

Christopher Hoffman

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Professors Crépon, Loriaux, and Mann-O'Donnell

“Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be at all”:

Writing the Heading from Breton to Derrida

*This world is only very relatively commensurate with thought, and incidents of this kind are only the most striking episodes of a war of independence of which I glory in taking part.*¹

-André Breton

*...I seemed to be harpooned by French philosophy and literature, the one and the other, the one or the other: wooden or metallic darts, a penetrating body of enviable, formidable, and inaccessible words even when they were entering me, sentences which it was necessary to appropriate, domesticate, coax, that is to say, love by setting on fire, burn (“tinder” is never far away), perhaps destroy, in all events mark, transform, prune, cut, forge, graft at the fire, let come in another way, in other words, to itself in itself.*²

-Jacques Derrida

¹ André Breton, “1924 Surrealist Manifesto” (Mann-O'Donnell PPCT course reader 2012), page 24. Translation altered for the sake of accuracy. Other citations taken directly from the document.

² Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), page 50-51. Translator's notes indicating the original French text have been omitted in this case.

In *The Other Heading*, Jacques Derrida considers Europe as heading, as the “advanced point...from which or in view of which everything takes place.”³ Derrida takes Europe as an example of an intellectual community, whose claim to supremacy makes it not only an example among continents but the exemplary example of the continent. Michael B. Naas’s introduction to the novel explores this concept further, bringing to light the essential confusion in the way the example is written, the way it iterates the singularity of the isolated case and makes it speak for the whole. The heading violently weaves into singular experience the authority of the universal, speaking for many from one. In Derrida’s work, the heading emerges as a fundamental logic in writing Western literature, as the decision for an author in finding his bearings, charting his course, and guiding his vessel to its destination, its *eschaton*.⁴ The possibility of changing headings, of heading for more distant shores, or of returning to familiar faces, becomes the task of each successive author. The author, tasked with finding his own heading, digs out of history the filiation of belonging, of an origin; he thereby crafts for himself a structure of meaning and truth. The heading delineates *telos*,⁵ beginning, and end, sketching a literary history, or prehistory, of false starts and momentary truths. This heading comes to inhabit each text and each moment of writing, an inescapable reference point for interpretation. This structure necessarily divides those belonging to the heading from those who do not belong, a division stemming from the colonial nature of language and inclusion. In texts like “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida explores the instability that dwells in the circle of heading-history-belonging; this instability provides the motive force for the ever-changing succession of headings. The results of this continual succession of headings litter intellectual history, some standing firm, while others

³ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault, Michael B. Naas (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), page 24-25.

⁴ The *eschaton*, from the Greek, refers to the end of time, or the climax of history. This terminology has been borrowed from Derrida.

⁵ The *telos* refers to the end-point of a predetermined process.

pass away like ghosts: Platonism, Marxism, liberalism, each of which takes the example as proof of its truth. The search for the language of the self, of singularity, fails, lastingly, as the heading swallows up the possibility of a text written for itself; this impossibility generates a sense of dislocation with which Derrida struggles throughout his work. The emergence of a new heading, another heading, one that escapes the possibility of both possession and dispossession, becomes the dreamed-of writing for Derrida and other writers.

Exemplarity, as a rhetorical device, means taking one thing, a writer, for instance, and finding in this writer the characteristics of a whole whose vast and varied manifestations exceed the writer alone. The example becomes a means of recognition and identification, a clause of belonging and hierarchy, which has been reproduced throughout language, spawning the etymological family example-exemplify-exemplar-exemplary. The connotations of the last two words indicate the logic of the example: the exemplar may be a typical instance of a wider phenomenon, but the exemplary is that which is worthy of imitation, or perhaps the ideal instance of the wider phenomenon. Hence, as Derrida points out, the example is never a mere example, but bears the “possibility of inscribing the universal in the proper body of a singularity, of an idiom or culture...”⁶ As a rhetorical device, the mere mentioning of examples becomes proof of a wider occurrence, the “undistinguished sample [becoming]...a teleological model.”⁷ The heading, as grand act of interpretation, wraps itself up in the idea of the example, allowing its author to propose this universalized formation of thought. This essay mimics Derrida in approaching the example as an always problematic, reductive gesture, always considering it from a skeptical angle, and recognizing the example as a key process through which argumentation arises.

⁶Derrida, *The Other Heading*, page xxvii, from Naas’s introduction, quoting Derrida.

⁷ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, page xvii, where Naas quotes Derrida.

Changing the heading means changing how one appropriates of the example. For example, the ostensible topic of Derrida's book, Europe – which he finds at a moment of reunification following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, a crossroads where Europe might return to an affirmation of its spiritual heading of Enlightenment, or it might change course and depart from the program of the past. Europe, as *cap*, headland, the “appendix to the Eurasian continent,” here embodies the “heading for world civilization or world culture in general...the advanced point of exemplarity.”⁸ As Derrida points out, Europe here is no mere example of their Enlightenment and civilization, but the object itself, the universal model meant to guide others, their own heading: Europe here has passed from its own specificity to become a universal purpose. This movement from the singular to the exemplar, from a state of existing atypically, without wider associations, to a state of demonstration of and belonging to the heading, complicates each act of writing. The example and the heading are embedded in Western thought, above all in writing, which through its preservation of the work of past authors, provides the clearest field of exchange and departure from the heading for the author. This essay will examine the heading as a literary act, present at the moment of inscription for each author.

For example, writing Europe. In *The Other Heading* Derrida interrogates how Europe has been written as an intellectual project, through the works of Valéry owing to his clear formulation of Europe as a civilizational, Mediterranean community unified by a shared literary inheritance.⁹ Valéry worked under the heading of Europe, which allowed him to speak of the crisis of Europe, Europe in one word, putting aside all its heterogeneities. For Derrida, the talk of Europe's reunification necessarily recalls previous examples of literature on a unified Europe – for instance, Kant. From a certain point of view, the history of the idea of Europe can be traced

⁸ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, page 21, quoting Valéry, then page 24-25.

⁹ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, page 35.

back generations. This historicizing expression necessarily means an assimilation of diverse writers to the same subject, giving them a sense of unanimity, when this assimilation also risks a violence done to the memory of these writers and their work. Derrida highlights how even the colloquium at which he delivered this address has been overdetermined by a European model of thinking, writing, and discussing:

“...present here at this table are mostly men and citizens of Western Europe, writers or philosophers according to the classic model of the European intellectual: a guardian held responsible for memory and culture, a citizen entrusted with a sort of spiritual mission to Europe.”¹⁰

The heading of Europe has elaborated this particular model for academics, citizenship, and culture; its effects go beyond the realm of the literary. Europe, an idea ostensibly born through writing and communication, has succeeded in ordering what it means to write about Europe, as a European, or even to pursue a politics of Europe, a European economics, and so on.¹¹ European writers, even Derrida, whose relation to Europe is quite complicated, cannot escape the European heading as it has been replicated throughout literary life; they belong to Europe, and if they wish to change the course of Europe, they must start from where it has been left. Europe becomes for these writers an origin, inscribed in their history and language – which is always a language and history of Europe.

The heading institutes this structure of origin and history, one which always remains specific to a certain point of view, a certain purpose, and a certain category of belonging. Europe is far from the only heading; it is an outlook reproduced continually by each consecutive writer,

¹⁰ Derrida, *The Other Heading*, page 22-23.

¹¹ For a parallel discussion about the birth of the idea of name-places, in this case the Greater Rhineland and its bifurcation along the Franco-German border, refer to Michael Loriaux, *European Union and the Deconstruction of the Rhineland Frontier* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Loriaux's methodology is to bring to light the *coups de force*, decisive literary texts, which shaped how the Rhineland came to be divided despite its central importance in European political economy.

who, negotiating with the headings with which they grew up, necessarily embark on their own headings, crafting a history and origin more or less similar to their precursor's in pursuit of self-definition. Many modernist artists did a particularly self-conscious exposition of the heading, writing manifestos and engaging in spirited discussion over the course of art. Breton, whose work will be considered later, offers a prime example of the heading in Surrealism, just as Valéry belongs, however uneasily, to the heading of Symbolism. The author belongs to the heading, the heading to the author, a haunting relationship which plays a central role at the moment of writing's creation – including Derrida's writing.

Derrida's project in *The Other Heading* is no simple dialectical response to the problem of the example, denying it as a legitimate means of analysis. It is rather a critical unveiling of the example, pulling it out of the woodwork, and demonstrating its influence in a domain such as European unification. If Derrida only brings the issue of the example to light at this late point in his career, he has interrogated this problematic of the heading from his first efforts, above all in the project of deconstruction. Deconstructive writing, to the extent that it attempts to inhabit another text and coax out the contradictions in its premises, assumptions, and obsessions, in short its failures to remain self-same under the same heading, always necessitates an intimate knowledge of and belonging to the original text. Despite the novelty of its approach, Derrida's writing points to the rejection of the heading, to the unveiling of its failures, and to the possibility of finding another heading, one less hurtful, even if this goal remains deferred, lastingly. If in its acknowledgment of the impossibility of an ameliorated heading it diverges from the normal teleology of the heading, still deconstruction remains at base a heading.

In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida extends deconstruction to the acquisition of language in its essential coloniality. A reading of this text will bring to light the purpose of

writing as a truth-telling endeavor, how this feeds into the belongingness of the heading, and how the heading might generate its own insecurity, or indeed a state of dispossession which conditions the break with the heading. Derrida approaches this text formally as autobiography, specifically his own encounter with national French culture from the abjected position of an Algerian Jew. Already the problem of exemplarity comes into play: autobiography implies that one can achieve a certain control and judgment over the self, and isolate within one's experiences that which could be offered as testament to the other, enriching them with whatever exemplary lessons one has derived from life. Early on Derrida draws attention to the problematic form of autobiography, which is essentially one of testament for others, speaking from the self for others, "more vividly" and better than the other, with "a language whose generality takes on a value that is in some way structural, universal, transcendental, or ontological..."¹² Derrida casts doubt on the possibility of speaking for others in this manner, or more specifically, of speaking for the singularity of the other's life. Nonetheless, he recognizes that writing cannot escape its value as testament, that writing necessarily speaks for others, that writing will be taken as a communication testifying to a condition shared by others, and hence it risks quieting other voices.

Certainly the heading reproduces this logic throughout its writings; writing under the heading also means writing under the heading of the other, writing in their place, saying "it suffices to hear me; I am the universal hostage."¹³ Still, this act of substitution of one voice for others' demands an amount of belief in the testament of writing, one that Derrida maintains "lies beyond the limits of proof, indication, certified acknowledgement, and knowledge," indeed, in

¹² Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 20.

¹³ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 20.

the realm of the “merely credible.”¹⁴ For Derrida, any attempt to speak in summary for the other remains fantastic, unbelievable, precisely because he recognizes the possibility of their own peculiarity, of a dramatic difference between his own life and that of others. Therefore, testifying for the experience of the other remains outside the realms of logic, strictly impossible except as belief. On the other hand, receiving the testament of the other, taking this leap of faith required to listen to the other, constitutes an ethical demand without which communication with the other could not happen. Through the structure of language elaborated above, one dependent entirely on faith, the heading draws its sustenance. The heading survives on faith in its authority, especially when it becomes institutionalized as authority, for example, as education in French language and culture was for Derrida. Hidden in this exchange with the other through testament lies the possibility of dispossession and of the violence and extortion in culture.

Derrida comes back to this double possibility in language, of possession and dispossession, of mastery of language or mastery by language, that is, the effect of its interdiction, through his book, notably in the epigraph of this paper. For Derrida, the formation of his identity was dramatically marked by what he called the “double interdict” of Jewish Maghrebians who, despite their French language (indeed, Derrida describes his ferocious discrimination for a “pure” French accent¹⁵) could not consider themselves French, nor did they have access to Arabic, the language of Algeria’s majority.¹⁶ The epigraph from Derrida above describes his experience of painful naturalization to the French language, a penetration as of the flesh by darts, as well as a mastery of the language which allows a certain thirst for revenge (“love by setting on fire, burn, perhaps destroy”) that might be mistaken for a desire to

¹⁴ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 20.

¹⁵ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 49.

¹⁶ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 31.

ameliorate it, (“transform, prune, cut, forge”) to make it his own, and to nurture it as his dwelling. This commerce with language, with or without double interdict, remains fundamentally colonial, as much a promise for belonging as a threat of self-destruction, made by the language which for Derrida becomes his dwelling, his very ipseity, his “inexhaustible solipsism.”¹⁷ The formation of selfhood through language gives the possibility of a great violence, especially in cases such as Derrida’s where his language, French, was imposed by a foreign colonizer whose culture he could not fully claim as his own. The heading, in all its manifestations, takes on this structure of language which promises belonging while menacing the stability of belonging, a threat as much as a gift.

As much as the heading offers this belonging, it equally offers the possibility of breaking with it. In the case of a heading such as French national culture, this break means the search for another language, one without the asymmetric structure of language which exists “always for the other, from the other, kept by the other.”¹⁸ While speaking the national language means mutual intelligibility, it means speaking the language of others, one which is necessarily general, because each word testifies to a meaning hosted by the collectivity of the language. The idiom, a language for the self, from the self, and kept by the self, promises to capture the irreducible singularity of the self, a language without the threat of exappropriation embedded in generalized language. The new heading wishes to capture this language, to depart from the bearings of an older, destructive heading, in search of an idiom and self-possession outside of the language of the other. To get beyond the alienation in colonial language, while remaining faithful to the value of testament in communication, Derrida urges the writer to “invent in your language if you can or want to hear mine,” despite the impossibility of creating a language of one’s own in this

¹⁷ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 1-2.

¹⁸ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 40.

capacity.¹⁹ Language will always bear with it this duality of promise-threat - the heading too – but to Derrida, the ethical obligation to speak truthfully of one’s own singularity to the other remains obligatory, an unattainable ideal that one cannot refuse.

Unstable Histories: The First Heading

Now, with some knowledge of the exemplarity of the heading, the contours of its belonging, and the violent response that can accompany it, this essay will consider the relation of the heading to history. As surely as the heading determines a course and purpose of the literary journey, it also determines a history of belonging stretching back into the past, a provenance peopled with the forbearers of its *telos*. In order to reassure the author of its stability and counteract the tendency to break headings, this historicizing gesture always points back to this origin, however illusory, which provides an anchor for its structure. Platonism folds into much of Western literature, making it the founding step in what could be called the history of the heading: the genealogical account woven for the purpose of the heading, which engages the past, lastingly. The way his work negotiates with the past and with its others has been reproduced in each heading to this day – as well as in the anxieties which force writers to change headings, lastingly. When Derrida identifies the “philosophers according to the classic model of the European intellectual... responsible for memory and culture,”²⁰ he calls attention to a model of philosophizing that not only claims descent from Plato, but operates in defense of the heading called “Platonism.” Derrida cannot disclude himself from this philosophy haunted by Platonism

¹⁹ Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 57.

²⁰ For reference, page 5 of this essay.

and Plato; hence in “Plato’s Pharmacy” his work engages not only Plato’s work for itself but the heading of Platonism as such.²¹

Derrida already puts the question of exemplarity into play in his discussion of the ongoing interpretation of Platonism. Since Plato plays such a key role in the definition of philosophy, issues of interpretation magnify in importance, above all for those writing under the heading of Platonism. Derrida starts his text with a reading of the *Phaedrus*. He points out that among scholars on Plato as diverse as Diogenes Laertius to Schleiermacher, the *Phaedrus* stands out for its uniquely weak argumentation.²² Their twin accusations: that the *Phaedrus* was a “first attempt,” and hence juvenile; and, corroborating the first accusation, that “an aging writer would never have condemned writing as Plato does in the *Phaedrus*.”²³ At stake in this discussion is precisely how exemplary the *Phaedrus* is as a Platonic text. Either the *Phaedrus* can be put aside, as Schleiermacher does, in pursuit of a purer, clarified vision of Plato’s work; or the *Phaedrus* can be taken seriously, risking, if his commentators are to be believed, the integrity of Plato’s oeuvre. In Derrida’s simple exposition of scholarship, he opens up a world of questions relating to how writers might formulate the heading, here Platonism, from the substance of the text.

The problem here is the possibility of self-difference under one name, one author. Namely, that many texts authored, under the name of Plato, might have been composed while he was more or less self-possessed, or might speak more or less to the essential thought of Plato, his language and direction, or might be more or less truly his. A clear and direct lineage from Plato through, for instance, Plotinus, Augustine, and so on, up to the modern day, serves the heading of Platonism. The continuity of path and thought is crucial for the heading; this continuity is taken

²¹ Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” from *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), page 65-167.

²² Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 66-67.

²³ Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 66.

as if on faith, even in the cases where this history is most threatened. Faith sustains the heading, putting the *Phaedrus* up for exclusion. In the case of Platonism tracing this history seems facile because his problematic has ingrained itself in our culture and language. In the case of other headings – Breton’s surrealism, Benjamin’s historical materialism – the history of the heading struggles for its own propriety, digging out of the works of others a pre-history. The non-integrity of Plato’s work, on view in the *Phaedrus*, demands that Platonism be recognized as if from his own time, apart from the fatality of how we experience it.

Derrida’s selection of the *Phaedrus* for an extended reading, then, shows his attention to the heterogeneity of Plato’s own work. The rigorous exclusion of the *Phaedrus* intrigues Derrida, drawing him to the prospect that the “trial of writing,” what supposedly weakens Plato’s text, “is rigorously called for from one end of the *Phaedrus* to the other,”²⁴ and indeed the entirety of Plato’s oeuvre. Derrida’s logic might be encapsulated in taking the principle of testimony in Plato to its limit, considering the *Phaedrus* not as a juvenile misfire but as typical of Plato, or even an exemplary work of his. Derrida simply disregards the arguments against including *Phaedrus* in the canon, affecting credulity for the *telos* of Platonism, that is, the life of Plato in all its literary force and propriety. Mirroring that unifying principle of Platonism, if in awkward complicity with exemplarity, Derrida’s project in “Pharmacy” is to take Plato’s work as systematic, therefore systematically susceptible to the critique of Plato’s essential binary oppositions. Derrida works under the heading of Platonism, or even as an exemplary case of Platonist thought.

If Plato can be considered truly sufficient in the exploration of philosophy, if he was a truly exemplary philosopher, there remains the question of why his work did not have more of a

²⁴ Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 68.

definitive quality to it, why, indeed, it engendered such a prodigious history of writers. Derrida puns on this conundrum at the opening of “Pharmacy,” asking the reader to “bear with us...If we extend ourselves by force of play.”²⁵ However decisive Plato’s philosophy, his own actions spurred others to engage in philosophy, to follow his heading, and extend Plato’s ideas further, feeling out the correct direction, the proper response to Plato’s work – as if by play along philosophy’s borders with its others, with its closest cousins who nevertheless pose a threat to philosophy’s genealogy. The importance of this genealogy comes through decisively at the moment when Plato marks off philosophy from its closest other, sophistic.²⁶ The heading becomes most clear in its distinction from the other, in its drawing battle lines between the realm of the proper, the good, the present, and the improper, the bad, and the deferred. By dividing the heading off from other possibilities, in defining it strictly, it becomes most truly graspable. The heading needs battle lines. And the most exemplary battle line in “Pharmacy” is the opposition between philosophy and sophistic, whose uneasy frontier becomes a constitutional barrier.

Derrida discovers that along this frontier the necessity to change headings becomes most logical. Plato condemns sophistry essentially for its false claim to knowledge or truth, a pitfall associated, according to Derrida, with writing: “The sophist thus sells signs and insignia of science: not memory itself (*mnēmē*), only monuments (*hypomnētata*), inventories, archives, citations, copies, accounts, tales, lists, notes, duplicates, chronicles, genealogies, references.”²⁷ The sophist, who proudly displays his ability to recite figures, relies on the crutch of writing – the means of recording, which the philosopher ought to distrust since they could have errors, distortions, mistranslations, or falsifications. Insofar as the sophist merely repeats what he has

²⁵ Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 65.

²⁶ See Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 105-106.

²⁷ Plato’s Pharmacy 107.

read, drawing on a reserve of unverifiable documents, sophistics sums up to a repetition of a repetition. In contrast, philosophy claims to truth precisely in its mastery of the *eidos*, the concept or idea, in the plenitude of knowledge earned through critical examination and reason. Still, just as in sophism, this thinking of *eidos* can only occur through repetition: “the truth of being...discovers in the *eidos* that which can be repeated, being the same, the clear, the stable, the identifiable in its equality with itself” while simultaneously, “repetition is the very movement of non-truth: the presence of what is gets lost, disperse itself, multiplies itself through mimemes, icons, phantasms, simulacra, etc.”²⁸ Repetition becomes at once a dangerous recourse for the philosopher and a necessity, an instability in the text that needs continual care. Repetition, for instance, of Plato, who, for all his successes, still needs refining, careful attention in commentary, and the proper coaxing of his intellectual heritage: in other words, a negotiation with the failures of his heading, its instability, with a view toward its future.²⁹

The distinction between sophistics and Philosophy, fails, but no doubt with serious repercussions. This marking-off becomes an essential structure of the heading, first in the battle-lines constructed between one strand of thought and another, and second in its assigning the value of truth and falsehood to one heading rather than the other. Sophistics is the other heading, here denigrated for failing to arrive at knowledge via legitimate means, such as writing – the same problem faced by philosophy, which has endured millennia by dint of its own prolific writers, the exemplary attention to its heading. However closely related sophistics and philosophy are historically, the Platonic heading has arrived at judging the latter as the truly exemplary form of thought, a privileging without which the heading would break down. This

²⁸ Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 168.

²⁹ Consider Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 168: “the disappearance of the good-father-capital-sun is thus the precondition of discourse...” The disappearance of Plato, then, becomes the precondition of a certain discourse on his own philosophy.

internal contradiction within the “system” of Platonism³⁰ becomes the very praxis of the heading of Platonism – or of perfecting it, refining it, coaxing it into a state of internal harmony, all while committed to Platonism, or at least its spirit. The Platonist heading continues, lastingly, first of all because of the faith that it has been invested with – its own privileging as tradition, as institutionalized thought, as a beacon of focused thought.

Contradictions remain in Plato’s own prolific contribution to writing despite his bitter condemnations of writing itself. Plato wrote systematically³¹ about the fundamental weaknesses of writing, comparing it to poison, parricide, drugs, concluding that it is “incapable of engendering anything, of picking itself up, of regenerating itself.”³² Writing spreads, like water, contaminates, and germinates, sprouting as sperm into unheard of structures³³ (of which Derrida’s “eccentric misreading”³⁴ of Plato certainly qualifies). This mistrust becomes increasingly ironic as Plato’s work grows to encompass the Western philosophical tradition as such; more than anyone else, his writings have transformed the heading of Western thought. Here Plato becomes an exemplary case of logophobia, of what unintended consequences might follow some good-natured writing, even as he becomes an exemplary case of writing as such. Plato writes despite himself, hypocritically devoted to writing. This (de-) privileging of writing both as means of expression and as dangerous supplement to reason threatens the purity of Plato’s thought, its privileging as representative of what Derrida calls the good-father-capital-

³⁰ On the subject of systematizing thought, Derrida early employs the metaphor of a “sumplokē” [interweaving] of Plato’s work which, paired with the “hypothesis of a rigorous, sure, and subtle form” simply unties itself. Derrida’s reading of Plato aims to capture the fabric of Plato’s argument and attack it at this locus of systematicity. Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 67.

³¹ A theme Derrida recapitulates several times throughout *Pharmacy*, ex: pg. 158: “This “contradiction,” which is nothing other than the relation-to-self of diction as it opposes itself to scription, as it chases itself (away) in hunting down what is properly its *trap*- this contradiction is not contingent.”

³² Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 152.

³³ Derrida discusses the comparison of writing and water in Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 151-2.

³⁴ John Searle notably denigrated Derrida’s approach to classical philosophy, such as Plato, here: “An Exchange on Deconstruction” by Louis H. Mackey, *New York Review of Books Online*. 2 February, 1984. Accessed 12 December, 2012. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1984/feb/02/an-exchange-on-deconstruction/>

sun.³⁵ The call to maintain Plato's purity, to reform his thought in more productive ways, becomes one of the central problems in philosophy, sustained by faith in the legitimacy of the Platonic testament, that is, the truth to which Plato testifies that remains "merely credible,"³⁶ and yet remains an object of faith for the heading of Platonism, obsessed with the enduring value of the spirit of Plato's thought, whatever its pitfalls.

This faith crops up throughout the interpretation of Plato's work; faith, for instance, in an incomplete translation:

...the regular, ordered polysemy [of the word *pharmakon*]...has, through skewing indetermination, or overdetermination...[been rendered] by "remedy," "recipe," "poison," "drug," "philter"... the malleable unity of this concept...has been dispersed, masked, obliterated, and rendered almost unreadable...³⁷

Derrida points out that the *pharmakon*, here synonymous with the effects of writing, has been systematically mistranslated, even after centuries of Classical scholarship. He demonstrates a blindness in classicism, despite the academic commitment to reason, visible in the reduction of the polysemy of this term without any reason save its own tradition. Or perhaps this reductive translation is already at work in Plato himself: Derrida claims that "the choice of only one of these renditions [of *pharmakon*'s translation] by the translator has as its first effect the neutralization of the citational play...[later:] this blockage of the passage among opposing values³⁸ is itself already an effect of "Platonism"..."³⁹ Again faith in Plato's work, in its legitimacy as an unproblematic origin for philosophy, self-same in its clarity and economy of thought, sustains this blindness and, critically, allows for the discrete distinction of philosophy from its other. On display here is one of the logics of the Platonic heading: its obstinate devotion

³⁵ Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 168.

³⁶ Recall the discussion of the testament and exemplarity on pages 7 and 8 of this essay.

³⁷ Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 71-72.

³⁸ A blockage, for instance, between philosophy and sophistics.

³⁹ "Pharmacy" 98

to a privileged interpretation of Platonism which licenses its own systematicity, despite its failures, contradictions, and the real possibility of its confusion or self-difference.

So far, this discussion of Derrida and Plato has sought to examine how Plato's has instituted the very problematic of the heading through his characteristic gestures: the inscription of the example, the writing of a philosophy, its demarcation from its others, the tracing of a history, and its own self-difference which obliges its continual renegotiation. To finish this involved effort at unraveling Plato, Derrida plays along another division – this time between literature and philosophy – by finishing his text with an evocative illustration of his reading of Plato.⁴⁰ At worst this scene might be characterized as obscurantist, a sophism following Derrida's admittedly heterodox reading of Plato. On the other hand, this dialogue might be rigorously called for" from one end of "Pharmacy" to the other, that is, a final transgression in capping off a work of philosophy with literature, or even myth.⁴¹ This illustration acts as an expression of Derrida's wider project in this text; it teases out the anxieties in Plato that have caused it to be replicated, setting the succession of headings in motion, this lineage of Platonism that that has defined literary history to the modern day.

The story starts with Plato's "retiring" out of the sun, trying to "distinguish between two repetitions...the good from the bad, the true from the false."⁴² In this statement is a curt summary of Plato's project as delineated in "Pharmacy"; his search to determine what is right and wrong,

⁴⁰ Pollock's concept of "performative writing" offers another means of considering this piece; she proposes a writing that acts out its own content, its meaning, for the sake of escaping from the dangers of classical writing. Della Pollock, "Performing Writing," in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York U, 1998).

⁴¹ The opposition myth/philosophy is examined in depth in "Pharmacy": see chapter 3, from page 86. For the sake of brevity, the same necessity of distinction between sophistic and philosophy structure the distinction between myth and philosophy, as well as literature and philosophy.

⁴² Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 169.

proper and improper, in a sense the binary oppositions which govern philosophy. The first sustained paragraph is key:

“Plato mutters as he transcribes the play of formulas. In the enclosed space...the reverberations of the monologue are immeasurably amplified. The walled-in voice strikes against the rafters, the words come apart, bits and pieces of sentences are separated, disarticulated parts begin to circulate through the corridors...[and] contradict each other, make trouble, tell on each other, come back like answers...Full of meaning...An entire history. All of philosophy.”⁴³

Here the enclosed space of the pharmacy, closed off from the outside, gives rise to reverberations, repetitions and distortions of Plato’s pharmacy. Derrida indicates first of all that the violent act of closing off philosophy as its own discursive arena submits it to something like the echoing effect described in the above passage. Instead of allowing a unity of thought, of distinguishing between good and bad repetition, Plato’s mutterings proliferate, polluting their own coherency as they repeat, taking on a life of their own. Derrida uses this metaphor of the echoing pharmacy for several rhetorical ends. First, the echoes refuse to quiet, to find their end or indeed any finality, and extend in play seemingly without purpose, beyond Plato’s own cognition. Rather than submit to a final inquiry into given philosophical topics, fulfilling their *telos* as the byproducts of this inquiry, the echoes repeat, and in fact transform, disseminating beyond Plato’s intentions. This transformation underlines how apart from Plato his own works have grown, indeed from any one person. These echoes can be interpreted as the descendants of Plato’s thought, those headings he generated; those who have taken up his work, extended themselves as if by “force of play” ceaselessly into the future, obeying no discrete principle of filiation from Plato’s founding works. To work under this shared history, within the pharmacy, guarantees a certain unity of thought and problematic, one which is inhabited by Plato, which cannot be extricated from his first motions as writer and philosopher – although the environment

⁴³ “Pharmacy” pg. 169

of the pharmacy, besieged by obfuscation and non-meaning, contradicts the proscription of an orderly history and progression of thought. The pharmacy scene describes precisely the problem of the creation heading, its creation of a history, its failures, and its demarcation from its other.

From this discussion of the “first” heading⁴⁴, Derrida has accounted for the ways in which the heading of Platonism spawned the field of possibilities for Western writing as such, under the heading – navigation, demarcation and embarkation, historicization through origin and *eschaton*, repetition and new bearings. Embedded in the heading as elaborated by Plato has been an essentially distrustful take on the generative possibilities of the future, and the ways in which the heading will be altered, distorted, and magnified through the process of lineage and inheritance by further generations – and precisely because it will never be closed, nor achieve its own completion. Contrariwise, from the point of view of those inheriting the heading, the twin possibilities of expropriation and mediocrity present themselves. Either the inheritors of the heading risk their own alienation from the heading, or they confront what is essentially impossible to repeat: the great literature of the past, in all its authority and respect. The writer cannot escape from a certain repetition of the heading, and from the impossibility of repeating it in all its prestige.

Breaking from the Heading

At this late point in history, thousands of years after Plato, the possibility of entirely new routes open up: living not in the shadow of the heading, but as if in a lucid dream, constantly flummoxed by the absurdity and radical opportunities of a disordered world that engenders

⁴⁴ For instance, the comparison of the state to a ship and the king to a captain, first mounted by Plato. This becomes the inspiration for Derrida to entitle *The Other Heading* as such, following some “brief, quasi-improvised reflections” on board a plane, with the language of navigation in mind. See Derrida, *The Other Heading*, page 13, and Naas’s discussion on page xlv of this book. This metaphor becomes the basis of the metaphor of the heading, and, of course, of this paper, too.

radical breaks from the heading. Breton remains acutely aware of the failure of the repetition of the heading, setting out on a different course that valorizes the surreal and absurd. As much as in Derrida's description of the monolingualism of the other, Breton's Surrealism responds to a colonial language, attempting to find an idiom through the means of another sort of testifying, truth, and meaning. Moreover, Breton's work pays as much attention to the familiar search for a history, purpose, and future, as to the pain, confusion, and breakdown of the heading.

Where Derrida's Plato might represent the idealized origin of philosophical thought, the exemplary moment of authorship, by the standards of the twentieth century André Breton might be taken as a typical modernist artist. Surrealism, the heading Breton defined, adopts many of the literary gestures involved in typical artist movements, what Tzara sardonically exposits as wanting "A.B. & C., and fulminat[ing] against 1, 2, & 3...[you must] sign, shout, swear...and maintain that novelty resembles life in the same way as the latest apparition of a harlot proves the essence of God."⁴⁵ From the point of view exemplified by Tzara's quote, the act of writing a manifesto in the age of manifestos already comes off as overeager and passé, above all because the claim on novelty and truth in each manifesto has been repeated without end. Indeed, the manifesto constitutes in perhaps its most basic form the setting-forth on a new heading, implying at a minimum the writer's confidence in their capacity to break with the past. The manifesto declares a new direction, a new possibility for truth, but in an inherently serialized form; no doubt here is one aspect of Plato's disavowal of writing's repetition in writing in the vulgarization of truth. From this repetition any claim on truth rings vain, the vanity of pronouncing with all available flourish the legitimacy of one's own ideas and viewpoints in a

⁴⁵ Tristan Tzara, "DADA Manifesto" (Mann-O'Donnell PPCT course reader 2012), page 1. This non-conventional take on theology might, in fact, intrigue Breton. In addition, in this comparison, Tzara highlights the claims on exemplarity proffered by manifestos, which take on an increasingly unlikely value (i.e. the harlot-God comparison).

public manifesto – and in an intonation borrowed from one’s forbearers. More puzzling is the tendency on the part of authors like Breton to try to phrase what may be personal experiences, for which the author can be reasonably accountable, as global phenomenon, or even as a wondrous social remedy. This could be called the vanity of the heading: the tendency to accord oneself the possibility of having a global solution from a strictly limited standpoint. Still, this vanity cannot be dissociated from the heading as such; each change of direction implies a change of leadership and its accompanying pomp, and Breton does the favor of meticulously spelling out the terms of his own heading, Surrealism.

In the “Surrealist Manifesto,” Breton sets out to overturn the hierarchy governing classical thinking on the waking-sleeping/conscious-unconscious hierarchy. Spurred on by ideas inherited from Freud and psychoanalysis, Breton aims to play the artistic counterpart to the scientific project of psychoanalysis.⁴⁶ He claims that the waking state, here synonymous with conscious life as it falls under our perceptions and reason, only constitutes a “phenomenon of interference”⁴⁷ of our unconscious life; the former is prone to “lose its bearings,” be assaulted by fatigue and substances, and in general find its access to reason and meaning challenged at every step. In comparison, the dreamer finds their every wish and desire fulfilled instantly, no longer plagued by the “agonizing question of possibility.”⁴⁸ The dream state lacks nothing. Breton therefore wishes to reform society, which, he claims (in a style reminiscent of Freud), under the pretense of civilization and progress, has tried to maintain however possible the division between conscious and unconscious life. Breton’s goal, his *eschaton*, that for which he wages his “war of independence,” is the resolution of this tension between dreaming and waking into a state of

⁴⁶ André Breton, “1924 Surrealist Manifesto” (Mann-O’Donnell PPCT course reader 2012), page 4.

⁴⁷ Breton, “Manifesto,” page 5.

⁴⁸ Breton, “Manifesto,” page 6.

“surreality” that unleashes the unconscious life in all its confusion and marvel, however naïve may be this endeavor.

Of note in this formulation is Breton’s recognition of the failure of conscious thought and reason without recourse to some other supplement, the same problem inherited from Plato and discussed extensively in philosophy ever since. As Derrida examines in “Pharmacy,” Plato attempted to reconcile the limits of reason with the apprehension of the outside world, hoping to maintain some continuity and order.⁴⁹ In this capacity, Breton’s departure from this debate lies in his displacement of the problem, acknowledging the failures of conscious life while stating that the solution lies elsewhere: in the unconscious.⁵⁰ Here Breton makes the self-difference of the mind a central principle of his work, proposing that not only does much escape the grasp of our consciousness, but most of our “self” exists outside our consciousness, hence art and life must be transformed to venerate the unconscious and bring it out of its repression as much as possible.⁵¹ This strict distinction laid out early on between consciousness and unconsciousness endures, allowing Breton to assert his texts’ artistic value even as he acknowledges the disjunction, the self-difference, therein— the very problem of a unity in writing that Derrida interrogated, for instance, in the case of the exemplarity of the *Phaedrus*. Breton’s heading brings to light and neutralizes the problem of self-difference that caused, for instance, scholars of Plato to ascribe the *Phaedrus* to a young, inexperienced Plato, thereby maintaining the alleged purity of his core texts. Breton’s valorization of the unconscious, moreover, still allows faith in the creative capacity in the self despite the weakness and vulnerability of the waking state. Indeed the conscious-unconscious distinction authorizes the entire Surrealist aesthetics, an aesthetics of the

⁴⁹ See Derrida, *Dissemination*, page 167.

⁵⁰ Breton, “Manifesto,” page 5.

⁵¹ See Breton, “Manifesto,” page 4.

self-different and the non-sequitur,⁵² simply because the ideal of artistic formation through school, study of the masters, and development of one's own style, in short the development of an artistic self-continuity, has been discarded.

Breton changes headings. He values the creative force of the individual in the traditional manner, but he can only resolve the frustrations in writing by allowing the construction of another binary state: waking/sleeping. He guards the spirit of Western headings, but not the example. In his effort at marking off the boundaries of Surrealism, no matter how surreal his results, he exemplifies continuity with the headings of the past in terms of their motion, their action. The creation of your own heading always means adopting the spirit of other headings – or even their history. Breton summons a range of writers as examples of Surrealist literature, exhibiting the genealogical impulse that accompanies each creation of a heading: “Swift is Surrealist in malice, Sade is Surrealist in sadism...Baudelaire is Surrealist in morality. Rimbaud is Surrealist in the way he lived, and elsewhere. Mallarmé is Surrealist when he is confiding.”⁵³ And so on. Besides the brute act of appropriation at work here, attempting to assimilate some of the brightest minds of Anglo-French literature, Breton reduces his own work to a laundry list of names and evocations without any real order. Here again is the “A, B, & C” presentation of the manifesto ridiculed by Tzara that aims to trace its own lineage out of the chaos of history. This process of listing authors, all of them male, fills the text of the Manifesto, attesting to a wide range of authors the unity of whom becomes increasingly unlikely; Breton seems bent on providing this pre-history of Surrealism, of simply filling the receptacle of his manifesto with the

⁵² Breton, “Manifesto,” page 13 provides another example of “X, Y, & Z” logic while still giving insight into what this aesthetics of Surrealism might be: “ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Philosophy*. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the distinterested play of thought.” In short, Surrealism values the results of an non-reflective collaboration of cosmic circumstances.

⁵³ Breton, “Manifesto,” page 13.

authority of a string of names. Breton does an exemplary job of taking this drive to historicizing and giving a sense of orderly filiation to the heading of Surrealism to the limits of credulity.

But if Breton repeats the historicizing gesture to set his heading, he also expresses this in an innovative fashion. “X writer is Surrealist in Y aspect,” this figure that he repeats twenty times in succession, allows some leeway; they are “not always Surrealists,” they were “instruments too full of pride...[to produce] a harmonious sound.”⁵⁴ Breton implies that these authors act as with the requisite attention to continuity and logic, as they learned from their repressive society, but their surreal qualities shone through, leaving an imprint, however fleeting, on their work. Breton gives room for each author to have their stated goal, but he insists that their truly revolutionary promise lies in their faint suggestion of Surrealism, their pointing-towards this final goal, the *eschaton* of a Surrealist world, a transformation at once political, artistic, and economic, bridging each of these divides, however tenuous they may be. From this point of view, Surrealism can be found everywhere – an example here, an example there. However nuanced Breton’s attempt at filiation, there remains an irreducible quality of reduction here, a violence in seizing the writers of the past for one’s own ends. In reading these authors principally to find evocations of Surrealism, Breton risks not taking them for their own worth, not finding the heterogeneities of chance in their work – a fear he voices besides in the opening paragraphs of his text.⁵⁵ Even if he plays at letting these quasi-ancestors of Surrealism have their own autonomy, he still inscribes in each the necessity of his Surrealist practice, his vision of the world.

⁵⁴ Breton, “Manifesto,” page 14.

⁵⁵ Breton, “Manifesto,” page 3, quoting Proust: “If in a cluster of grapes there are no two alike, why do you want me to describe this grape by the other, by all the others...? Our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable. The desire for analysis wins out over sentiments.”

The appropriation of the authority of dead authors in this unified historical vision ends up abusing them, their idiom, and their right to autonomy of thought; respecting these is the obligation for inheritance with justice and care from past generations. Each of these authors were themselves working for their own purposes, on their own headings, and Breton's assimilating them to Surrealism remains problematic. Breton, who has grown up with these authors and possessed his French culture through them, owes his literary forbearers the respect of an open reading, without his own ulterior motives. In this conundrum lies the problem of the inheritance of the heading: Breton inherits the heading of the past, the one he learned as he acculturated and became French, possessed of and possessing French. He cannot claim ownership of this heading, or this culture; but without leaving his mark on it, his own belongingness is threatened. Consequently, he attempts to possess this culture by reappropriating it under his own heading. The respect he owes the culture which has become his dwelling, and the diverse singularities that make up the literature of others, must necessarily be refused. This principle of respect for the inheritance which Derrida calls the "right of inspection,"⁵⁶ can only be an impossible ideal.

To access this claim on culture through the heading, one's own idiom, Breton develops a process for writing without the intervention of any editorial principle, called automatic writing

⁵⁶ This usage refers to Derrida's use of the term in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, translated by Jennifer Bajorek (Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), page 121, describing the relation of sight of the "specter" of dead people recorded on film (or recorded in general) to the living: "...I can't meet the gaze of the other, whereas I am in his sight. The specter is not simply this visible invisible that I can see, it is someone who watches or concerns me without any possible reciprocity, and who therefore makes the law when I am blind, blind by situation. The specter enjoys the right of absolute inspection. He is the right of inspection." This enduring presence of the dead is precisely what is at work in the haunting of the heading, in its inhabitation by the one's forbearers of the past. Insofar as the dead remain a constitutive part of our history, their spectral presence (or non-absence) becomes a moral law, the law of mourning, just as much as hospitality governs our relation to the other. To better sketch this concept of haunting in the heading would require another essay of considerable size, potentially (to speculate rather improvisationally) with a reading of *Echographies* (which at any rate would contribute much to the discussion of the social constitution of the heading) and *Specters of Marx*, and perhaps Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*.

(*écriture automatique*).⁵⁷ In the “Manifesto,” he describes his first experiments in writing automatically, first through dictation of speech uninhibited by the censors of the “critical faculties,” to achieve something “akin to spoken thought.”⁵⁸ Automatic writing therefore diverges from “normal writing,” which takes time to reflect and think over its structure, implications, and general goal, and makes use of what Breton calls the “faculty of the first draft.”⁵⁹ Breton finds himself believing “more and more in the infallibility of my thought with respect to myself,” that is, without any intervention from his conscious “me,” what Derrida might call his “ipseity.”⁶⁰ Automatic writing becomes one sustained stream of words transcribed as if in a trance, or a drugged state, a direct communication with the unconscious, without any conscious process of editing one’s own work; Either way, the captivating effect that came out in these first instances is their “extreme degree of immediate absurdity,” which Breton takes as the revolutionary capacity of the “omnipotence of dream...[and] the disinterested play of thought,”⁶¹ Surrealism itself. Even if Breton discards traditional writing’s search for organization and veracity for the non-logic, non-organization of Surrealism, what remains is a strikingly similar structure as traditional accounts of writing: the disjointed self that, through proper practice (in automatic writing), has access to a form of testament or truth. Breton prizes Surrealism for its immediacy, its presence and plenitude that usurps traditional notions of writing, although in hindsight the scientific or artistic project, formulated in such an orderly manner by Breton, remains naïve, subject to the same deferral of presence and logocentrism analyzed by Derrida.

This naïveté expresses itself clearest in Breton’s 1928 novel *Nadja*, which starts with Breton’s characteristically enthusiastic declarations of program and ends mired in the tragedy of

⁵⁷Breton, “Manifesto,” page 19.

⁵⁸Breton, “Manifesto,” page 11.

⁵⁹Breton, “Manifesto,” page 17.

⁶⁰Derrida, *Monolingualism*, page 1.

⁶¹Breton, “Manifesto,” page 13.

the collapse of the heading and the recognition of all its gravest consequences. Moreover, a continuity of artistic program bridges the gap between *Nadja* and the “Manifesto.” Breton starts off with a question whose implications guide the rest of the novel: “who am I?”⁶² He promptly responds that “everything would amount to knowing whom I ‘haunt.’” Derrida departs from historical notions of existence, preferring the Surrealist-inspired definition focusing on a more ghostly form of haunting, one that denies Breton the possibility of intuitively sensing his selfhood, but authorizes its definition in strange coincidences, deferred from the self. For example, this proof of selfhood Breton finds in the eccentricities of various authors: Hugo and his wife’s daily self-comparison to Philemon and Baucis, Flaubert’s saying his entire project in *Salammô* was to “give the impression of the color yellow,” or the light in Courbet’s paintings.⁶³ Here he finds a testament to these people in all their fleshy humanity, discovered by means of quirky factoids, the key to explain their life and work, however unlikely. At work here is the spirit of Surrealism; the possibility that, contrary to polemics of the past, even the most coincidental fact constitutes a person’s singularity, their selfhood. If *Nadja* has become the exemplar of Surrealist novels, within its opening pages it has forefronted the definition of the self as a key goal.

In an effort, then, to find his own testament, to delineate exactly whom he haunts and then, perhaps, find himself, Breton sets out writing, not with a clearly deliberated purpose and goal but to “[recall] without effort certain things which, apart from any exertions on my part, have occasionally happened to me...[discussed] without pre-established order, and according to

⁶² In the original : “Qui suis-je?” Consulted for this essay include the original French and an English translation. English copy: André Breton, *Nadja* trans. Richard Howard. (New York: Grove Press, 1960). French copy: André Breton. *Nadja*. (Saint-Amand Editions Gallimard, 1964).

⁶³ Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Howard, page 14-15.

the mood of the moment which lets whatever survives survive.”⁶⁴ In spite of this outlook on keeping organization to a minimum, Breton soon devolves into an account of his relationship with Nadja, who remains most clearly the object of Breton’s haunting. Nadja is poor, mad, and itinerant, but also the very embodiment of surrealism in all its disorganized associations and shocking juxtapositions. Breton encounters her on the street, and over the course of a few days falls into orbit around this woman – and vice versa: Nadja takes Breton, already a well-known writer in French literature by 1928, “as a god...as the sun.”⁶⁵ Breton haunts Nadja, feeding off of her spontaneity for his own Surrealist purposes, even as her mental state deteriorates. It becomes increasingly clear that Nadja is mad, and Breton’s narration seems to fall to the level of resuscitating her, recording increasingly bare accounts of Breton’s days spent with her, as well as the deeply disjointed drawings she created with his encouragement. By the end of the novel, Nadja is judged mad and institutionalized.

The book, having started with a promise for Breton’s self-definition in a new, heterogeneous way, closes with a bitter tone regarding the memory of Nadja. Breton’s fascination with this woman was cut short by the reality of her own mental illness; from this perspective, his attachment to her simply for what he saw as her Surrealist life seems increasingly juvenile or even cruel to a sick woman. If Breton had no artistic orientation, the prospect of a book written on his encounter with a mad woman, in order to justify his own artistic project, would appear grossly exploitative, considering the power relation between a middle-class writer and a poor woman. Dismissing the fact of Nadja’s sickness and her danger to herself, Breton remarks: “I still cannot see why a human being should be deprived of freedom.

⁶⁴Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Howard, page 23. In the original French, Breton uses a considerably more nuanced verb, the potential implications of which Sarah Mann-O’Donnell drew out in class: “...j’en parlerai sans ordre préétabli, et selon le caprice de l’heure qui laisse surnager ce qui surnage.” From Breton, *Nadja*, page 24.

⁶⁵Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Howard, page 111.

They shut up Sade, they shut up Nietzsche; they shut up Baudelaire.”⁶⁶ This line between art and madness, which Breton saw Nadja challenging, remains always in his mind, coming back to other exemplary men who struggled with it. Regardless of the exploitative tone of the book, Breton still shows his remorse at the loss of Nadja, intoning that “this succession of terrible or charming enigmas was to come to an end at your feet.”⁶⁷ In a sense, the loss of Nadja, her dispossession of her own language and thought, though experienced from afar by Breton, profoundly challenges his certitude in the heading, the enthusiastic declarations made in the “Manifesto,” by revealing the pain at the heart of belonging, the one which Nadja succumbed to.

In sum, *Nadja* provides an exemplary manifestation of the heading in writing, of the ways in which one’s personal experience of dispossession, madness, and radical possibility arrive inscribed in literature, ready to be reintegrated into a wider artistic milieu. Once written, Breton’s book is up for reappropriation – for example, under the headings of modernism, Surrealism, French literature, psychoanalysis, or Derridean ethics. The disturbing expressions of pain recorded in Breton’s work render the stakes of the heading more vivid still: the beauty of finding a new heading will be tempered by the knowledge that it always threatens the alienation of the other, conditioning their suffering and selfhood. If Breton embarked on the project of Surrealism hoping that his automatic writing might allow a language that escapes this structure of possession and dispossession, his efforts in *Nadja* made clear the limits in his approach, the feebleness of his heading next to the reality of madness. This failure is typical, rigidly demanded by the heading. Breton sums up the reality of the heading in his parting sentence: “Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be at all.”⁶⁸ Each heading, however ambitious, necessarily fails,

⁶⁶ Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Howard, page 141

⁶⁷ Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Howard, page 158.

⁶⁸ Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Howard, page 160. In the French there is no “at all.”

often in traumatic manners, like the pain of mental illness, or even the traumas history of the history of metaphysics. Whether the author is Plato or Breton, the formation of the heading draws the author through the process of inspiration, creation, historicization, and ultimately, the pain of its failures, calling for its resuscitation and reformulation once again. The endless succession of headings is both convulsive in its ruin of itself and its others, and beautiful in its lasting pursuit of a language of singularity.