not allow itself to be grasped immediately. When I name something, I invoke a whole network of powers in order to withdraw the presence of the thing in which I speak or write. In ridding myself of the singular, I reveal the meaning—the idea that subsists in all things; but this means that the particular disappears, the unique instant escapes and the word fails to capture what seemed to offer itself to its grasp. But does the memorial not provide the *beginnings* of an idiom, recalling the specificity, the singularity of each victim?

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[4] *Smothered Words* was written for an edition of *Les Cahiers de l'Herne* on the politics of Blanchot; however, since the volume never appeared, it was published as a separate book in 1987.

[5] Klarsfeld's memorial records the names, deportation dates and dates and places of birth of French deportees.

Perhaps John Caputo is right to suggest that "the best monument to victims is just to write down their names, one by one, to make a long detailed list of the proper names […] and to drop the speeches" (*Against Ethics* 69). Does the memorial counter the identification and classification of names and numbers that occurred in the camps through a *re*naming: calling out the names again, but this time in order to remember what happened? It is true that the memorial presents a list of information, but its sobriety and its restraint allow the names to resound anew, halting the inexorable roll-call.

It is in order to let her father's name resound, along with all the other names on the pages of the memorial she reproduces, that Kofman writes *Smothered Words*. In *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, published a few years later[6], Kofman recalls that all she has left of him is the fountain pen she took from her mother's purse: a pen that she used until it failed her, until, patched up with Scotch tape, it took its place before her and on her desk. It "makes me write, write. Maybe all my books have been the detours required to bring me to write about 'that'" (*Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* 3).

To write about *that*: Kofman would indicate the instant that is incommensurable with writing and calls for it, demanding that writing become an endless detour, a series of futile attempts to reach the trauma, to broach it in its uniqueness and its singularity. Her aim is to write a writing like that of the textual memorial: to find a way of letting an instant resound not in order to restore her father to life nor perhaps even bringing the singularity of his murder to our attention. The imperative to "write, write" is a response to the demand to *situate herself* with respect to this loss. But she does not satisfy herself with a private act of witnessing, retreating into mourning, nor even to commemorate terrible events. She writes to disturb us, to awaken a memory (scarcely a memory but an excess of memory, an *hypermnesis*) that demands a new kind of ethics and politics, a new practice of writing.

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[6] *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, an account of Kofman's childhood in Paris immediately following her father's deportation, was published in 1994.

It is in this respect, for Kofman, that Blanchot's theoretical practice is exemplary:

> *It behooves me, as a Jewish woman intellectual who has survived the holocaust, to pay homage to Blanchot for the fragments on Auschwitz scattered throughout his texts: writing of the ashes, writing of the disaster which avoids the trap of complicity with speculative knowledge, with that in it which is tied to power, and thereby complicit with the torturers of Auschwitz. (*Smothered Words *7-8)*

Blanchot, author of *The Writing of the Disaster*, would have taught us how to witness. My principal aim is to understand the grounds of Kofman's claim.

III.

Kofman pays particular tribute to the figure of the Jew in Blanchot: "the infinite of which the Jew, for Blanchot (even if he is not only that), is the emblematic figure, he who has been able to preserve throughout his history the vocation of foreignness, of exile, of the outside" (*Smothered Words* 8).[7] This foreignness, exile or exteriority is as terrifying as it is measureless, refusing to let the proposed "solution" to the Jewish question do away with that question. The Jews were marked out as a people who belong to a book and a history, a people who resisted assimilation because they belonged, ultimately, to another God. What does this mean? The hygienic or sanitary operation of the extermination expresses the essence of Nazism and perhaps, as Lacoue-Labarthe suggests in a book which Blanchot praises[8], *the essence of the West*:

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[7] At the time Kofman was writing her tribute to Blanchot, controversy surrounding Blanchot's early journalism was at its peak. As is now well known, Blanchot was, in his youth, an extreme nationalist who contributed to ephemeral journals like *Le revue français*, *Réaction*, *La Revue universelle*, *La Revue du siècle* and published articles alongside racists and anti-semites, in *l'Insurgé*, of which he was one of the founding editors. By the late 1930s, however, Blanchot had rejected nationalism and patriotism. The anti-parliamentarian, anti-communist, anti-capitalist monarchist of the 1930s fundamentally concerned for the fate of the social and cultural identity of France gives way to the communist who, eighteen years later, would campaign against French colonial interests in Algeria. Blanchot would also go on to participate in the Events of Paris in May 1968. Kofman rejects the mythologizing of Blanchot's early political journalism as well as the claim that Blanchot's later interventions in French public life operate as a kind of compensation for his early views. I regard Leslie Hill's reading of Blanchot's journalism in *Blanchot – Extreme Contemporary* as definitive.

> *It was not at all by chance that the victims of that annihilation attempt were the witnesses in that West of another origin of the God who was venerated and though there – if not indeed, perhaps, of another God – one who evaded capture by the Hellenistic and Roman traditions and who thereby stood in the way of the programme of accomplishment. (*Heidegger, Art and Politics *37)*

Blanchot concurs: the Jewish God here would not name "the God of power, promise and salvation, of whose retreat Auschwitz is the mark" (*The Infinite Conversation* 249). This God names the call from the outside, the call that elects a people to leave their abode. It is this God who called Abraham into exile, who allowed the slaves to become a people in the deserts of Egypt, a people without land, hunted and anxious but elected to observe the Law and to preserve an *ethos* (*The Infinite Conversation* 249). The words heard by Abraham, "leave your country, your kinsmen, your father's house," take on meaning for Blanchot as a summons to a positive errancy, to a new, nomadic relation to the earth (*The Infinite Conversation* 249).

How is this possible? Blanchot, in a series of conversations written on the occasion of the publishing of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, allows his conversationalist to reject the word 'God' and to express reservations about the words "ethics" and "good" in Levinas's work.[9] At the same time, the conversationalists welcome the publication of *Totality and Infinity* as a new turn in philosophy.[10] *The Infinite Conversation*, in which these conversations can be found, also includes an essay in which a more positive appropriation of the significance of Jewish monotheism occurs.

Blanchot claims with a self-confessed "brutality" that Jewish monotheism is "the revelation of speech as the place where men hold themselves in relation with what excludes all relation: the infinitely Distant, the absolutely Foreign" (*The Infinite Conversation* 127). Thus, as Blanchot emphasizes, when God appeared to him, Abraham opened his eyes to see three *men*. Likewise, after Jacob struggled with his opponent, he said: "You have wrestled with Elohim as with *men*" and said to Esau not "I just saw God as I see you," but "*I see you as one sees God*" (*The*

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[8] See Blanchot's "*Penser l'Apocalypse*."

[9] Blanchot's conversationalists find the name God "too imposing" (*The Infinite Conversation* 50) and reject the word *l'éthique* entirely (*The Infinite Conversation* 55).

[10] One of the conversationalists proclaims that *Totality and Infinity* accomplishes "a new departure in philosophy and a leap that it, and we ourselves, were urged to accomplish" (*The Infinite Conversation* 74).

Infinite Conversation 127, my emphasis): this conveys, Blanchot avers, "the suggestion that the marvel (the privileged surprise) is indeed human presence, this Other Presence that is *Autrui*—no less inaccessible, separate, and distant than the Invisible himself" (*The Infinite Conversation* 129).[11] This would be the revelation of the Law and the *ethos*: the call outside, the revelation of the Other [*Autrui*] is, for Blanchot, the revelation at the heart of Jewish monotheism.

But what is it that allows Blanchot to make this claim? It is, without doubt, his engagement with the work of Levinas. It is in terms of his relation to the work of his friend, to the philosopher who places witnessing [*le dire*], saying [*le Dire*] at the heart of his thought in *Otherwise Than Being*, that Blanchot's difficult writings on the notion of witnessing can be understood.

IV.

In the opening dedication to *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas writes that anti-Semitism is the hatred of the other man in every confession, and every nation. Yet by linking it to the name Semite, he claims a special status for the Jews as witnesses for all humankind. In one sense, for Levinas, the Jews are a people like any other, "a people in love with happiness, like all peoples, and with the pleasures of life"; and yet by a "strange election" they are bound to a revelation (*Proper Names* 122). But they are also a people to whom, in Levinas's figure, the Bible is bound as strings are bound to the body of a violin, whose history gives the revelation a human history as the revelation of the Infinite. This means that God is not, for Levinas, absent from Auschwitz; to assert this, he writes, "would amount to finishing the criminal enterprise of National Socialism, which is aimed at the annihilation of Israel and the forgetting of the ethical message of the Bible, which Judaism bears, and whose multimillennial history is concretely prolonged by Israel's existence as a people" (*Difficult Freedom* 99). Levinas calls for a return to these same texts: to the origins that continue to provide sustenance. The scriptures, commentaries, flowers in the "garden of Writing," open to those patriarchs, prophets, Kings, farmers, and builders who would live from the divine source (*Difficult Freedom* 27). "The adventure of Spirit also unfolds among men," and it is still unfolding; the modern Jew must learn how the "traumatism" of the enslavement in Egypt "constitutes my very humanity, that which draws me closer to the problems of the wretched of the earth, to all persecuted people" (*Difficult Freedom* 30). Likewise, the traumatism of the camps does not obliterate the revelation, but testifies to it in another sense. The revelation eliciting Abraham's "here I am" (the burning bush before which Moses lowers his eyes) meet the books belonging to the witnesses of the extermination, the new genre that Weisel identifies. The garden remains open to the Jew.

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[11] The argument I paraphrase from "Being Jewish" may appear arbitrary, or at least too brief. Doubtless it should be read in conjunction with his lengthy discussions of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, the influence of which informs almost every page of Blanchot's *The Infinite Conversation*. These discussions develop these brief scriptural allusions, drawing, no doubt, on Levinas's own essays on Judaism. I will show how Blanchot differs from Levinas in his interpretation of Judaism below. Gary D. Mole's *Levinas, Blanchot, Jabès* is particularly interesting on the question of Judaism in Blanchot. I respond to his reading in "The Movement of Testimony."

It is in a tribute to the work of Levinas that Blanchot writes:

> *I will not speak of the other or about the other, but I will speak – If I speak –* to *the Other (i.e., to the stranger, the poor, him who has no speech, even the master, bereft of mastery), not to inform him or to transmit knowledge to him – a task for ordinary language – but rather to invoke him (this other so other that his mode of address is not "you" but "he"), to render him witness by a manner of speaking that doesn't efface the infinite distance, but is speech by this distance, a speech born of the infinite. ("Our Clandestine Companion" 45)*

To render him witness: this is structurally similar to the witnessing that is the witnessing of Auschwitz since to render witness is to create a space such that the relation in question is not subsumed. To speak *of* or *about* the other is to risk speaking in place of the Other and thereby *assuming this place*, filling in the infinite dissymmetry of the relation between the "I" and the Other.

It is Levinas who taught us that Jews bear witness to a relation of difference with the human face, recalling us, Blanchot writes, "to the exigency of strangeness; not separated by an incomprehensible retribution, but designating as pure separation and as pure relation what, from man to man, exceeds human power—which is nonetheless capable of anything" (*The Infinite Conversation* 129). For Levinas, the relation or separation that opens between human beings escapes the entire dimension of power, and hence the cultural determination of human relations as master and slave, employer and employee, etc. The unilateral relation to which Levinas attends is not modeled after any reciprocity; to claim that it escapes power is also to point beyond any particular construal of the relation between individuals. It is, rather, a traumatizing *exposition*, opening immediately in a greeting or salutation in which the "I" is claimed to be *elected* by the Other. Why here is this election presented as a trauma? It is, after all, in these terms that Levinas writes of the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt. Why should it be appropriate to describe the relation that bestows the good?—because it is structurally analogous to the thorn in the flesh of the opening to the Other. It is, for Levinas, analogous to the irruption to which he links the good.

It is significant that this trauma awakens a witnessing. The "I" before the Other is claimed to say a word of welcome, analogous to Abraham's *hinei*, the *here I am* through which he put himself in service to God. The call that tore Abraham from his sedentary existence is structurally analogous to the opening to the Other that is acknowledged in Saying. Both imply the disruption of a settled way of existence—of the happiness of a life lived without a more fundamental responsibility. Both singularize the one who responds, summoning him or her to assume responsibility. Both, in turn, are also analogous to the persecution that occurred in the Egyptian enslavement. But both bear witness to a more originary traumatism than the one exemplified in the enslavement of Israel. Saying, for Levinas, is a contentless declaration of a readiness, a doing before understanding that happens in response to the traumatizing opening to the Other. The Other, like the God who calls Abraham, is not a master with an imperious will. The traumatic opening that bestows the good is not enmeshed in relations of power, nor is it an event I can choose whether to acknowledge. It inscribes itself in me. In saying, in rendering witness to the Other, I am exposed henceforward, according to Levinas, and am responsible to the Other before all else.

It is to the primacy of this traumatism, this saying, to which Levinas's thought in its entirety attempts to attend. But if he is to retain the opening to the Other that obtains as saying, and if he is to remember that language is inaugurated in the address to the Other, then this demands an attempt to write in a way allowing this election to resound. It is to traumatism, to saying, that Levinas answers in his extraordinary endeavor to write another kind of writing, refusing to make saying into an object of discourse. *Otherwise Than Being* is a work of philosophy written against the said [*le dit*], in order to answer to a relation withholding itself from the measure of power.[12]

But does this mean that Levinas's *Otherwise than Being* would provide the key to understanding Blanchot's notions of trauma and witnessing? Blanchot also writes a new kind of writing, fragmenting *The Writing of the Disaster* in order to make writing into an indication, better to witness what lies beyond the reach of a classically philosophical discourse. As I will show, Levinas and Blanchot respond in different ways to the ambiguity that is bound up with witnessing and trauma. This divergent response yields divergent writing practices and different accounts of witnessing in terms of the relationship between the notions of the *il y a* and illeity. But it is Blanchot, I will claim, who is best able to respond to this ambiguity in its ambiguity, allowing us to understand why Kofman is to pay homage to his work as a Jewish survivor.

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[12] Space prevents me from deepening my account of Levinas's extraordinary claims here. See Mole's *Levinas, Blanchot, Jabès* for a clear account of the arguments and discursive strategy of *Otherwise than Being*.

V.

For Levinas, Abraham's "here I am" re-echoes in the "here I am" of the "I" before the Other. Both are ways of opening to God. Both are ways of witnessing. As he writes, "It is by way of this witnessing that glory is glorified [*la glorie se glorifie*]. It is the way in which the Infinite surpasses the finite, and the way in which the Infinite *comes to pass* [*se passé*]" (*God, Death and Time* 199). For Levinas, it is this witnessing calling the subject into existence just as Adam was called from the thickets of Paradise where he sought refuge. The voice of God "moving through the garden from the way whence comes the day" is a figure for a response to a summons that cannot be evaded, and an original surprise that calls for the sincerity of saying ("The Truth of Disclosure and the Truth of Testimony" 103). It is in the *hineni*, the *me voici* or *here I am* that I acknowledge the summons that exposes me as if to a blazing sun that eradicates every interiority. But this infinite, originary relation—the light of a blazing sun—harbors a shadow. Levinas writes transcendence "needs ambiguity as 'a frontier at once ineffaceable and finer than the outline of an ideal line'" ("The Truth of Disclosure and the Truth of Testimony" 107). The boundary is not the line of the geometer, it does not carve up an ideal space. The opening to the Other is an opening to the unknown. In "God and Philosophy," this ambiguity is indicated in the equivocal relationship between two crucial terms in his lexicon: *illeity* and the *il y a*.

Levinas forms the neologism illeity from *il* (he) or *ille*, indicating the passing of the infinite, which is the way the infinite reveals itself without yielding to the powers belonging to the subjectivity of the subject (*Otherwise Than Being* 13). Levinas associates illeity with the "he," with "the nonphenomenality of the other who affects me beyond representation, unbeknownst to me and like a thief" (*God, Death and Time* 201). However, this notion bears a relation with another notion formulated jointly by Blanchot and Levinas in their first writings: the *il y a*. One way to understand the relation between illeity and the *il y a* in their texts, through separating the role of these notions in the thought of Levinas and Blanchot, is in terms of the relation to the infinite they respectively imply.

Both the *il y a* and illeity might be characterized as openings and perhaps even revelations. Yet if the latter is, as I will show, an acknowledgement of the glory of God, the former is revealed in an experience as lowly as physical pain. In pain, "there is an absence of all refuge. It is the fact of direct exposure to being. It is made up of the impossibility of fleeing or retreating" (*Time and the Other* 69). The individual who feels pain cannot leave the painful instant behind; he or she is unable to summon the strength sufficient to open a future for him, or herself. The *il y a* is not the Heideggerian "*es gibt*"; it is not the being of beings understood as "*transcendens* pure and simple," that is, the temporal transcendence that opens the future.[13] The horror of the *il y a*, for Levinas, lies in the fact that it gives nothing to be experienced—that it does not permit a "subject" of experience to take up a stance with respect to the irremissibility of being.

By contrast, the good infinitude of God is claimed to be otherwise than being, i.e., beyond the bad infinitude of existence.[14] Levinas coins the word "illeity" in order to indicate the way in which God is transcendent. Illeity refers to the coming to pass of the infinite: to infinitude as "the only positive predicate of God" (*Alterity and Transcendence* 65). It is this infinitude that, he writes, "remains a third person, the *he* in the depth of the You" (*God, Death and Time* 198). But what then of the relation between illeity, the "he" or "*il*" of God as it is revealed in the face of the Other, and the *il y a*, the impersonal "*il*" of existence? What is particularly generous about Levinas's work, opening it to re-readings and re-negotiations, is the way in which he does not shelter his texts from the ambiguity of transcendence:

> *God is not simply the "first other," the other par excellence, or the "absolutely other," but other than the other, other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other, prior to the ethical bond with the other and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of a possible confusion with the stirring of the* il y a*. ("God and Philosophy" 141)*

Levinas's God, the "*il*" who passes in illeity might be confused with another "*il*," that is, the "it" of the *il y a*. It is to Levinas's sentences from "God and Philosophy" to which Blanchot draws attention: "he gives us a presentiment that, without being another name for the Other (always other than the Other, 'other otherwise'), the infinite transcendence, the transcendence of the infinite, to which we try to subject God, will always be ready to veer off 'to the point of a possible confusion with the stirring of the *il y a*." ("Our Clandestine Companion" 49, translation modified). A few lines later he adds: "the '*il y a*' is one of Levinas's most fascinating propositions. It is his temptation, too, since as the reverse of transcendence it is not distinct from it either" ("Our Clandestine Companion" 49). Blanchot *is* tempted; illeity, for him, is confusable for the *il y a*; transcendence with the reverse of transcendence. This is why he can affirm Jewish monotheism, albeit in his own way. Jewish monotheism, with Blanchot, attests not only to transcendence but to reverse of transcendence. Here, Blanchot does not break with Levinas's argument concerning the central importance of the relation to the Other—its precedence over reason—but allows this relation to be implicated by the *il y a*.

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[13] I recall Heidegger's discussion of the relationship between being and beings, which, in the second introduction to *Being and Time*, he characterises as transcendental (see *Being and Time 63*). The transcendence of being, as becomes clear in the same work, must be thought temporally, that is, in terms of the opening of *Dasein* to its future. The opening to the future is evoked by Heidegger in terms of the '*es gibt*', of the generosity and prodigality of being. The experience of pain would prevent this opening.

[14] Levinas invokes the emerging and arising of the *il y a* in an interview in a few terse but evocative sentences: "Can one break with being? Can one *exit* being? Don't negation and annihilation leave in place the stage on which negations and annihilations are played out? Isn't the outside inside, in a sense? Aren't we always enclosed within existence? No escape. Maurice Blanchot, in his wonderful and strange work, has conceived of death in terms of the impossibility of breaking away. This view on the mystery of death is profound and obsessive. Ontology as obsession. In the anguish of death, the impossibility of nothingness. An impossibility of "stopping the music", of calling a halt to the "ruckus" of existence! And yet, at the same time, the impossibility of going on with them" (*Ethics and Infinity* 157).

This is why Blanchot can claim that the Nazi persecutions did not prevent the revelation of the infinitude of Jewish monotheism. Anti-Semitism bears furled within it a positive revelation of the God whose call, recorded in the scriptures, bound a people to one another. Blanchot's "God" did not die at Auschwitz, but was revealed anew. Here would be the revelation of the Law and the *ethos*: the call outside, the revelation of the Other [*Autrui*] is, for Blanchot, the revelation at the heart of Jewish monotheism. The voyage out—the movement of migration—demanded the solitude of Israel from its outset, a solitude that prevented enrootedness, sedentarism and the institution of a kingdom or a state like other states.[15]

As Blanchot recalls in a letter, the Nazi persecutions "made us feel that the Jews were our brothers, and that Judaism was more than just a culture, and more than just a religion even because it was the foundation of our relationship to others [*autrui*]" ("Do Not Forget" 245). Is this not an echo of the "Intellectual's Manifesto" written during the Dreyfus Affair, through which intellectuals declared their opposition to fanatical persecution? But the intellectuals who judged the judges and the society to which they belonged in their defense of Dreyfus, did so in the name of reason—the same reason whose primacy is, for Blanchot, placed at stake by Jewish monotheism. Most important, the Shoah is not simply a case of injustice towards a group of people, but an injustice against those whose sacred books bear witness to a relation to the Other. This is what

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[15] I examine and criticize Levinas's version of the claim that the modern state of Israel is a state unlike other states in "The City and the Stars," arguing that he exhibits a nostalgia for a lost authority which allows him to set up a relationship between the *polis*, the locus of politics, and alterity figured in the image of the star. I use Blanchot's writings to present a non-nostalgic account of being together or community. However, it is also necessary to think through Blanchot's own characteristically elusive claims regarding the singularity of the state of Israel, a task I have tentatively begun here and hope to take up at greater length elsewhere.

Blanchot expresses when he affirms Levinas's claim that "Judaism is an essential modality of all that is human" ("Do Not Forget" 249).

"The Jews were our brothers"—Blanchot remembers how the persecutions drew together a community of thinkers in the recognition of this impugned modality, each of whom being addressed, interpolated and traumatized by a call that issues from a source upstream of the natural reason for which, he claims, Jewish monotheism is a figure. Henceforward, Blanchot and the community to which he alludes would relive the extermination in an interminable *hypermnesis*, an active remembering that would prevent them from acquitting themselves of their responsibility.[16] It is in response to the same responsibility that Blanchot seeks to do more than call for justice in the name of reason. He would to attend to a traumatic call from which reason emerges: to write in order to bear witness to what he believes himself able to call "God."

Has Blanchot gone too far in understanding the meaning of Jewish monotheism in this way? Yes. In claiming that transcendence needs ambiguity, Levinas permits this claim. From one perspective, Blanchot's oeuvre can be read as issuing from a confused misunderstanding of the revelation to which Levinas points. From another, Levinas's own texts can be read as a confused attempt to sacralize the *"il y a,"* seeking to contain its unrestricted force in the institution of prohibitions marked out by key terms in his lexicon. Might one then propose a Blanchovian account of trauma and witnessing in place of a Levinasian one, regarding the notions of witnessing, of saying in Levinas's work as delimitations of a broader, *transgressive* notion of the *il y a*? It is not a question, here, of arbitrating between Levinas and Blanchot, since it is the very possibility of arbitration at issue. If there is no transcendence without ambiguity to which one might appeal, then it is impossible to arbitrate. But if this is the case, this implies that there is no reason to follow Levinas in his apparent certainty that the relation to the glorious infinitude of illeity is differentiable from the *il y a*. To know that there might be confusion with respect to the *il y a* and illeity, transcendence and the reverse of transcendence is perhaps already to stray.

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[16] No doubt Blanchot alludes to this *hypermnesis* when, in "Intellectuals in Question", he makes a "personal confession" (a startling phrase from a writer notorious for safeguarding his privacy) in the form of a few lines he quotes from Char's poem "*Billets à Francis Curel II*" (*Oeuvres complètes*, 633) that, he writes, come to him almost every day: "I want never to forget that I have been forced to become – for how long? – a monster of justice and intolerance, a cooped up simplifier, an arctic individual with no interest in the fate of anyone who is not league with him to kill the hounds of hell. The round-ups of Jews, scalpings in police-stations, terrorist raids by Hitler's police on stunned villages, lift me off the ground, strike my chapped face with a red-hot slap of molten iron" ("Intellectuals in Question" 225). We are told that these words were written in 1943 – a date that, Blanchot writes, "hangs suspended above our heads" ("Intellectuals in Question" 225). How can we read them? One might conclude that they refer to a certain experience – a call to arms, to responsibility — that precipitated Blanchot's own involvement with the *Résistance* (Char, too, was a member of the *Résistance*).

VI.

Blanchot is Levinas straying and tempted. He foregrounds the same ambiguity between the illeity and the *il y a* as Levinas, but, according to my argument, he follows the consequences of this ambiguity. But this does not mean it is possible to locate Blanchot's account of witnessing and trauma on one side of this ambiguity with Levinas's account on the other, since this would be to resolve this ambiguity in advance. What does this imply with respect to the attempt to respond to witnessing and trauma?

Long before Levinas moved saying to the center of his thought, Blanchot developed a theory of language centered on a call, an originary disappropriation of the writer or speaker. As a commentator on scriptural texts, Levinas urges the relevance of Jewish literature for Jews of our time.[17] As a philosopher, he uses a vocabulary of election and prayer, religion and the sacred. Talmudic commentary and philosophy converge in the notion of saying and witnessing. He would invite the Jew into the garden of writing to read and write; he would also teach us that reading and writing are likewise a response to saying; he invents a practice of writing that answers to revelation. But for Blanchot, witnessing is associated with another kind of receptivity, another practice of reading and writing. To read with Blanchot is to understand that the religious language of the scriptural commentator also bears witness to a certain poetry, one that finally outplays the notions and vocabulary of monotheism. Blanchot's critical practice, in particular, his notions of witnessing and trauma, attest to an ambiguity inherent in religious experience, i.e., to the problem of understanding the infinitude of God as anything other than a restricted delimitation of the *"il y a."*[18] This does not imply the rejection of Levinas's account of ethics or sacrality, but rather their renegotiation.

This gives an indication of the way in which one might approach Levinas's Talmudic commentaries. Levinas knows how far scriptural texts are from contemporary experience; this is why he writes commentaries, drawing the Jews into the garden, showing us that the texts are alive, how they bind a people, granting them a future in the future of exegesis. The revelation, he writes,

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[17] As he realises, for modern Jews, "whose concern with the intellectual destiny of the West and its triumphs and crises is not simply borrowed […] the problem of the revelation remains pressing, and demands the elaboration of new modes of thought" (*Levinas Reader* 192).

[18] This invites a new exploration of religiosity in terms of the "*il y a*," a task I hope to be able to undertake elsewhere.

> *has a particular way of producing meaning, which lies in its calling upon the unique within me. It is as if a multiplicity of persons—and it is this multiplicity, surely, that gives the notion of "person" its sense—were the condition for the plenitude of "absolute truth," as if each person, by virtue of his own uniqueness, were able to guarantee the revelation of one unique aspect of the truth (*Levinas Reader, *195)*

But to permit this equivocation, thereby handing the determination of meaning over to the reader, is to render the status of his own commentary ambiguous. The very language of the commentaries, like the scriptures themselves, is affected by the ambiguity between illeity and the *il y a*. Linguistic meaning depends upon transcendence, upon the dissimulation of the power of language to negate its referents. But language is also composed of other rhetorical and poetical elements that are very evident in scriptural texts. For Levinas, the revelation is given in exegesis and in the encounter of the reader with the text. But the same exegesis involves interpretation—an attempt to retrieve a meaning by negotiating the complex interweaving of allusion, suggestion, metaphor and transposition. Revelation is transmitted not despite these linguistic features, but through them. The glory of God that would pass in saying is confusable with the poetical features of language itself.

According to the well-known argument of Blanchot's "Literature and the Right to Death," language can never purge itself of sense once and for all. It must *mean*; it must undertake a minimal transcendence implying that it can never become a thing unto itself. Language can neither free itself from things nor become a thing; it is drawn simultaneously in two opposing directions. As such, the effects of the ambiguity of transcendence cannot be confined to God alone; the reader of the scriptures or the commentaries might discover something revelatory in the grain of the language that was supposed to convey revelation. Is this what Nietzsche understands when he writes, "we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar" (*Twilight of the Idols* 50)? Is it the shadows of a dead God that flicker through the thickets of language, an overgrown garden whose flowers no longer open to the sun? Are the dreams of a pure, transparent, meta-language the shadow of the God who is already dead? For Blanchot, God cannot find us sheltering in the thickets of paradise because we know that language has enclosed us and hidden us forever. Knowledge is astray; historiography has been sent off course. To use a Blanchovian figure: the stars are going out above us; the disaster has happened. We remain in the thickets of a language that can no longer raise itself to the stars.

Blanchot's commentaries call literature as a witness, flinging open the gates of a garden that has overgrown and covered the world. For him, a certain modern poetry begins in the wilderness, finding joy in the fleshiness of words, and knowing that it must resist turning words into indifferent counters of exchange.

Language must not be allowed to conceal the subterfuge of dissimulating violence by means of violence, of wielding power against power. The poet would restore the *weight* of language in the poem. Poetry can never make language into a thing, yet it depends on the fact that words are not indifferent counters of exchange. The rhythmical and sonorous qualities of language are the poet's chance. They are also, it is true, the chance of the scriptural writer; but in poetry, according to Blanchot, these qualities are an end in themselves insofar as it is the poet's endeavor to attempt to realize a poetic 'thing' that would be sufficient unto itself, that is, a work of language referring to nothing outside itself. Poetry cannot make words into things, the poem cannot remain mired in immanence but must make sense. But in attesting to the endeavor in question, the poem enacts its own kind of revelation.

Do scriptural writers draw upon the same features of language—the same rhythms and sonorities—in figuring the revelation within the very grain of the text? For Levinas, scripture attests to saying, to the glory of God. But perhaps scripture is revelatory because it cannot become the conduit through which revelation could surge; because it testifies to the co-implication of transcendence, the reverse of transcendence, indeterminacy and determinacy, the *il y a* and illeity, bad and good infinitude, the voice of God moving through the garden like the day and the choking undergrowth that has overgrown the garden.

Levinas knows this reading of the scriptures is possible. He knows that scriptural language resembles the language of poetry and that no garden of writing will open for a community of Blanchovian readers. He knows that to invoke saying and trauma is the riskiest game and that he will no longer be able to rest with the reassurances of the classical role of the thinker. No doubt it is because saying is claimed to attest to the glory of God that poetry and literature in Levinas's work figure as little more than illustrative supplements to his philosophical arguments.[19] But poetry does not allow itself to simply ornament a text. To recognize an ambiguity between the *il y a* and illeity is to admit to an irresolvable ambiguity between poetry and the scriptures, between Blanchovian commentary and both Levinasian philosophy and Levinasian Talmudic commentary.

VII.

Our age, according to Weisel, has seen the invention of the testimony. Current interest in witnessing and trauma reflects the need to transform theoretical practice in order to be open to this new literature. The dark radiance of the books that recorded the experience of the Nazi persecutions do not offer themselves to any process of accommodation. They are present to us, Blanchot writes, "as nocturnal signals, as silent warnings" (*Friendship* 110).[20] But in order to instruct, in order to become more than separate points of darkness lost in darkness, one must answer them. If it is impossible to respond theoretically to these testimonies, if knowledge is shattered and dispersed into the multiplicity of traumatic experiences, how is it possible to think and write in response to the terrible events of our time? Here, it is insufficient to claim simply that knowledge has fragmented whilst leaving the notion of knowledge untouched. For the fragment still gains its meaning from the whole. Just as a shard of a mirror is still a whole mirror, the fragment must also flash the system back to itself: it speculates. The task is to bring the fragment to expression whilst understanding that to do so is always to lose it in its singularity.

Trauma calls for a writing of trauma, a writing practice attending to incommensurable experiences of trauma and witnessing without subsuming them as particulars beneath a universal. This paradoxical practice would show that particularization and universalization are incompletable, and that the indeterminability of trauma suspends the demands of conceptualization. The relationship between trauma and the practice in question is such that the latter can never completely detach from its "object." It must remain contextual, close to the object of a reading at the juncture of witnessing experiences. The practice in question would thus undergo a perpetual alteration, allowing itself to be transformed—*wagered*—in the readings and negotiations that call it into existence. It implies the transformation of the classical modes of philosophical discursivity in the attempt to open itself to the trauma, each time singular and without capturing it within the horizon of expectation. This would not mean that the traumatologist must indulge in formal experimentation or arbitrary textual play for its own sake, because the play in question must be serious if it is to answer to testimony—if it is to respond to the heteronymous and plural.

My thesis is that it is in terms of the attempt to enact this practice that one might understand how discourses on literature, on the Shoah and on the relation to the Other, intersect in Blanchot's fragmentary texts. It is my view that this is what

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[19] See, for example, the passages on Shakespeare in *Existence and Existents* (33, 56, 87, 88) or the allusion to Rimbaud that opens *Totality and Infinity* (33). Jill Robbins has provided a valuable examination of the relationship between Levinas's ethics and literature in her *Altered Reading*.

[20] Blanchot is placing particular emphasis in this context upon Antelme's testimony, *The Human Rac*e. I deal with the fraught question of the relationship between Blanchot's claim about the specificity of Jewish experience and his foregrounding of a testimony by Antelme, a non-Jewish writer, in "The Movement of Testimony."

Kofman expresses in paying homage to Blanchot in the name of a writing that would suspend the demands of power and speculative knowledge. To write of the ashes of the disaster is to attend beyond the point of the ruination of discourse, to the instant that refuses to be unified or synthesized, to the infinite incommensurability of an event that must nevertheless be thought together with other events. This is why, writing after Blanchot, Kofman allows pages from the Serge Klarsfeld Memorial to interrupt her own text. It is why Blanchot's testimony allows Kofman to bear witness to her father's death, to the death of a Rabbi who refused to work in Auschwitz.

How should this be understood? The columns of proper names in the memorial are markers of a refusal of power. The memorial records only names, presenting nothing more than a list of the dead. But by granting us this information, through restraining itself from commentary, it leaves us (the ones who come after) without voice, without common sense and without a language in common. It afflicts us because it presents us with the obligation of a testimony that is missing from those who did not survive. The memorial makes the operation of systematic murder visible. This is not the hither side of the revelation of God, verso to the recto of the summoning call, but to the revelation of the indeterminability of trauma and witnessing. The opening to the divine is thus released into a more general and indeterminable exposition. It is not a question of affirming a tranquil secularism in place of religion and the sacred, since the field that opens to the traumatologist is not saturable; it does not lend itself any specific determination. Blanchot does not claim simply that trauma, in other words, is undecidable with respect to the divine, but that the divine or the sacred marking the traumatic opening to the Other—what Levinas calls the trace of God's passing—attests to the undecidability in question. Yes, Blanchot's adoption of the phrase "Jewish monotheism" is brutal, but he does not abolish what Levinas presents as the ethical message of the Bible altogether. Blanchot claims that the Biblical message, its revelation, is more ambiguous than it might seem, and that saying renders witness to the Other in another sense. But he makes this claim in the name of the Other, which is to say: in the attempt to render truer witness to the Other.

The Klarsfeld Memorial recalls Blanchot's sober and vigilant attempt to bear witness, to write of the ashes, to write of the disaster. His texts do more than present us with a list of names. But they answer to the same demand as the Memorial—to the need, in Kofman's words, "to bear witness is the obligation of a testimony that can only be given—and given only in the singularity of each individual—by the impossible witnesses—the witnesses of the impossible" ("After the Fact", 494). Blanchot does not speak *of* or about trauma. He does not determine its shape. His practice of writing permits him to respond *to* the infinite, to infinitude, and if by this we are to understand the relation to the

Other of which Jewish monotheism is a figure, and the Nazi persecutions the negative revelation.

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