Prefatory Note

What follows is an essay, *Witness of Fire*, discovered by the amanuensis of Matthew; they cannot remember having written it under Matthew's dictation. The amanuensis, on the margins of the found essay, writes their own essay that seeks to remember another of Matthew's works referred to at the beginning of the found essay, entitled *The Hand of Cinder*, whilst obliquely reading, anticipating, and fracturing the trajectory of *Witness of Fire*. Each essay has been written in such a way that the grammar and content of the interrupted sentence collocates with the sentence that is interrupting it, and vice-versa; while both essays could, in theory, be read separately, this would detract from the theoretical import of the piece, which is to write 'in a single language always to make the double speech heard' (Blanchot 1997: 5) and to illustrate that criticism is 'both internal and external to the work' (Hill 2010: 54). There is a proliferation of interpretative paths down which you, reader, may wander, all of which lead to the disaster; as a witness of fire, you are always already the hand of cinder.

All quotations will be indicated in italics with full references given at the end of the piece. It is not always clear from which text a quotation is derived; indications are provided when it is necessary. Given that *Witness of Fire* is, if nothing else, a search for the fire of its title across time and history that culminates in a polyphony of indistinguishable voices in the final two pages, as well as the immense responsibility of coming to terms with the horror of the Holocaust, this is a deliberate stylistic choice

that multiplies the central weaving together of two voices into 'the countless cry' of several (Blanchot 1995: 47). It serves to illustrate, furthermore, the intellectual affinities between Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida, whose writings are, at times, indistinguishable; this is particularly notable on the final two pages of the essay.

This essay is presented with uses of font, line spacing, and margins that do not follow the conventions of regular academic papers, and which are used to buttress the modulation between the tightly focused and obsessive line of inquiry in Matthew's essay and the amanuensis's all-consuming meditations.

(I go and come from one to the other without interruption)
(Derrida)

"The history of fire?"
"Our history."
(Jabès)

I have alighted upon your essay, Matthew. I do not remember it. I am not entirely concerned with how it came to be written; perhaps there exists another amanuensis through which you wrote. Perhaps it was me through which you wrote; there is so much one forgets when one is being written through, threadlike. When you dictated your writing to me, I would recall that decisive line that opens the threshold of *The Book of Questions*: *You are the one who writes and the one who is written*.

Witness of Fire

> I seem to have written myself up to this point from the moment the title of that tripartite work, written all those years ago, came to me: *The Hand of Cinder*. The question of titles has always been a difficult one; the title inaugurates and entombs. It was necessary, then, not to figure *The Hand of Cinder* as a taut roter Faden along which each volume of the work would hang like photographs in a dark room,

which would be lit, curiously, by the very light of the thread on which the photographs might hang; a recurring credo, which has always followed me, reminds me that *a theory of interpretation which at the outset runs straight to the moment of decision moves too fast*, and warns me against opening the door into this room and following the blazing red thread, which I *cannot see from here except for the lambent light*. I cannot help thinking of a certain intersection in the opening pages of W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*; reserve, for a moment, what this intersection might be, and trace, instead, where the lines begin before they converge. I am thinking of that *significant date* that marks Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*; significant not for any sort of synchronicity that would lead the chronologist to pursue a thread from the day of its completion in January 1632 to all subsequent iterations of that day across time, but significant in its immortalising of the moment at which *society* was *emerging from the darkness into the light*. We know that it *was about more than a thorough knowledge of the inner organs of the human body* – it is, rather, about *the offending hand* with which the *anatomist has started* his dissection. *Now, this hand is most peculiar* for more reasons than the peregrinator of *The Rings of Saturn* cares to consider; he stops at suggesting that *it is with him*, that is the *petty thief*, *Aris Kindt*, *that the painter identifies* through rendering it *grotesquely out of proportion compared with the hand closer to us*. He succumbs to his own conclusion of deeming the *art of anatomy a way of making the reprobate body invisible*; the body disappears from his view, just as it does for *Dr Tulp's colleagues*, whose *gaze is directed just past it to focus on the open anatomical atlas*. In their case, it is a failure of the collective gaze; those closest to the dissected hand fail to observe *the shadow over the dead man's eyes*, and if I take the fact that *the much-admired verisimilitude of Rembrandt's picture proves on closer examination to be more apparent than real* to an extreme point, then the *shadow over the dead man's eyes* is the shadow of his inflated, dissected hand. The point of the gaze is not the hand itself, but the shadow of the haptic that obscures the optic. So too is it with *The Hand of Cinder*, of which I remember nothing, of which I wish, now, to remember everything; its writing is but the

shadow of a hand over my eyes which I fail to apprehend. It is no longer imaginable as a book,

> but instead as the ball of thread out of which would unravel the first and third volumes; the movement *from out of a center toward the surface of a sphere*. There was no question of guiding words towards something that one could hold in one's hands; the title would belong to the second volume, and the bookending volumes would simply bear the respective inscriptions of I and III. I wanted something of an included middle; the first volume would be defined by that which was, for the years between volumes, to come, and the third volume defined by that which had already come. I sense that this tangle of time is decisive for what I am now writing; I proceed with the fear that I *have got hold of the wrong thread*, as W. G. Sebald's narrator puts it in *The Rings of Saturn*, but can no longer subject myself to the ceaseless stops and pauses that have defined my previous works. Nor can I be subjected to them.

I am concerned here with thinking of Jacques Derrida –

but as something that scarcely exists; the trace of a hand. It is necessary to stop and pause with Sebald's narrator again when he talks of Thomas Browne's *Musæum Clausum*, which, he indicates, is *likely* to have consisted of *products of his imagination, the inventory of a treasure house that existed purely in his head and to which there is no access except through the letters on the page*. He goes on: *among the rare books and documents in Browne's "Musæum" are King Solomon's treatise on the shadows cast by our thoughts, de Umbri Idœarum*. It may be strange to pause and think of this, but there may be more truth in thinking about an imaginary work than a so-called real work; if the *essence* of literature *is disappearance*, as Maurice Blanchot tells us, then literature might be at its truest when it is nothing more than a title that refers to nothing: literature. Might it be that a title is nothing more than the shadow of a hand? To say so would be simply to duplicate the corpse of *The Anatomy Lesson*; the gaze would be obscured, at every turn, by the haptic shadow. I should go further, if not to depart, then at least to understand more about this lambent darkness in which I can neither see nor grasp. I will go to the very question of thinking

> of a certain Derrida of a certain post card within his *Envois*. It is dated the 22nd of September 1977; in it, we find mention of *M.B.* The reader

of Matthew's Book

> of Maurice Blanchot may know, owing to Christophe Bident's magisterial biography, that it was on *September 22, 1907, at 2:00am.*, that *Maurice Blanchot was born*. A pleasing coincidence, then; it appears, at first glance, to be little more than a fragment of a Festschrift honouring this clandestine thinker's seventieth birthday. It comes, however, a little bit before its time, and augurs this very fact if particular attention is paid to its opening sentence: *between us song was anachronistic*. I will leave it to the scholars and professors of monographic truth to trace the lineage from this elusive song to Blanchot's confounding meditation on *the Sirens' song*, which, he insists, *is not an allegory* for narrative, but is indicative of how *narrative is the approach* towards *the event* that is *always still to come, always already past, always present in a beginning so abrupt that it cuts off your breath, and still unfurling as the return and the eternal new beginning*. Such anachronisms can wait for another day, unless that day has already been and gone. No, it is something else entirely within this post card: Derrida professes that, *like him (M.B.), I like the word "disaster,"*

by way of Martin Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking?* If *memory is the gathering and convergence of thought upon what everywhere demands to be thought about first of all*, then it must be that memory is an aporia; *The Hand of Cinder* demands my thought, but I cannot remember anything about it. I remember the nameless volumes between which it was suspended, but it is little more to me now than the lore of the excluded middle. Perhaps I should remember what Blanchot wrote: that *the disaster is related to forgetfulness—forgetfulness without memory*. I should not concern myself, then, with memory, but with forgetting: disaster. Where was it he once wrote that *it was necessary that he, too, enter into forgetting*? Such is what I should do now, but I do not know where to begin. Perhaps the title will tell me; it is almost as though it reaches out *to carry* me with it *into the great oneness*, as Heidegger puts it. Yes, perhaps I must begin with the *two hands* that *fold into one*, but I think of hands as he would have written them, 'hände', and all I hear is: ender, as though to join my hand with *The Hand of Cinder* would be to cease,

> which will strike the reader as odd. This post card precedes Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* by three years. I do not wish to suggest that Derrida somehow prophesied Blanchot's turn to the disaster, which would be little more than an idle conspiracy; it seems to signal, rather, something about disaster itself.

It is not easy to delineate what the disaster might mean,

but I cannot see where else I might begin other than with the hand. Nor can Heidegger, in fact, whose haptocentric phenomenology of encountering *useful things* in the world began with *Being and Time*. His list of *utensils* all hinge on being grasped and put to action: *utensils for writing, sewing, working, driving,* and *measuring*. It is only through *the act of hammering*, in the instance of grasping and using a hammer – a Nietzschean phenomenologising with a hammer, perhaps – that the thing's *handiness* is revealed to us. Here, the eye is initially subordinate to the hand; *we cannot discover handiness* if we *just look at things "theoretically"*, though to touch and grasp, he then suggests, *has its own way of seeing which guides our operations and gives them their specific certainty*. Touch, then, is a primordial way of seeing, where the apprehending qualities of the eye intersect with the grasping of the hand. I would like to go further with Heidegger, however, when he asks *What is Called Thinking?* towards which he begins to answer with the startling proclamation that *thinking* is *the handicraft par excellence*. He likens it to *something like building a cabinet*; to think, then, is to grasp things in their handiness and to discover *the different kinds of wood and the shapes slumbering within wood*. This is agreeable enough if we continue to talk of tools and materials out of which we can make things – a cabinet, a chair, a desk, all of which come from wood, nails, and the hammer that, with every strike, threatens destruction. What, though, of Heidegger's first utensil from *Being and Time*, which, not insignificantly, is the writer's pen? I fear that I am approaching danger,

> given that it simply amounts to yet another account of what Blanchot calls the *limit-experience*. It is, he explains, something *we can never say we have undergone*; it remains outside the totality of what is possible. One finds a similar expression in *The Writing of the Disaster*: the disaster *is what escapes the very possibility of experience*. Strange, then, to speak of the origin of disaster if it remains wholly exterior to the realm of what is possible, and if origin designates a point out of which things proceed; yet this origin comes to us, at first, on the 22nd of September, 1907, the day on which Blanchot was born, and the night, five years later, on which Franz Kafka began to write, *at one sitting*, 'The Judgement'. I will not pretend that it was through a chance reading of Kafka's diaries that I happened upon this fact, though I will say that Bident, in drawing our attention to it in the beginning of his Blanchography, offers a clue that he does not, perhaps cannot, pursue. There is little else, however, that I can do

but something impels me to follow this flaming thread, perhaps to move towards it as if my hand demands to touch the fire, no longer content with letting my eyes merely apprehend it. When I wrote for you, Matthew, I cannot say that I ever felt, in those moments, even an approximation of what writing is; I did not write. Neither, as is known, did Socrates, and yet, insists Heidegger, he *is the purest thinker of the West*; *he wrote nothing*. Imagine, then, that Socrates did not write insofar as he did write; this would be little more than an idle paradox if Derrida, in his *Envois*, did not illuminate this very idea when he finds a post card on which *Socrates* is *writing, writing in front of Plato*, at the centre of which is the double image of *the pen and the grattoir*. While both of these might be wielded by different hands, and while Derrida objects to the idea, seemingly apropos of me, *that "to write" is indeed to scratch*, each is, in fact, the irreducible origin of the other, which is to say that to write and to scratch designate the utter absence of origin to which they point. This much is clear in the apparent fact of writing as an inscription, which, *owing to the game of common etymology*, as Blanchot knows, *makes of writing a cutting movement*; *to write is perhaps to bring to the surface something like absent meaning*, he will later remark, knowing that this bringing forth is also a wearing away of the inscribed surface. He puts it more clearly than I ever could, given that I have not written; the *limit* and *force of writing*, which is *disaster*, is that it, in fact, *de-scribes*. While Derrida might insist that Socrates *is scratching in order to erase*, to write and to erase are evidently both movements that anticipate one another. As soon as Socrates begins writing – cutting – he is already erasing – scratching – which is little more than to write; each is caught up in the same movement of violence against the de-inscribed surface. Here, then, Heidegger's hands and the pens they might wield are no longer that through which we may think, but are *the disastrous ruin of thought*, the very undoing of thought, where each hand seems to share in the inflicting of a certain type of pain that might be said to derive from fire; the pain of a cut and a scratch can be described, perhaps a little bit simply, as one that burns, and it would seem, then, that to write – to erase – is to burn. Was I, like Socrates, *a perverse copyist* when I wrote for you, Matthew, *busy transcribing a busy passage, scratching out a given other one in order to prepare it for the fire*? *I no longer know what I am doing, and how I am "scratching," if I am erasing or writing what I am "saving"*, but the fire speaks to me, it has burnt my hand and refused its touch, and all that is left is a hand of cinder. My hand has failed me, or perhaps it has simply shown me that it can be burned as much as it might burn, and that this is precisely the point: that the hand – writing, erasing – is always already the aftermath of its own fire: the après-hände of its own disaster. I fear that, if I continue to follow this burning – burnt – red thread any longer by looking at it as closely as I do, my gaze, too, will burn, and I will be, if only for a moment, a witness of fire. I will go on; there is seemingly nothing else to do

> other than to follow this clue, where I will begin with Kafka's diary at the precise moment when his writing of 'The Judgement' ends, when, *as the maid walked through the anteroom for the first time I wrote the last sentence*.

There is seemingly little here worth noting; Kafka simply finished his story as the work of the day began to usher itself in. Compare this, however, with the end of the story in question: *on the stairs, which he took like a smooth incline, he collided with the charwoman, who was just on her way upstairs to give the flat its morning clean.* It is at this point that the two versions of an event – the encounter with the maid – converge and deprive them of any discernible origin other than to say that each is, irreducibly, the other's origin. This is not an altogether pleasing paradox; it might become more bearable

if I am to understand this unbearable truth: that the shadow of the hand over my eyes is the scorch of writing to which I, somehow, must bear witness. I am no longer certain that eyes can read

if I return to Blanchot, this time with his description of the *journal*, which is *a memorial* for the *writer*, and *who he is when he isn't writing, when he lives daily life, when he is alive and true, not dying and bereft of truth.* The journal, then, is directly opposed to the so-called literary work, the writing of which is *to withdraw language from the world, to detach it from what makes it a power according to which, when I speak, it is the world that declares itself, the clear light of day that develops through tasks undertaken, through action and time.* That is to say, the writing of the journal maintains the relationship between signifier and signified, whilst the writing of the literary work is the dissolution of language's capacity to form a relation to what it purportedly signifies.

What, then, might be said of the convergence of these two versions of writing in that encounter with the maid? Disappointingly – but perhaps only at first – Blanchot provides a simple answer: Kafka's *"Journal"*, he says, *is not only a "Journal" as we understand this genre today, but the very movement of the experience of writing*. This much is known from Kafka's numerous sketches and fragments of works that appear in his journals only to be left unfinished. Blanchot's description does not account, however, for the fact that the same event has occurred twice over, once in a work and then in a journal, and that this extends, in fact,

to the recurrence of what is the same event in Blanchot's birth in 1907, and the writing of 'The Judgement' in 1912. This simultaneous event, which is, in the simplest of terms, the collision of birth and death, inevitably foreshadows itself and defers its origin to its counterpart. Blanchot's birth marks the rupture in time exemplified by Kafka's story and journal, both of which mark the simultaneous birth and death of Georg Bendemann, the story's principal character who meets his end by suicide, and the death of the writing of the story, which is little more than the birth of the story in its completion: *the story* that *came out of me like a real birth*. Blanchot's birth can only mark this rupture in time, however, by being marked itself by Kafka's story and journal as the simultaneous moment of birth and death; so too can Kafka's story and journal only mark the rupture of time in Blanchot's birth if his birth is marked itself by what it marks. What is marked in Blanchot is nothing less than the birth of a writer committed to what he would later call *the other night* into which everything disappears, most of all the life of the writer. Blanchot's birth is the birth of a writer that, more startlingly still, having taken place at *2:00am*, at the precise point where the night of the 21st lingers in the night of the 22nd, anticipates Kafka's writing of 'The Judgement' by just one day; it began *during the night of the 22nd-23rd, from ten o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning*, as though birth begets death.

I find myself, then, shuttling back and forth between two origins of birth and death, each of which augurs

the writer, Matthew, and *his biography*, this essay: *he died; lived and died*, if I am to believe, with Blanchot, that there is a *speech of writing*. *Speaking is first of all writing*, if both mean simply *to cease thinking solely with a view to unity*; the eyes give way, then, to the ears, given that *speaking is not seeing*, and that the former *frees thought from the optical imperative* of *the Western tradition*. Yet there remains the burning pain of writing – speaking – which seems to be *an inexhaustible forgetfulness* of de-inscription, where writing – scratching, erasing – is not something to be heard, as Derrida seems to know, for *a cinder is silent*, but something to be felt, just as *the condemned man* in Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony' *has to have the law he has transgressed inscribed by the harrow on his body, the script* of which is not read *with one's eyes*, but *with wounds*, as if he should, in Blanchot's words, *learn to think with pain*, which would simply be to subject the de-inscription of the body to what

Derrida calls the *nonknowledge* of *writing*: *The Hand of Cinder*, absolute unworking of thought, interminable forgetting of the de-inscribed body. Writing, scratching, wounding, erasing, forgetting: each indicates

> the other, anachronistically or otherwise. Imagine my surprise, then, as I discover the very same augury in Derrida's post card, which seems, as I look further, to point to what is beginning to look like some kind of cosmic disaster of September, which he seems to know when he refers to the *disaster* as a *teeming constellation*; it is not surprising that, if I turn the first letter of those dreaded initials, *M.B.*, upside-down – as perhaps Derrida did, when he wrote that *I have necessarily written upside down* – I am given the supreme thinker of constellations:

a Witness Burning and

> Walter Benjamin, who died on the 26th of September, 1940. I cannot bear to think that there is further proof for what I am trying to understand, and will limit myself to the evidence at hand: what Derrida calls the *September letter*. This is a curious appellation, given that he begins to ask its recipient if *you have still not gotten the letter that I sent to the village P.R.* on the 1st of September, from which I can only conclude that the letter was, in fact, composed and sent in August at the earliest. It is clear, however, that the letter in question comes to be given its belated name because its existence only becomes apparent when the movement of commentary alights upon it. Its going missing is, in fact, its very essence, and exemplifies the agony of literary criticism, which knows that the work is *the point which cannot be reached, yet* is *the only one which is worth reaching*, as Blanchot would say; there is more at stake, however, than some idle allegory for literary criticism. Blanchot knew this much in *The Work of Fire* from 1949, when he describes *the chatter of commentaries*, to which Kafka's *silent work* is subjected, as nothing other than *disaster*. Disaster lies, then, within a *commentarial language* that *embeds itself in fiction and is indistinguishable from it*. Blanchot, in this case, is speaking of Kafka's occasional tendency to comment upon his works in his journals. I fear that I am

treading much of the same ground; that disastrous encounter with the maid in both 'The Judgement' and Kafka's journal is the very same embedded language of commentary within fiction, and, indeed, vice-versa. Fiction begets commentary, which begets fiction. It becomes clear at this point, however, that Derrida was doubtless referring, in that September post card from 1977, to Blanchot's use of the word *disaster* in relation to Kafka, whose *narratives* are *the most rooted in absolute disaster*; at this point, however, it is unclear whether *narratives* refers to fiction or commentary, given that neither is distinguishable from the other. There is nonetheless a distinct resonance here with Derrida's *September letter*, which comes as both fiction and commentary, ceaselessly referring, as it does, to that *strange, mute, eloquent, thing* that exists as fiction through the language of commentary, which itself is little more than fiction.

It would seem, then, that September is simply a vanishing – or vanished – point into which life, death, fiction, and commentary simply tumble and tangle. Derrida, however, gestures towards another star in this constellation of disaster when he reminds his recipient that *little by little I am forgetting it, forgetting the details* of the *September letter*. Forgetting, it would seem, becomes the condition under which any reference to the letter is possible, which points – all too clearly – to Blanchot's *Awaiting Oblivion* (*L'Attente l'oubli,* or *Waiting Forgetting*), within which, Blanchot meditates, *forgetting is a relation with that which is forgotten, a relation that, making secret that with which there is a relation, possesses the power and meaning of the secret*, just as the *September letter* is full of *secrets* that *merit only forgetting*, where its commentary perpetuates the secret: the forgetting of its contents. It is telling that Blanchot's text, as it suggests in one of many moments of self-reflexivity, is an *event* that *consisted in this manner of being neither true nor false*; it seems that this is what disaster is destined to designate until I recall that *Awaiting Oblivion* began as a contribution, entitled 'Waiting' ('L'Attente'), to a Festschrift for the seventieth birthday of Martin

> Heidegger, who was born on the day, but not the year, that Benjamin would die, the 26th of September, 1889, just as disaster begins, in Derrida's post card, on Blanchot's seventieth birthday. Disaster begins, then, just as life, according to the Bible, comes to an end, for *the days of our years are threescore years and ten*; yet disaster cannot simply mean death, for Blanchot and Heidegger lived beyond the age of seventy, and just like that, the fabric of the biblical cosmic order is unwoven. Perhaps disaster is simply waiting for a death that does not come, or perhaps a forgetting outside of memory, just as Derrida's *September letter* is marked by the forgetting of its non-arrival; *disaster*, as Blanchot knows, *is not advent: it does not happen*, and yet all seems to happen anew again in *the very element of forgetfulness: writing*, which, like the disaster, *is not of the order of things that happen*.
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> September is *the disaster: stress upon minutiae, sovereignty of the accidental*. Something in it signals

the agony of his wounded, burning body: *all these cinders, he feels them burning in his flesh*. He is burning now;

> a profound entanglement of life-and-death lodestars that I can scarcely explain, all of which seem to point elsewhere, as if to say: *the disaster is there, now*. No – I sense that it is much more than this. It is the work of fire, as Kafka knows when he writes, thinking of 'The Judgement', that *everything can be said*; *for everything, for the strangest fancies, there waits a great fire in which they perish and rise up again*, just as Derrida knows when he writes of *the great burning of us – I propose that we do it in September* – and just as Blanchot knows when he writes: *the words had been said, the utterances burned*. This much is clear in the dispersed disaster – *an immense dispersed collection* – that I have followed, all instances of which – *nowhere-wandering, everywhere-residing* – point to *that utter-burn where all history took fire* in September 1939 until September 1945, which, as Giorgio Agamben knows, *contains something that cannot be borne witness to*, but onto which we must not *confer the prestige of the mystical*: where *people did not die*, but where

corpses were produced. Death did not come inasmuch as death did not cease. Yet I ask, with Blanchot: as *the absolute event of history, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up*, *how can it be preserved, even by thought?* I feel now that I cannot continue, that, now, *the collection becomes impossible*, I *can no longer totalize*, and that September is *the little by little suddenly* of the unthinkable fire of disaster that is always already *the countless cry* of *what has never ceased to take place; it is always already repeating itself*. Perhaps this is why I cannot understand what I have followed; this eternal September is simply the *smoke* of a fire *without perceptible remainder, for it rises, it takes to the air*, and I have only just begun to understand where the fire is, which, burning, has already burned.

I will say only this: it is no sovereign accident that if I say he writes in German, 'er schreibt', the word contains, if one letter is removed, a scream: 'er schreit'. Perhaps, instead, the scream contains writing in this excess letter, just as writing, 'schreiben', contains a scream, 'schrei', and the trace of a burn, if one listens closely to that last syllable – *I still have an ear for the flame* – as though writing were a scream-burn, though I cannot hear it, for *there is no silence if not written*. Yet I *have* heard *burned paper at a distance*, in all these Septembers that defy history, all of which now burn me, my paper. *I no longer know who I am* other than he who writes, who screams, *a witness to the unencountered*: a witness of fire.

I, too, am burning now, and I cannot speak or see, for my eyes and mouth are full of cinders. *I still have an ear for the flame*, always already a cinder, and *even if a cinder is silent*: *the speaking that silence is*. My ears are aflame; I hear through burning. I scream, I burn: the end of cinder.

References and Notes

Preface

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Witness of Fire

1. *(I go and come from one to the other without interruption).* Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 124.
2. *"The history of fire?"* / *"Our history."* Edmond Jabès, *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Book*, trans. by Rosemarie Waldrop (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 32.
3. *You are the one who writes and the one who is written*. Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions: Volume I*, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 11.
4. *a theory of interpretation which at the outset runs straight to the moment of decision moves too fast*. Paul Ricoeur, 'Preface to Bultmann', trans. Peter McCormick in

The Conflict of Interpretations, ed. Don Ihde (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 397.

5. *cannot see from here except for the lambent light*. Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Dialogue,* trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 7.
6. *significant date.* W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. Michael Hulse (London: Vintage, 2002), 12.
7. *society was emerging from the darkness into the light*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 12.
8. *was about more than a thorough knowledge of the inner organs of the human body*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 13.
9. *the offending hand … anatomist has started*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 16.
10. *Now, this hand is most peculiar*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 16.
11. *it is with him*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 17.
12. *petty thief*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 12.
13. *that the painter identifies*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 17.
14. *grotesquely out of proportion compared with the hand closer to us*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 16.
15. *art of anatomy a way of making the reprobate body invisible*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 13.
16. *Dr Tulp's colleagues … gaze is directed just past it to focus on the open anatomical atlas*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 13.

17. *the shadow over the dead man's eyes*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 17.

18. *the much-admired verisimilitude of Rembrandt's picture proves on closer examination to be more apparent than real*. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 16.

19. *from out of a center toward the surface of a sphere*. Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: Minneapolis University Press, 1993), 425.

20. *Musæum Clausum … likely … products of his imagination, the inventory of a treasure house that existed purely in his head and to which there is no access except through the letters on the page.* Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 271.

21. *among the rare books and documents in Browne's "Musæum" are King Solomon's treatise on the shadows cast by our thoughts, de Umbri Idœarum.* Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, 272.

22. *essence … is disappearance.* Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 195.

23. *M.B.* Derrida, *The Post Card*, 108.

24. *September 22, 1907, at 2:00am. … Maurice Blanchot was born*. Christophe Bident, *Maurice Blanchot: A Critical Biography*, trans. John McKeane (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 3.

25. *between us song was anachronistic.* Derrida, *The Post Card*, 107.

26. *the Sirens' song*. Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 3.

27. *is not an allegory*. Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 5.

28. *narrative is the approach … the event … always still to come, always already past, always present in a beginning so abrupt that it cuts off your breath, and still unfurling as the return and the eternal new beginning*. Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, 10.

29. *like him (M.B.), I like the word "disaster"*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 108.

30. *memory is the gathering and convergence of thought upon what everywhere demands to be thought about first of all*. Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1968), 11.

31. *the disaster is related to forgetfulness—forgetfulness without memory*. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 3.

32. *it was necessary that he, too, enter into forgetting*. Maurice Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 4.

33. *into the great oneness*. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 16.

34. *two hands … fold into one*. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 16.

35. *utensils … utensils for writing, sewing, working, driving, and measuring*. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 68.

36. *the act of hammering … handiness*. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 69.

37. *we cannot discover handiness if we just look at things "theoretically" … has its own way of seeing which guides our operations and gives them their specific certainty.* Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 69.

38. *thinking is the handicraft par excellence.* Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 23.

39. *something like building a cabinet … the different kinds of wood and the shapes slumbering within wood.* Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 15, 16.

40. *limit-experience … we can never say we have undergone*. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* 210.

41. *is what escapes the very possibility of experience*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 7.

42. *at one sitting.* Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-1913*, ed. Max Brod and trans. Joseph Kresh (London: Secker and Warbur, 1948), 275.

43. *is the purest thinker of the West … he wrote nothing*. Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 17.

44. *Socrates … writing, writing in front of Plato*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 9.

45. *the pen and the grattoir.* Derrida, *The Post Card*, 218.

46. *that "to write" is indeed to scratch*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 49.

47. *owing to the game of common etymology … makes of writing a cutting movement*. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* 28.

48. *to write is perhaps to bring to the surface something like absent meaning*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 41.

49. *limit … force of writing … disaster … de-scribes*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 7.

50. *is scratching in order to erase*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 49.

51. *the disastrous ruin of thought*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 41.

52. *a perverse copyist … busy transcribing a busy passage, scratching out a given other one in order to prepare it for the fire*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 182.

53. *I no longer know what I am doing, and how I am "scratching," if I am erasing or writing what I am "saving"*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 229.

54. *as the maid walked through the anteroom for the first time I wrote the last sentence.* Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-1913*, 276.

55. *on the stairs, which he took like a smooth incline, he collided with the charwoman, who was just on her way upstairs to give the flat its morning clean*. Franz Kafka, 'The Judgement', in *Metamorphosis & Other Stories*, trans. Michael Hoffman (London: Penguin, 2007), 50.

56. *journal … a memorial … writer … who he is when he isn't writing, when he lives daily life, when he is alive and true, not dying and bereft of truth*. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 29.

57. *to withdraw language from the world, to detach it from what makes it a power according to which, when I speak, it is the world that declares itself, the clear light of day that develops through tasks undertaken, through action and time*. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 26.

58. *"Journal" … is not only a "Journal" as we understand this genre today, but the very movement of the experience of writing*. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 57.

59. *the story … came out of me like a real birth*. Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-1913*, 278.

60. *the other night*. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 163.

61. *2:00am*. Bident, *Maurice Blanchot: A Critical Biography*, 3.

62. *during the night of the 22nd-23rd, from ten o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning*. Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-1913*, 275-276.

63. *the writer … his biography: he died; lived and died*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 36.

64. *speech of writing*. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 78.

65. *speaking is not seeing … frees thought from the optical imperative of the Western tradition*. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 27.

66. *an inexhaustible forgetfulness*. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 29.

67. *a cinder is silent*. Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, trans. Ned Lukacher (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 57.

68. *the condemned man … has to have the law he has transgressed inscribed by the harrow on his body*. Franz Kafka, 'In the Penal Colony', in *Metamorphosis & Other Stories*, trans. Michael Hoffman (London: Penguin, 2007), 154.

69. *the script … with one's eyes … with wounds*. Kafka, 'In the Penal Colony', 160.

70. *learn to think with pain*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 145.

71. *Nonknowledge … writing*. Derrida, *Cinders*, 35.

72. *disaster … teeming constellation … M.B*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 108.

73. *I have necessarily written upside down.* Derrida, *The Post Card*, 196.

74. *September letter*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 121.

75. *you have still not gotten the letter that I sent to the village P.R.* Derrida, *The Post Card*, 48.

76. *the point which cannot be reached, yet is the only one which is worth reaching.* Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 54.

77. *the chatter of commentaries … silent work … disaster*. Maurice Blanchot, *The Work of Fire,* trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 1.

78. *commentarial language … embeds itself in fiction and is indistinguishable from it*. Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, 2.

79. *disaster … narratives … the most rooted in absolute disaster*. Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, 10.

80. *September letter … strange, mute, eloquent, thing*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 124.

81. *little by little I am forgetting it, forgetting the details … September letter*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 109, 121.

82. *forgetting is a relation with that which is forgotten, a relation that, making secret that with which there is a relation, possesses the power and meaning of the secret*. Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 45.

83. *secrets … merit only forgetting*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 83.

84. *event … consisted in this manner of being neither true nor false*. Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 4.

85. *the days of our years are threescore years and ten*. Psalm 90. 10 (KJV). *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008.

86. *September letter*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 121.

87. *disaster … is not advent: it does not happen*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 5.

88. *the very element of forgetfulness: writing*. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 29.

89. *is not of the order of things that happen*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 62.

90. *the disaster: stress upon minutiae, sovereignty of the accidental*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 3.

91. *all these cinders, he feels them burning in his flesh.* Derrida, *Cinders*, 31.

92. *the disaster is there, now*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 93.

93. *everything can be said; for everything, for the strangest fancies, there waits a great fire in which they perish and rise up again*. Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-1913*, 276.

94. *the great burning of us … I propose that we do it in September*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 198.

95. *the words had been said, the utterances burned*. Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 33.

96. *an immense dispersed collection*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 186.

97. *nowhere-wandering, everywhere-residing*. Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, 82.

98. *that utter-burn where all history took fire*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 47.

99. *contains something that cannot be borne witness to*. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999) 34.

100. *confer the prestige of the mystical*. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 32.

101. *people did not die … corpses were produced*. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 72.

102. *the absolute event of history, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up, how can it be preserved, even by thought?* Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 47.

103. *the collection becomes impossible … can no longer totalize*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 207.

104. *the little by little suddenly*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 34.

105. *the countless cry*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 47.

106. *what has never ceased to take place; it is always already repeating itself*. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 101.

107. *smoke … without perceptible remainder, for it rises, it takes to the air*. Derrida, *Cinders*, 55.

108. *I still have an ear for the flame*. Derrida, *Cinders*, 57.

109. *there is no silence if not written*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 8.

110. *have … burned paper at a distance*. Derrida, *Cinders*, 57.

111. *I no longer know who I am*. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 229.

112. *a witness to the unencountered*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 121.

113. *I still have an ear for the flame*. Derrida, *Cinders*, 57.

114. *even if a cinder is silent*. Derrida, *Cinders*, 57.

115. *the speaking that silence is*. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 59.