

The Subject of Narration:

Blanchot and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*

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The madness of writing – the insane game – is the relation of writing, a relation established not between writing and the production of the book but, through the production of the book, between writing and the absence of the work.

Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*

He dived once more into his story and was drawn down, as by a siren's hand, to where, in the dim underworld of fiction, the great glazed tank of art, strange silent subjects float.

Henry James, *The Middle Years*

"I've been ever so far; all round about – miles and miles away."

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*

Telling Tales

Writing and that which it entails are the subject of countless texts by Maurice Blanchot. In particular, Blanchot has focused on the notion of the work, or more precisely on a groundlessness or an absence of the work,¹ which he has designated from different perspectives over the course of

more than half a century. In various ways, Blanchot has conceived of the work as an affirmation of its undoing. The question of narration, often about a confrontation with death, is fundamentally important, as is evident for example in Blanchot's *Death Sentence*, *The Madness of the Day* or *The Instant of My Death*. In a sense, it is bound up with the possibility of the work. Writing about Henry James in "The Turn of the Screw"² in *The Book to Come*, Blanchot discusses narration. What is described is indeed a certain absence of the work relating to the writer's difficult struggle to narrate everything. I will examine Blanchot's reading of James to expose this conception of narration centred on seizing the truth. It is apparent that Blanchot approaches the question very differently in "Narrative Voice (the 'it' [*'il'*], the neutral)," in *The Infinite Conversation* in which there is a decentring of the work.³ I will show that this text as well as certain writings by Derrida make it possible to arrive at a conception of narration in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) which strongly contrasts with the one put forward by Blanchot in *The Book to Come*. Thus, alongside Blanchot's reading of *The Turn of the Screw* which relates to the project of realising the work as a totality, Blanchot makes possible a more radical approach to the text, illustrating the non-totalization of the work whose borders are uncertain. In this way, Blanchot can be shown to step beyond an impossible conception of the absence of the work.

What is repeatedly in play in Blanchot's discussions of the work from various perspectives is the question of its limits. However in Blanchot's early text "Literature and the Right to Death," in *The Work of Fire*, it is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, more especially Alexandre Kojève's reading of it,⁴ which takes on a key role. Literature is conceptualized in terms of the phenomenology of spirit with all of its figures of meaning. It would be absolute knowledge in the form of a Book. The work is not in the world, but is the realisation of everything, that is the absence of everything, of nothing; it is "the meaning of meaning of words," "*that life which supports death and maintains itself in it*" (WF 343; PF 330).⁵ In later texts, Blanchot's writing testifies to a marked shift away from Hegel and Kojève, firstly towards Heidegger and the question of Being, evident in some texts of *The Space of Literature* and *The Book to Come*, then to Lévinas and also Nietzsche, as is already apparent in *The Infinite Conversation*. This ongoing displacement is important, since no text states the last word.

A certain displacement in Blanchot's writing is evident when one compares his thought on narration in the reading of James in *The Book to Come* with his approach in "Narrative Voice (the 'it' [*'il'*], the neutral)." What is significant is that these discussions about narration expose two different conceptions of the groundlessness of the work. They can be characterized

in terms of the two different aspects of play which Derrida defines in “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” in *Writing and Difference*. In his discussion of structuralism, Derrida opposes its negative, nostalgic, Rousseauistic side of thinking of play to the Nietzschean “affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.” Derrida adds: “*This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as the loss of the center.*”⁶ While one side is directed towards a truth or dreams of this origin which escapes play, the other does not search for the beginning or end of play but affirms the game. Presence or absence is not thought prior to the game but as a function of it. Derrida insists that the two irreconcilable interpretations of interpretation share the field of social sciences and that it is not a simple matter of choosing between them.⁷ I will indicate the way in which Blanchot’s writing on narration points not just to a nostalgic conception of play in *The Turn of the Screw* but also beyond it.

Blanchot’s reading of the work of many writers in *The Book to Come* is indeed about the search to narrate everything and to reach end-game, showing the nostalgic side of play. This is already apparent in the opening section of *The Book to Come*, “The Song of the Sirens,” which comprises two texts: “Encountering the Imaginary” and “The Experience of Proust (BC 1-24; LV 7-40).”⁸ The first of these is about the precarious approach of the writer or narrator towards an intangible point of revelation, however elusive it may be. The writer’s task is no more straightforward than that of the traveller who is attracted to a source and through which he will navigate more or less successfully. In this text, under the title “The Secret Law of the Story,” Blanchot describes the “point of encounter” (BC 5; LV 12), which he defines as belonging intrinsically to the story (*récit*) in contrast to the novel (BC 5-7; LV 12-4),⁹ but it is almost impossible to reach. Although the goal is mapped and supposedly exists, some try to get to it too early, others too late. Some impatiently say: “it is here; here, I will cast anchor” (BC 4; LV 10) whereas for others, Blanchot insists, it was always beyond the right point. Blanchot’s conception of the writer is part of the dream of truth and search for presence to which Derrida has drawn attention.

Under the heading “The Secret of Writing” in “The Experience of Proust,” the other text of “The Song of the Sirens,” Blanchot focuses on a pivotal aspect of the work of the writer Proust. He describes the way in which the “imaginary navigation of the story” is happily superimposed on the “navigation of his real life” which led him to “the fabulous point where he encounters the event that makes every story possible” (BC 11; LV 20). It is at this so-called meeting point that his experience can be truly understood

and realized. Already in *The Space of Literature* writing is tied to the “absolute milieu,” where the thing becomes image, figure and then finally that which is without form, indeed that supposed presence of the absence of everything after or before the existence of the world (SL 33; EL 27-8).¹⁰ Blanchot conceives of such a presence, albeit more elusively, in relation to the fascination of narration in *The Book to Come*. “The Song of the Sirens,” the opening section on the imaginary and Proust, reveals the point of attraction towards which the writer’s work is nostalgically oriented. The work would turn into the tale of everything and its absence. What Blanchot writes of Broch in *The Book to Come* typifies the writer’s pursuit:

The search for unity was Broch’s great passion, his torment, his nostalgia: unity, the hope of reaching the point of the circle’s closing, when the one who has advanced far enough obtains the right to turn around and to surprise, as a united whole, the infinitely opposed forces which divide him. (BC 120; LV 177)

It is as if there were some hidden centre at which the work would disclose the mystery of the world. It is on that impossible point that Blanchot’s reading of Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* is also centred.

Preliminaries

A prolific writer, Henry James is renowned in particular for his novels and tales, among others, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *Washington Square* (1881), *The Aspern Papers* (1888), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). At the beginning of his article on James, Blanchot immediately focuses not on the writer’s completed works, but on the plans for his novels in his *Notebooks* and compares his methods to those of Kafka and Proust. James is quoted as saying: “The subject is everything – the subject is everything” (BC 126; LV 187). While in one sense this statement may be understood as emphasising the crucial importance of the subject, as if nothing were more fundamental, it is also to be comprehended literally. Blanchot returns persistently to these words and to the issue of what is meant by the subject. It is the question which is central in his own text on James. He wonders whether the anecdote told to James by the Archbishop of Canterbury and on which the story was based would be its subject (BC 128; LV 189-90).¹¹ In starting to define the subject of a story, Blanchot points beyond the superficiality of the work to its fathomless depths, where everyday life is put aside and certainly nothing of substance remains. “A story with a subject,” writes Blanchot, “is thus a mysterious work freed from all matter: a story without char-

acters, a story where the uneventful day-to-day happenings and the intimacy without occurrences, conveniently available sources, cease being a resource" (*BC* 127; *LV* 188). Such a story is not simply about endless episodes or the "play of superficial or capricious succession" but constitutes a "unified whole"; what counts is not the game of unpredictable events, nor in fact the lives of the characters, for ultimately the focus is "the secret centre of everything" (*BC* 127; *LV* 188). Blanchot clearly associates the subject with that which is most fundamental in the work, with its heart and soul, which is sinister rather than vibrant.

In passing, Blanchot considers whether the narrating governess might be the subject of the story. In this role, she also adds to its ambiguity.¹² However ultimately, he concentrates on the "truth" of *The Turn of the Screw*, although it is difficult to seize: the tale is "a fascinating, indubitable, ungraspable story, in which truth has the slippery certainty of an image, close, like it and like it inaccessible" (*BC* 130; *LV* 191). It is perhaps this truth which most profoundly constitutes the subject of the story in Blanchot's reading. In fact, it is paramount in the brief section devoted to Henry James in "The Pain of Dialogue" where Blanchot considers the pressure exerted by the governess on the child in *The Turn of the Screw* to speak the truth which cannot be spoken. Furthermore, Blanchot maintains that the dark, "hidden truth" which seeks to emerge in the conversations in James's writings is central and brings the characters together around the incommunicable (*BC* 153; *LV* 227-8).¹³ It is evident that, for Blanchot, the subject of *The Turn of the Screw* only concerns the narrating governess to the extent of her involvement in narrative space, that "beyond," where everything is ungraspable. She draws the children into "the indecisive space of narration, into that unreal beyond where everything becomes phantom, everything becomes slippery, fugitive, present and absent," a region which may be just "the evil heart of every story" (*BC* 130; *LV* 192). Indeed Blanchot affirms that the subject of *The Turn of the Screw* is "James's art, that way of always circling around a secret" (*BC* 130; *LV* 192). It is that turn of the screw around a mysterious centre which is important: the circuitous movement which Blanchot considers characteristic of James's approach. The subject of the story is James's art of turning around, like Broch, to narrate the inaccessible truth.

Blanchot notes that there is something which escapes James and cannot quite be contained in his work. Blanchot writes: "There is, in the form that is unique to him, an excess, perhaps a side of madness against which he tries to protect himself, because every artist is frightened of himself" (*BC* 131; *LV* 194). Blanchot writes about James's fears of beginning a work, of losing himself in the preliminaries and the detours of his art. Yet

James then supposedly moves gradually closer to finding himself and the “true meaning of this preliminary work” (*BC* 131; *LV* 195). It is through the divine, magic, roundabout paths of the notes which precede the work that James would attain the “fullness” of the story to come. Quoting James, Blanchot reflects on why it is that “the patient, passionate little notebook becomes ... the essential in life” (*BC* 132; *LV* 195):

It is because in these hours of confiding in himself, he is grappling with the fullness of the story which has not yet begun, when the still undetermined work, pure of any action and any limit, is only possible, is the “blessed” drunkenness of pure possibility. (*BC* 132; *LV* 195)

In effect, what counts in Blanchot’s reading is the prelude to the story when James would truly encounter himself, gathering his thoughts together; what is important is some unbridled Dionysian force towards which James is attracted, that point of fascination or “secret centre” (*BC* 132; *LV* 196) of the work. Precisely through his notes, James would attain the limitless potential of the story. He would discover some fabulous twilight zone where he would already have conjured up the completed work while at the same time not having begun. At that time of research, James’s pen exercises “an enchanted pressure”, becomes the ‘deciphering’ pen, the magic needle in movement, whose turns and detours give him a premonition of the innumerable paths that are not yet traced” (*BC* 132; *LV* 195).

In his plans, James experiences that which is “not yet”; his focus is “the other side of the work, the one which the movement of writing necessarily hides” (*BC* 132; *LV* 196). His “care” would be pure inspiration. In a sense, he would be like Orpheus in *The Space of Literature*, whose “unique care” is “to look into the night at what the night dissimulates, the *other* night, the dissimulation which appears” (*SL* 172, Blanchot’s emphasis; *EL* 228-9).¹⁴ According to Blanchot, the “paradox” of James’s preliminary work is that it is defined, yet it also represents the opposite:

the happiness of creation which coincides with the pure indetermination of the work, which puts it to the test, but without reducing it, without depriving it of all the possibilities which it contains (and such is perhaps the essence of James’s art: each instant to make the whole work present and even, behind the constructed and limited work which he puts into a form, to give a presentiment of other forms, the infinite and light space of the story such that it could still have been, such that it is before any beginning). (*BC* 132-3; *LV* 196)

For Blanchot, the “essence” of James’s writing is in some origin of his work

where everything would be possible. James's art is to be understood above all in terms of his preliminary work which makes the totality of his work present.

Blanchot emphasizes that James calls the pressure which he applies to the work, namely that "pressing solicitation" to make it "speak completely," by the name of the "turn of the screw." This is the "subject" of James's story. It is the pressure exerted by the governess to make the children speak their "secret" which is

essentially the pressure of narration itself, the marvellous and terrible movement which the act of writing exercises on truth, torment, torture, violence which finally lead to death where everything appears to be revealed, where everything however falls back into doubt and the void of the shadows. (*BC* 133; *LV* 196-7)

The words "The subject is everything" (*BC* 126; *LV* 187) designate this region beyond the play of capricious events, where the writer would approach the incomprehensible truth. It is no coincidence that following the above passage Blanchot quotes the dying writer of James's *The Middle Years*. It is as if the writer at death, in the same way as James in his preliminary work at the start of his trajectory, were close to the source. Indeed the subject would turn full circle to comprehend "everything." Blanchot imagines James's own endeavour in terms of that fabulous pure possibility: that point at which nothing, almost nothing, would be turned into the ultimate work.

The Movement of Writing

In reading *The Turn of the Screw*, Blanchot focuses on the author of the preparatory notes or the dying writer who would approach some elusive point. However the words of James's failing writer, Dencombe, quoted by Blanchot at the end of his text, do not necessarily imply that the author is almost always turned away from the light, only to catch a glimpse of truth. Dencombe states: "We work in the dark – we do what we can – we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art" (*BC* 133; *LV* 197).¹⁵ It is "the rest," "the madness of art," indeed the excess, which cannot be comprehended once and for all. Thus, in this reading, James's *The Turn of the Screw*, like Dencombe's speech, is not simply about an ultimate turning point or about the pursuit of truth, but about the inexplicable turns and detours of narration which are always in play in the work. This "madness of writing" is also important in Blanchot's reinscription of James's words in a much later article entitled "We Work in the Dark."¹⁶

With reference to Blanchot's writing on narrative voice, it is possible to indicate a reading of James's *The Turn of the Screw* which is not nostalgic but shows an affirmation of play. In "Narrative Voice (the 'it' ['il'], the neutral)," in *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot emphasizes the way in which narration as conscious vision has been brought into question. If Flaubert still believed in narration, in telling as showing, without really dwelling on its limitations, Thomas Mann already began to challenge it (*IC* 382-3; *EI* 560-1). Insisting that telling is certainly not self-evident, Blanchot contests the use of a centralized perspective in a story in the form of a privileged "I," or perhaps also in the guise of a third person. For the problem is that these stories equate the narrative act and the transparency of a consciousness, as if telling were only being conscious or revealing. What takes place with Kafka, for Blanchot, is a distancing of the main character from himself, the other characters and events. This decentres the work and brings into the narration a different speech or speech of the other (*IC* 383-4; *EI* 561-2). It is then the narration itself which comes into play.

Blanchot associates the neuter with Kafka's narration: in it speaks an "il," a third person which is neither a third person nor simply impersonality. The subjects are in "a relation of non-identification with themselves": "something happens to them which they can only seize again by letting go of their power to say 'I,' and what happens to them has always already happened to them" (*IC* 384-5; *EI* 564). Narrative voice (*narrative*), to be distinguished from narrating voice (*narratrice*), is thus not that of a particular subject. The "il" is dispersed and mobile. "Its place" is both where it is always missing, therefore empty, and a "surplus of place" or "hypertopia" (*IC* 385, 462 n. 2; *EI* 563-4, n. 1, 565). Blanchot states that this voice signals an emptiness in the work like Marguerite Duras's "absence-word": "a hole-word, hollowed out in its center by a hole, the hole in which all the other words should have been buried." It is "a neutral voice that speaks the work from out of this place without a place, where the work is silent" (*IC* 385; *EI* 565).¹⁷ "Spectral, ghostlike," it is "the indifferent-difference that alters the personal voice," decentring it (*IC* 386; *EI* 566). The work thus lacks a centre and does not form a whole.

The elaborate framing of the story of *The Turn of the Screw* highlights the act of narration. The tale is not simply about one subject, be it the governess or indeed James, who presents a centralized perspective, but about a multiplicity of decentred subjects. The narration of the story is not simply about the limited particularities of an individual supposedly accounting for the world, which, as Blanchot underlines, becomes a characteristic of the novel (*IC* 381; *EI* 559). At the start of the story, in the first person, the narrator talks of being around a hearth in an old house where a number of

people were telling strange stories. Douglas, who was among them, later sends away for a manuscript which is secretly locked away in a drawer. Finally, he reads this tale by the governess who has been dead “these twenty years.”¹⁸ Yet Douglas too is dead and the story told by the narrator is a transcript which he made of the manuscript given to him by Douglas just before his death. The frame gives the impression not so much of subjects following on from each other in a quest for truth, but of a plurality of subjects, who occupy each other’s places, there being no final position or truth. The governess’s words live on in the narration. She is neither simply alive nor dead. Through the evocation of the real and the unreal together, ghosts alongside the living, it is as if the quick were always doubled by shadows; death is clearly already part of life and not just a point at the end.

The narration of *The Turn of the Screw* constantly affirms, in the descriptions of time and place, the emptiness of another time, another place. The governess compares the house, Bly, where she might meet the ghosts Quint and Miss Jessel, to a “theatre after the performance” (TS 243). There are moments which are almost like repetitions of other times. After first seeing Quint through the window, the governess recalls other instants when she had “looked for him in vain in the circle of the shrubbery.” She adds: “I recognised the signs, the portents – I recognised the moment, the spot. But they remained unaccompanied and empty” (TS 243). It is as if what took place were not altogether real, but reminiscent of some other action. In James’s story, various characters occupy each other’s place, adopt each other’s perspective and to a certain extent stand in for each other. The narrative voice shows the characters shifting around, enacting a series of repetitious and somewhat unreal moves. The governess writes for example: “It was confusedly present to me that I ought to place myself where he had stood. I did so; I applied my face to the pane and looked, as he had looked, into the room.” (TS 185). This change of position is all the more significant as the person whose place the governess occupies is a ghost. It is as if the living and the dead were to a certain extent interchangeable and the instant of death interminable. The narration is not that of a personal voice but rather this narrative voice traces an unlimited number of moves in which the figures are out of touch with themselves, de-centred, absent.

It is as if the apparition described by the governess and identified by Mrs Grose as Quint, dressed in his master’s clothes, were not the only one who resembled an actor (TS 191). One character is almost resurrected in the form of another. Indeed the governess works in place of the previously deceased governess Miss Jessel, in a sense her double, and what is apparent is that both are at once ghostly and real. At some moments in particular, it is evident that the governess is as much an “intruder” as Miss

Jessel, as much a passing image in James's text as the former employee. She writes of her:

She rose, not as if she had heard me, but with an indescribable grand melancholy of indifference and detachment, and, within a dozen feet of me, stood there as my vile predecessor. Dishonoured and tragic, she was all before me; but even as I fixed and, for memory, secured it, the awful image passed away. Dark as midnight in her black dress, her haggard beauty and her unutterable woe, she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers. While these instants lasted indeed I had the extraordinary chill of a feeling that it was I who was the terrible intruder. (TS 257)

The gazes of the governesses and the fact that one might have no more entitlement to be at the table than the other reinforces a certain interchangeability between the characters. The possible substitution of places of one who is alive and one who is dead has the effect of making them both appear to be actors. It is evident that in James's *The Turn of the Screw*, the subjects are clearly in a "relation of non-identification with themselves." Rather than the conscious vision of one subject, there are multiple subjects dispossessed of themselves.

Through its narration, the text does not highlight the culmination of the search for truth, but rather many truly unfathomable moments. The governess finally grasps Miles: "at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped" (TS 309). Yet, in a sense, the story continues in the events which are related at the start, that is in the frame in which the storytelling takes place and in which the background to the governess's tale is given. Her final words are echoed towards the beginning, when the focus is once more the heart. It is the narration of the governess's story which produced an effect on Douglas. The first person narrator, who later transcribed the story, asked him whether he "took the thing down" and he replies simply: "Nothing but the impression. I took that *here*' – he tapped his heart. 'I've never lost it'" (TS 149). The narration touches his heart; it is impressed upon him, as if in listening to the governess's story, he were also part of the story, virtually taking the place of the child Miles. It is as if the outside frame and the inside story were difficult to distinguish, the listener already in a sense also an apparition, or perhaps Miles living on in Douglas. In James's ghostly story, there is no finality to death; what has passed on also returns. Thus when Douglas reads the story, it is also as if he sensed the very presence of the governess long gone, while becoming

oblivious to the first person narrator in front of him: "Douglas, without heeding me, had begun to read with a fine clearness that was like a rendering to the ear of the beauty of his author's hand" (*TS* 157). Through the echoing voice of another, the governess speaks her words, just as Douglas's performance seems to extend beyond those around him to those of the past, indeed also without doubt to the listeners of the future. The narrator or the writer is in part caught up in another time, another place, and has no possibility of finding himself; he can have no vision of unity.

The writer's work is not complete but open, constructed to a certain extent by its inheritors. As Derrida underlines in *The Ear of the Other*, texts have a testamentary structure.¹⁹ *The Turn of the Screw* designates an emptiness associated with the pressure of narration; the narrative voice is made up of a multiplicity of speakers, one in the place of another, perhaps a ghost of the other. Characters in James's story stand in each other's places or take each other's places like the governess and her predecessor; they mimic actions like actors. Indeed through repeating James's title *The Turn of the Screw* as the title of his own text, Blanchot does not simply speak from "outside," but, in a sense, revisits the place of Henry James as the author of *The Turn of the Screw*, becoming involved like the first person narrator, as well as Douglas and the governess, in another turn of the screw of narration, an interminable, unfathomable displacement.

What is apparent is that James is not simply involved in making the work "speak completely" (*BC* 133; *LV* 196) or in approaching such a "point" as in Blanchot's reading of James. The "essence" of James's art cannot be to apply to the work such a *tour de force* that it would give the sense of all forms contained in its form "prior to any beginning" (*BC* 133; *LV* 196), the work becoming the ultimate creation. His art is not in reaching "behind the work" to make "the whole work present" once and for all, but rather in an affirmation of the incessant, ungraspable "movement of writing" (*BC* 132-3; *LV* 196). By envisaging James in search of some "secret centre," approached through preliminary notes or dying words, Blanchot pursues the nostalgic side of play which Derrida describes. In such a pursuit, or perhaps the dream of success, the noncentre is often defined, as Derrida maintains, in terms of the "loss" of centre. Rather than illustrating the writer's search for unity, *The Turn of the Screw* shows multiple perspectives: dispossessed subjects, doubled by ghosts, returning and disappearing. The work is pervaded by the unknown, a fathomless narrative voice which is perhaps "the oblique voice of madness" (*IC* 387; *EI* 567) indeed, in a sense, the "absence of the work." As Blanchot underlines, narrative voice always affirms an excess which, precisely, cannot be contained. It is that absence which is fundamental to the subject of narration. Narration is thus

what Blanchot calls in another context, the “language of the detour” (*IC* 29; *EI* 40). For composing a work, such as *The Turn of the Screw*, is less about turning around in nostalgic pursuit of the truth than about an endless diversion or, as Derrida has described with reference to Nietzsche, an affirmation of play. Blanchot writes in “Speaking is not Seeing” in *The Infinite Conversation*: “To find [*trouver*] is to turn, to take a turn, to go around. To find a song is to turn a melodic movement, to make it turn. No idea here of a goal, still less of stopping” (*IC* 25; *EI* 35-6).

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NOTES

- ¹ The third and final section of Maurice Blanchot’s *The Infinite Conversation* takes its title “The Absence of the Book (the neutral, the fragmentary)” from the last text in it, “*L’absence de livre*.” In that text, Blanchot uses the term “*absence d’œuvre*,” the “absence of (the) work,” as well as “*désœuvrement*,” translated by “worklessness or unworking.” Michel Foucault also published the important text “*La folie, l’absence d’œuvre*” as an appendix to *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1972), 575-82. Blanchot writes: “To write is to produce the absence of the work (worklessness),” *IC* 424; *EI* 622. (Throughout this article, I have modified the English translations.) On this major issue, see among other texts, Paul Davies, “The Work and the Absence of the Work”, *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1996), 91-107; Gerald L. Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1997), 145-72; Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (London: Routledge, 1997), 103-20.
- ² The text was previously published as “Le Tour d’écrou,” *Nouvelle Revue française*, 24 (décembre 1954), 1062-72.
- ³ The title of this text is translated in *The Infinite Conversation* as “Narrative Voice (the ‘he’, the neutral),” *IC* 379; *EI* 556. The French text was previously published as “La voix narrative”, *Nouvelle Revue française*, 142 (octobre 1964), 674-85.
- ⁴ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* [1947], trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969). Blanchot refers to Kojève’s text in “Literature and the Right to Death”, *WF* 314 and 323; *PF* 305 and 312.
- ⁵ See also *WF* 316-321; *PF* 307-311. Hegel writes: “the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures and maintains itself in it”. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Werke in 20 Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969-71) 3: 36; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1977), 19.
- ⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 369; *L’Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 427. See

also in the same book "Force and signification", 1-35; *L'Écriture et la différence*, 9-49 and in particular F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. with commentary by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967); *Die Geburt der Tragödie, Werke*, I, ed. Karl Schlehta (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1969).

- ⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 369-70; *L'Écriture et la différence*, 426-8.
- ⁸ "La rencontre de l'imaginaire" also has the sense of the encounter of the imaginary kind, the imaginary encounter. On the image, see in particular BC 91-2, LV 136-8; SL 32-4, EL 25-8; "Vast as the Night", IC 318-325, EI 465-77.
- ⁹ I have translated *récit* by "story," rather than "narrative" used in *The Book to Come*. The *récit* is an event, an exceptional event, or the approach to one, as opposed to the light-hearted fiction of the novel, yet the difference cannot be so clearly established. This is also evident when Blanchot refers to Plato's *Gorgias* and the *récit* of the Last Judgement.
- ¹⁰ See also "The Essential Solitude and Solitude in the World", SL 251-3; EL 341-4.
- ¹¹ See F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds, *The Notebooks of Henry James* (New York: Oxford U. P., 1961), 178-9.
- ¹² See also Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James", *A Casebook on Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw"*, ed. Gerald Willen (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1960), 115-53; Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1962); Michel Zérafra, ed. *L'Art de la Fiction. Henry James, "The Art of Fiction", "Gustave Flaubert", "Julia Bride" et neuf études* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1978); Merle A. Williams, *Henry James and the Philosophical Novel: Being and Seeing* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1993).
- ¹³ From a different perspective, after quoting Georges Bataille's *Guilty* in the final pages of *The Unavowable Community*, Blanchot discusses the relationship of the book with the unknown and Bataille's "negative community" of those without community; see also the last section "The Heart or the Law." See UC 1-26; CI 9-47.
- ¹⁴ On inspiration, see, in particular, SL 173-87; EL 230-50.
- ¹⁵ The citation is to be found in Henry James, "The Middle Years", in *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, New York Edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 16: 105. All references to James's work are to this edition.
- ¹⁶ Blanchot, "Nous travaillons dans les ténèbres", *Le Monde*, 22 juillet 1983, 9.
- ¹⁷ See Derrida's discussion of Blanchot's narrative voice in "Survivre", *Parages* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986), 149-52; "Living On", *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 104-7.
- ¹⁸ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, 12 (1908): 149 hereafter cited as TS.
- ¹⁹ Derrida, Response to Christie V. McDonald in the Round Table on Autobiography, *L'Oreille de l'autre. Otobiographies, transferts, traductions. Textes et débats avec Jacques Derrida*, sous la direction de Claude Lévesque et Christie V. McDonald (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1982), 71-2.