

The Limit Experience in Modern French Poetry and Thought

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Short Abstract

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The limit experience (*l'expérience-limite* or, in Georges Bataille's formulation, *l'expérience intérieure*) is the experience of reaching a firm limit and yet transgressing it. It is thus co-implicated from the outset with an experience of limitlessness. Twentieth-century thinkers in pursuit of the limit experience, such as Maurice Blanchot, have tended to locate something of it in poetry. While critics have identified numerous limit crossings or aporias in literature more broadly, a dedicated structural analysis of poetry's own liminality has not been proposed. This thesis therefore expands the thinking of the limit experience beyond its presumed borders, bringing it into connection with close readings of poems to develop an understanding of on what grounds, if any, poetry is a privileged site for the limit experience. Using notions of experience, experiment, exemplarity, induction, and accumulation to frame its approach to the research question, this thesis offers a theoretical contribution to the study of modern French poetry, deconstruction, post-structuralism, liminality, and post-Heideggerian poetics. It clearly elucidates the figure of the limit and that of experience, drawing significantly on the thought of Jacques Derrida. It advances that the limit experiences identified by critics in the literary realm are interconnected, and that they form a differential matrix. Then, through the analysis of a corpus of poems by twentieth-century writers Jacques Dupin and Louis-René des Forêts—and incorporating an awareness of poetry's fine details, its internal patterns and forms, including doubling, metaphor, rhyme, enjambment, parallelism, hyperbaton, typography, metonymy, and chiasmus—this study suggests that the experience of poetry takes the form of a compressed, vibrating network of mobile limit experiences. The thesis's primary claim is that poetry's exemplary status within the thinking of the limit experience may derive from its experimental, multiplicitous, and differential structure. In this way, the thesis provides a literary-theoretical explanation for why poetry in particular has become a privileged site for the limit experience.

Long Abstract

This work offers a literary-theoretical contribution to the study of poetry and liminality. Inspired by the work of Georges Bataille and his notion of *expérience intérieure*, moving through Maurice Blanchot's version of the *expérience-limite*, and finally influenced by Jacques Derrida's thinking around limits and experience, the present study develops a broadly deconstructive gaze on the double-sidedness of the limit. These thinkers have tended to identify *poetry* as a significant site for the limit experience; and those working at the cross-section of twentieth-century French thought and literary studies have located a wide range of liminal structures and aporias in literature. The limit experiences identified by critics in the literary realm give rise to the implicit suggestion that these examples are all interconnected, and that they form a differential matrix—literature itself becoming a figure of figures. The thesis brings this intellectual context into connection with close readings of a corpus of poems by twentieth-century poets Jacques Dupin and Louis-René des Forêts, seeking to answer the question: on what grounds, if any, has poetry in particular come to be considered a privileged site for the limit experience?

The originality of this thesis lies largely in the following three aspects. Firstly, while critics have thoroughly addressed liminality in literature broadly speaking, a dedicated structural analysis of *poetry's* own specific mode of liminality has not been proposed. The inheritance from Martin Heidegger's poetics has encouraged those writing in his wake to omit discussion of poetry's formal features and rhetorical devices, associating them negatively with metaphysics and hermeneutics. In this scholarly field, the poetic is frequently not differentiated from literature more broadly, but instead comes to stand in, somewhat vaguely, for the concept or quintessence of the literary. By venturing into the poems' fine details, its internal structures, patterns, forms, and devices, the thesis expands the field of thinking around the limit experience and poetry and provides a blueprint for a kind of acceptable criticism. This thesis fits within the field of scholars of modern French theory who also engage with poetry at the level of structural detail: in Chapter 4, Arkady Plotnitsky, Glenn Williams Fetzer, Peter Poiana and Marian Hobson; and in Chapter 5, David Nowell Smith and Clare Connors. It pursues an argument that encompasses poetry's use of doublings, metaphor, simile, rhyme, enjambment, parallelism, polysemy, hyperbaton, typography, metonymy, chiasmus, enallage, and other figures.

Secondly, in consonance with its argument for a reinvigoration of poetry's distinctive formal features in this context, this thesis proposes a novel theory for what poetry is doing to attain this exemplary status. An argument forms around experimentation and exemplarity, a process which

occurs on two levels: 1) *I* experiment on poetry, alighting on and enumerating examples of liminality within it, performing this exemplarity in the thesis structure, which is arranged as examples of limit experiences; and 2) *poetry* experiments on life, literature, and language, finding and performing examples of liminality within *them*. Some of these are structured as poetic figures, rhetorical devices, and movements and forms. The first level is affected by my experiment design, my experimental and experiential methodology; at the second level, poetry's own experimental processes are involved. Both poetry and I elucidate examples of limit experiences, but while my focus lies on poetry's own workings, poetry explores a wider differential matrix.

Thirdly, the thesis suggests that the degree of exemplarity in prose literature and in philosophical renderings of the limit experience (including in this thesis itself) is much reduced in comparison to the experimental potential of poetry. It argues that poetry's exemplary status derives from its own heightened level of exemplary showing, its practice of accumulation and experimentation with regard to these limit experiences. This has two facets: 1) poetry compresses limit experiences with an unusual level of density; and 2) despite this compactness, poetry omits *less*; it takes in a broad field—all the literary examples listed, plus many more idiosyncratically poetic ones. On a meta-level, then, poetry's simultaneous extension and compression create a bunching or clumping effect in the space/time of relation, and this corresponds to an increased exemplarity, a greater, more acute sense of liminality.

The thesis is not an exegetical report on Blanchot's and Derrida's thought, nor a standalone piece of poetry analysis. It derives and demonstrates literary-theoretical conclusions from the limit experience and its structures and forms. This research concludes that the experience of poetry takes the form of a compressed, vibrating web of mobile limit experiences across multiple axes and directions. The present work's primary contribution is to suggest that poetry's exemplary status within the thinking of the limit experience may emerge from this multiplicitous and differential structure. In this way, the thesis provides a literary-theoretical explanation for why poetry in particular has become a privileged site for the limit experience.

List of chapters

Having disambiguated this work's approach to the limit from that of Georges Bataille in the Introduction, Chapter 1, titled 'Figures of the Limit Experience', now sets the ground by establishing the basic topology of the limit and the limit experience. The purpose of this chapter

is to build up a shared understanding of the limit structure and to construct a working mental model which will serve the reader in the coming chapters. This introductory chapter lays out the thinking clearly and ‘from first principles’. It offers a synthesis of post-structuralist ideas about liminality to elucidate what the limit experience is and where it might be found. The chapter is structured as examples, and thus begins to reveal the underlying exemplary framing of this study. Beginning with the notion of ‘limit’ itself, and the double face of the border, Chapter 1 explains the limit experience largely without reference to literature, writing, or poetry at this stage. It introduces the idea that the limit structure is an explanatory model for life derived uncertainly from experiment, but overall the approach in Chapter 1 is that of an initial sketch via examples, pitched in an abstract, geometric way.

Chapter 2, titled ‘Literature and the Limit Experience’ further elaborates the model of the limit experience, this time in relation to literature, language, writing, genre categories, and other broadly literary concerns. Again, it synthesises philosophical thinking on this theme, alongside the work of critics such as Derek Attridge, Timothy Clark, Simon Critchley, Rodolphe Gasché, Leslie Hill, John W. P. Phillips, and Nicholas Royle. The chapter introduces two ideas: firstly, that literature has been shown to be liminal in many different ways, along many different axes; and secondly, that literature has also been said to occupy a privileged position in the writing of the aporetic experience of the limit. Joining these two suggestions together produces the insight that literature may be a good example of the limit structure *because* literature acts as a ‘figure of figures’: as an umbrella term of sorts, embracing even its own non/relation to things outside literature, literature comes to stand in for liminality itself. Throughout this chapter, I urge the reader to keep an eye out for uses of the terms ‘poetry’, ‘poetic’ and ‘poetics’ by critics and thinkers in ways that reflect little about the uniqueness of poetry as a mode, instead collapsing it into literature more broadly in an unacknowledged strategic elision.

In Chapter 3 (‘Poetry and the Limit Experience’), with the groundwork now laid, the originality of the thesis’s approach is able to hit its stride. This chapter deals with three vital aspects. Firstly, it handles the argumentation in favour of using exemplarity, including experimental induction, as a critical guide. Repeated examples found by experiment produce increased confidence in a hypothesis and show evidence of a phenomenon; this chapter addresses the tendency of exemplarity towards accumulation, an accumulation that is not sought from the outset but which must be allowed to emerge from experimental processes in order to suggest provisional conclusions about the object of study. Secondly, tying this line of thought back to poetry, Chapter 3 makes the argument that, in poetry, this accumulation—perhaps unexpectedly, given its

expansiveness—takes the form of compression, density, depth, and even compactness. In poetry, we find a play of relation across multiple axes, a bunching or clumping in the very space/time of relation. Thirdly, this chapter at last broaches the question of poetic form and structure specifically. It recounts how poetic form and its rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, have been associated with interpretation and then held with suspicion by post-Heideggerian thinkers; it also supports the reincorporation of formal poetic analysis into the philosophy of the limit experience.

Following on from the logic of Chapter 3, Chapter 4, ‘Substitution and Fold’, begins to find examples of the limit experience in poems, specifically a range of modern French poems by Dupin. Through close reading, and with reference to literary-critical analyses, the work identifies a repertoire of textual means and methods that evoke and perform limit structures in poetry, most notably enjambment, doublings, ambiguity, parallelism, substitution, metonymy, repetition, and chiasmus. Chapter 4 also addresses the question of the typographical forward slash and associated imagery, and introduces the exemplary figures of the fold, textile, substitution, and *dénégation*. The examples chosen are often minimalist, paratactic, and brief in style. The quantity and consistency of the examples provided demonstrates the presence of a concertina of limit experiences pleated into Dupin’s poetry.

Chapter 5, ‘Metaphor and *Jouissance*’, acts as a companion to Chapter 4, and it shares the same structure and approach. It takes the extended poem *Les Mégères de la mer* by des Forêts as its prime example. The limit experiences found within the poem are all connected through dense metaphorical matrices. In this chapter, what is highlighted is the complex proliferation of these limit experiences, their compression in a single poem, and, crucially, the oscillating movement of mobility and immobility to which they give rise. This analysis observes the *manifold*. In the liminal seaside setting of the poem, double binds lead to the affective experience of *angoisse* or anxiety. In turn, that movement propels the poem, both performatively and thematically, towards the physiological, differential vibration of *jouissance*. As embodied examples of the limit experience, *angoisse*, *jouissance*, and the very mobile tissue of the poem’s metaphoricity are shown to be structurally parallel to one another.

Introduction

L'expérience intérieure

The limit experience is the connecting thread of this thesis, whose study is primarily a theoretical one, guided by the basic principles of liminality. As such, the *historical* development of the limit experience as a concept within French thought will not be explored in detail. However, at the outset it is worthwhile for reasons of clarity to situate the present work within the intellectual tradition of the limit experience and to explain something of its inheritances and background. The notion of *expérience limite* in French derives from several intertwining strands within twentieth-century continental thought. The best-known of these is the post-Hegelian writer Georges Bataille's *expérience intérieure*, which he imagines as the experience of a subject exposed to the limit(s) of his or her own possibility. A second strand of thinking around limits, whose primary proponents for my purposes are Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida, is more greatly influenced by Heideggerian poetics and structuralist philosophy. This second strand, which might be called 'deconstructive' or loosely 'post-structuralist',¹ engages with the notion of limit experience as originally set out by Bataille, and interrogates liminality in that light, whilst pursuing it in a different—though ultimately not entirely incompatible—direction. It is not my wish to dichotomise these very closely related traditions. Rather, by way of introduction, I wish to indicate that the concerns of this thesis have tended towards the second strand of thought and to offer some reasons for this preference.

There are many thematic and structural similarities between the thinking of the limit experience as laid out in this thesis and Bataille's *expérience intérieure*. The first and most vital of these lies in the structure of the experience itself. In Bataille's characterisation, the limit experience is one of meeting, surpassing, and going beyond a limit. As Patrick ffrench states in his *After Bataille: Sacrifice, Exposure, Community*, Bataille exemplifies something of the 'commitment to

¹ Historically speaking, 'post-structuralist' is not the most obvious descriptor for Blanchot. He is commonly considered a precursor to and significant influence on the school—though some have argued for his inclusion (see Rustam Singh, 'Not This, Not That: Maurice Blanchot and Poststructuralism', *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, 8.1 [2016], 72-82). The areas of Blanchot's thinking dealt with here are those that most concern the question of structure itself, and they are observably post-structuralist in spirit. Additionally, thanks to the twist between past and future entailed by the limit structure itself, we might say that the post-structuralist gesture not only post-dates structuralism but in fact already inhabits that 'earlier' thinking.

experiences of, at and beyond the limit of the possible'.² This conjunction of 'of', 'at', and 'beyond' is significant, because this experience has at least two faces: it faces outwards and exceeds the limit by effectively escaping into a realm beyond it, whilst, at the same time, it remains facilitated by and unable quite to separate from the limit. This property of limits is essential to the present study; indeed, it is perhaps its grounding principle. The second crucial similarity, discussed in more depth below, is the assertion of the importance of poetic language in providing a medium and a site for such an experience.

This thesis also makes a number of notable departures. In Bataille's conception of the limit experience, we might say there is a projectile, excretive directionality. The propulsion towards the chaotic realm of inner experience is very strong. The limit experience takes us from *here* to *there*.³ Bataille is careful to stipulate that the limit cannot be entirely left behind, understanding that the presence of a border in any movement of transgression cannot be eliminated; indeed, doing so would risk slipping into a Hegelian dialectical inversion. The limit is a necessary stepping-stone for Bataille, but that stipulation seems to be secondary: that is, Bataille's conception of the limit is secondary to the experience that lies *beyond* the limit. There seems to be, at least in terms of emphasis, a privileging of limitlessness and transgression. Bataille's texts are said to 'give voice to the unmasterable turbulence at the heart of all writing';⁴ or to be 'the experience of existing at "the (extreme) limit of the possible"'—where that '(extreme)' reveals a great deal.⁵ This strategic emphasis on limitlessness (now figured as meaninglessness) is encapsulated by Michel Foucault's statement in 'Préface à la transgression' that 'À vrai dire l'œil révolté, chez Bataille, *ne signifie rien* dans son langage, pour la seule raison qu'il en marque la limite'.⁶ Bataille's image of the upturned eye *means nothing*, Foucault claims, even though the eye, in truth, marks the *limit* of the possibility of meaning.

² Patrick ffrench, *After Bataille: Sacrifice, Exposure, Community* (Abingdon: MHRA and Routledge, 2007), p. 4.

³ I think it is fair to say that some of the terms most associated with the work of Bataille are: absence, absurdity, affectivity, annulment, chaos, corporeality, destruction, dissolution, ecstasy, eroticism, excess, excretion, exhilaration, expenditure, expulsion, heterogeneity, immediacy, insubordination, irrationality, liberation, loss, madness, materiality, momentariness, obscenity, pain, remainder, rending, rupture, sovereignty, subversion, the sacred, sacrifice, transgression, the unknowable, unproductivity, violence.

⁴ Leslie Hill, *Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot: Writing at the Limit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 22.

⁵ Arkady Plotnitsky, 'Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot' in *Modern European Criticism and Theory: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 174.

⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Préface à la transgression' in *Dits et écrits I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 233-50 (p. 247). My emphasis.

The formulation of the limit experience proposed here in no way categorically rejects or disqualifies Bataille's perspective, but it does differ in terms of where its attention is directed. Whereas Bataille's attention is focused on the experience's degree of extremity, length, distance and extent, my formulation attends more to the *breadth* of the field of study and the *level of compression of that breadth* (the rationale for this is articulated in Chapter 3). This is a significant point of difference between the two accounts. To speak in broad strokes, in my formulation, the double face of the limit contaminates everything, so the limit experience affects a system across multiple directions and dimensions. Two relevant consequences arise from this: 1) the limit affects the entirety of the territory whose edge it bounds, rather than the threshold moment only, so the limit is present (along with the territory's outside, which also conditions the limit between them) in any moment of fluidity, explosiveness, absence of meaning, etc., and these therefore rely on their opposites *not just at the border line but throughout*; and 2) there are—must be—further limits that are interconnected with any given limit, and there is no such 'single' limit experience, because each limit has various properties and dimensions that are also split and doubled potentially *ad infinitum*; thus, one cannot fully fence off any region. One may well still wish to perform exclusions of these additional elements in the pursuit of a certain *type* of experience. However, whilst recognising that it is always necessary to perform exclusions and make decisions about emphasis—and *my exclusion of Bataille is another of these*—I suggest that, even if exclusions are acknowledged, they may harm the efficacy of a descriptive project (again, the rationale for this is expressed in Chapter 3, 'Exemplarity').

Putting Bataille's topology of the limit experience in my terms now, we might say that Bataille's limit experience chooses one primary direction and pursues it as far as it will go through a series of repeated refusals, a string of negations. (For more on how this works, see 'Neither/nor' and 'Experience of the aporia' in Chapter 1.) In *L'Expérience intérieure*, Bataille explains that, ordinarily, 'L'action introduit le connu (le fabriqué), puis l'entendement qui lui est lié rapporte, l'un après l'autre, les éléments non fabriqué, inconnus, au connu'.⁷ This process of understanding allows the subject to integrate unknown elements into what is already known through a chain of relationality. However, in the limit experience, a dramatic slippage in the opposite direction occurs: 'Mais le désir, la poésie, le rire, font incessamment glisser la vie dans le sens contraire, allant du connu à l'inconnu. L'existence à la fin décèle la tache aveugle de l'entendement et s'y absorbe aussitôt tout entière'.⁸ The movement towards the unknown (and its associated terms) is stronger, more compelling, than the movement towards the known, and in fact it ends up

⁷ Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes V* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 129.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

absorbing the movement of understanding. (Note the reference to the eye's blind spot, referenced by Foucault as a symbol for both the limit *and* the utter loss of understanding or meaning.)

This lop-sidedness is where our approaches differ in emphasis. Bataille privileges the unknown over the known and binds *only the chosen term* tightly to its own limit, a limit that it then, at least partially, absorbs.⁹ This directed meta-movement allows Bataille to pursue the extremes *of the structure itself*—the most absent absence, the most limitless limitlessness. These refusals are not absolute, because the limit technically remains both present and absent in them,¹⁰ but this remaining link back—to knowledge, subjecthood, sanity, mediation—is framed as a necessary concession, a restriction that underpins the functionality of the transgression, where the true interest lies. Poetry falls somewhat short. It must negate itself in order to avoid the Hegelian trap, but that very withdrawal is framed by Bataille as a disappointment, because such limits are originally conceived of as a stepping-stone or necessary artefact on the way to an experience of formless freedom. As Frank W. Stevenson captures:

Bataille envisions modern poesis as an explosive force, a momentary, random and directionless 'sacrifice of language,' a violent self-expenditure which accomplishes nothing, reveals nothing. [...] Yet he feels that poetry, in order to do this, cannot be a total expenditure or self-negation—which traps us within Hegelian discourse by giving us finally the 'meaning' of negation—but rather must be a negation of this negation.¹¹

Thus, as ffrench has it, poetry 'demands the impossible, the sovereign refusal of servitude and the instant, but it inevitably becomes a mediator and introduces equivocation'.¹² By contrast, in my

⁹ Blanchot performs a manoeuvre not dissimilar to this in 'La Pensée et l'exigence de discontinuité', Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 5. There, one term of an 'A/B' pair comes to stand in for the limit ('/') between the terms. Derrida performs this operation at times, too, in his thinking of the 'tout autre'. In *Apories*, Derrida makes plain the distinction between the other person and the 'tout autre': 'Et chaque fois la décision concerne le choix entre le rapport à un autre qui soit son autre (c'est-à-dire un autre opposable dans un couple) et le rapport à un tout autre non opposable, un autre qui n'est plus son autre', Jacques Derrida, *Apories Mourir—s'attendre aux 'limites de la vérité'* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), pp. 39-40. At other times, the other and the *tout autre* are strategically elided in the manner of Bataille. For an explanation of this structure in Derrida, see Thomas Helmut Bretz, "'But Who, We?": Derrida on Non-Human Others' (doctoral thesis, Loyola University Chicago, August 2016). Bretz reassures his reader: 'At first, it might seem that in this seeming tautology the *tout autre* is simply referred to twice [...] However, the *tout autre* is hinted at in this phrase precisely in the in-between' (p. 72).

¹⁰ In Bataille's own terms, knowledge persists as 'means', as cause: 'Même à l'intérieur du cercle achevé (incessant), le non-savoir est fin et le savoir moyen'. *Oeuvres complètes V: I*, p. 130.

¹¹ Frank W. Stevenson, 'Inverted Surfaces: Bataille's Pineal Eye and the Mythopoetics of Augury', *Concentric*, 29.1 (2003), 67-94 (p. 67).

¹² Patrick ffrench, 'Donner à Voir: Sacrifice and Poetry in the Work of Georges Bataille', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 42.2, 126-38 (p. 132). This disappointment is palpable in *L'Expérience intérieure*: 'Si la poésie introduit l'étrange, elle le fait par la voie du familier. Le poétique est du familier se dissolvant dans l'étrange et nous-mêmes avec lui. Il ne nous dépossède jamais de tout en tout, car les mots,

approach to poetry as limit experience, this interfolded quality in space and time in fact marks the existence of a limit. In my account, the thought experiment of the ‘both/and’, ‘neither/nor’ and ‘either/or’ discussed in Chapter 1, and the generalised, web-like structure that emerges, are what is primarily at stake in the limit experience, so Bataille’s restricted perspective seems unhelpfully limiting.¹³ In its pursuit of a distinctive ‘slice’ of reality, and its attempted rejection of much of experience, Bataille’s cluster of ideas about the limit experience and the scope of his experimentation around it lack range and broad applicability.

Inner experience, for Bataille, may produce a feeling of ‘agitation circulaire—qui ne s’épuise pas dans l’extase’.¹⁴ This affective dimension brings me to another point of coincidence between the approach developed in this thesis and Bataille’s own: both are concerned with experiences such as *angoisse*, compulsiveness, and *jouissance*. Whereas for Bataille, ecstasy involves a ‘dissolution of the self’, ‘a fall into nothingness’,¹⁵ in this thesis these experiences remain more thoroughly liminal, for they maintain a doubling, vibrational structure. In Bataille’s *Histoire de l’oeil*, the obscenity and violence end up falling so extremely in one direction, in the manner suggested above, that eventually ‘Rien de tout cela ne pouvait être réduit à la commune mesure [...] en nous laissant aveugles et, pour ainsi dire, situés très loin de ce que nous touchions, dans un monde où les gestes n’ont aucune portée’.¹⁶ On the other hand, more in consonance with my choice of emphasis, the text seems also to prize ‘une incandescence géométrique (coïncidence, entre autres, de la vie et de la mort, de l’être et du néant)’.¹⁷ Indeed, my conceptualisation of the oscillating, propulsive structure of *angoisse* and *jouissance* was informed and inspired by Bataille’s short text *L’Anus solaire*, in which the two main generating principles are said to be ‘le mouvement rotatif et le mouvement sexuel, dont la combinaison s’exprime par une locomotive composée de roues et de pistons. Ces deux mouvements se transforment l’un en l’autre réciproquement’.¹⁸ (For my discussion of *angoisse* and *jouissance* in poetry, see Chapter 5.)

les images dissoutes, sont chargés d’émotion déjà éprouvées, fixées à des objets qui les lient au connu’, Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes V: I*, p. 17.

¹³ A similar charge could be levelled at the sovereignty of the Derridian *ipse*, which strategically reasserts itself *outside* the structure of liminality, denying its own co-implication in it. The *ipse* enacts the strategic exclusion *par excellence*, since it is as exclusionary in focus as possible, including in its failure to acknowledge its own exclusions. As a result, the *ipse* is so restricted a figure as to be little use in a study of limits (see Chapter 1, ‘Ipse’).

¹⁴ Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes V: I*, p. 130.

¹⁵ Glenn W. Fetzer, ‘Dupin, Bataille and the Sense of the Sacred’ in *Literature and Spirituality*, ed. by David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 49-58 (p. 55).

¹⁶ Georges Bataille, ‘Histoire de l’oeil’ in *Oeuvres complètes I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 9-78 (p. 47). Furthermore, the sexual games are described as participating in ‘la joie de ne plus tenir compte d’aucune limite’ (p. 39).

¹⁷ Georges Bataille, ‘Histoire de l’oeil (nouvelle version)’ in *Oeuvres complètes I*, pp. 571-605 (p. 584).

¹⁸ Georges Bataille, ‘L’Anus solaire’ in *Oeuvres complètes I*, pp. 79-86 (p. 82).

For Bataille, the ‘*dépense improductive*’ associated with the limit experience manifests not only in ‘*le luxe, les deuils, les guerres, les cultes, les constructions de monuments somptuaires, les jeux, les spectacles, les arts, l’activité sexuelle perverse*’,¹⁹ but also in *poetry*. Bataille effectively locates his version of the limit experience *in* poetry, and so do the post-Heideggerians.²⁰ Another point of coincidence with the post-Heideggerians and the post-structuralists (discussed in Chapter 3) is that Bataille blurs poetry and literature, or, more precisely, considers poetry to be a special subset of the literary, without granting it much specificity beyond that.²¹ This lack of generic specificity is a key hallmark of Blanchot’s, Martin Heidegger’s, and Derrida’s engagement with poetry in the context of the limit experience, too, and by looking at detailed examples of poems the present study seeks to remedy this, restoring an interest in poetry’s own structures and forms. Again, this is an understandable strategic exclusion on the part of those thinkers, but it is one that reveals itself to be unnecessarily limiting when attempting to understand the relationship between poetry and the limit experience.

For Bataille, poetry represents the aforementioned process of radical shedding: ‘*Le terme de poésie peut être considéré comme synonyme de dépense: il signifie, en effet, de la façon la plus précise, création au moyen de la perte*’.²² In Bataille’s model, in terms of emphasis, poetry is figured primarily as an outside, a beyond. For me, poetry is not a site of transgression, nor even of extreme digression beyond a limit. That is because poetry is not a concept defined by edges, but a mode of experience expressed through writing, one which has its own duration and texture. Poetry is a figure of the limit and of liminality, and *this liminality* comes to light within poetry’s own operation and inner workings as well as at poetry’s border. So, rather than a fairly tightly scoped trajectory towards an extreme, in which the limit ‘itself’ ultimately plays a supporting role, this research emphasises the following traits of the limit experience: liminality, exemplarity, measure, balance, relationality, breadth, network, accumulation, compression, structure, doublings, experiment, emergence, vibration.

The development of these terms has been informed by my approach to a crucial initial question—*on what theoretical grounds, if any, is poetry a privileged site for the limit experience?*—and my ‘experiment design’ was informed by the structures I found in my corpus of poetry, so there is a

¹⁹ Georges Bataille, *La Part maudite, précédé de: La Notion de dépense* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 28.

²⁰ According to Hill, ‘like the informe that Bataille famously compared to a spider or spit, it [poetry] is more like an absence of category’. *Writing at the Limit*, p. 46.

²¹ ffrench acknowledges this in Bataille’s treatment of poetry, classified ‘as the essence of literature (where poetry comes to stand in for literature as such)’. ffrench, ‘Donner à Voir’, p. 132.

²² Bataille, *La Part maudite*, pp. 30-31.

back-and-forth oscillating logic of mutual co-constitution there. What has emerged is a theory that I feel makes more contact with poetry as a mode of writing than do notions of expenditure, interiority, formlessness, and eroticism. Indeed, the argument made here includes the presence of transgression, nonsense, performativity, and limitlessness in literature (see Chapter 2); but it determines that literature performs these elements most usually *alongside* their liminal counterparts, and therefore it denies them a privileged position. Thus, poetry is not just the other of meaning. Instead, *relationality* emerges as a highly *poetic* structural topology. The thesis that follows aims to develop and substantiate this theory of poetry and the limit experience, supported by the thought of Blanchot, Derrida, and others.

Approach

My indebtedness to the thought of Blanchot and Derrida has grown over the course of this study. Experience, limits, and relations are favoured terms in Blanchot's and Derrida's philosophies, and Chapter 1 leans heavily on them in its explication of these figures. Chapter 2 illuminates the pertinence of these limit figures to literature, including how Blanchot's and Derrida's work on the limit experience has developed in response to literary concerns and, reciprocally, has informed them. My study of this interconnection reveals not only that liminality appears in various guises within a literary work and at its borders, but also that both liminality and literature are positioned as meta-figures for a structure of experience. As a result, literature comes to stand as a 'figure of figures', a figure *for* liminality.²³ Within this important literary realm, thinkers of the limit experience have tended to locate that experience in poetry or the poetic, much as Bataille does. This thesis formulates a theory that not only differentiates poetry as a mode of writing in the thinking of the limit experience, but also proposes to explain poetry's prominence in this context. From Chapter 3, this research establishes that poetry is the site of a heightened exemplarity in comparison to other literary modes. To be precise, it is a gathering place for a *compressed* exemplarity, wherein examples of the limit experience find expression across multiple axes.

As mentioned with regard to Bataille's *expérience intérieure*, strategic omissions are almost inevitable when dealing with what is a potentially ubiquitous structure of relationality. However, when these biases are unduly restrictive, or when the contours and contingencies of these omissions are not acknowledged, the scope of their exemplarity is diminished. According to the notions of experience, experiment, exemplarity, induction, and accumulation developed here,

²³ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 514.

checking for examples expands our understanding of the object of study. Therefore, widening the field, not only to poetry but also to its own internal patterns and structures, serves a greater exemplarity. And poetry—thanks to its structures, form, rhetorical devices, including metaphor, as well as its more generally literary qualities, and its intertwined thematics—does seem to offer *many* examples of limit experiences. Poetry’s structural and formal features thus contribute significantly to poetry’s accumulative, exemplary role.

In terms of methodological approach, the thesis is structured as a network of interconnected examples. Through these examples, the research examines the workings and unworkings of the limit experience within poetry. It does so first theoretically, taking its bearings from readings of Blanchot, Derrida, and others; and second at the level of close reading, adopting a corpus of poems by modern French poets Jacques Dupin and Louis-René des Forêts. These examples provide the structuring impetus for this document, and they are performative as well as descriptive: each example constatively describes a feature, and that feature also applies performatively to the example, as well as to every other example in the network of exemplary limit experiences. Another exemplary property of this formal structure is that it is both separable from and inseparable from its content. It cannot be played out except via different instantiations. In keeping with the liminal temporality of the limit experience, these examples are therefore different every time, according to a split and doubled logic of ‘chaque fois une fois’.²⁴ Each term can also be internally divided in a fractal manner, shifting focus to a more micro scale, or multiplied, to bloom into a larger pattern. Emergent trends occur in the examples, producing further axes of liminal differentiation: some examples have negative emotional valences, others are ‘neutral’, and still others are associated with a sort of rhythmic wave of ambiguous pleasure (and all of these valences are indissociable as well as separate from one another).

Chapters 4 and 5 will be dedicated to worked-through examples of limit experiences in poetry, especially those germane to poetic form. My poetic corpus was chosen not from the outset but iteratively, to exemplify some of these myriad properties of the limit experience.²⁵ In Chapter 4,

²⁴ ‘Ce qui m’intéresse dans l’événement, c’est sa singularité. Cela a lieu une fois, chaque fois une fois’. Jacques Derrida, ‘Entretien: Jacques Derrida, penseur de l’événement’, *L’Humanité*, 28 January 2004, www.humanite.fr/node/299140.

²⁵ Caveat: this was in addition, of course, to strategic considerations such as space and time limitations, and a good dose of historical contingency, especially with regards my choice of these poets in the first place. See the Conclusion for a reflection on the limitations to my study. The strongest version of my argument would imply that I could have selected any poems at all for this analysis. However, it made sense to begin to develop, experiment, and stress-test what emerged in concert with poets for whom this post-Heideggerian literary-critical tradition had sympathy, and with whom they shared a historical moment, such as Dupin and des Forêts.

through poetry by Dupin, the approach is primarily to examine ‘individual’ limit experiences across a range of poems. This juxtaposition of the singularity of each example against the circumstance that they are scattered everywhere throughout Dupin’s œuvre is illustrative of the double-sided limit between the singular and the general. The miniature scale of each example contrasts with their dispersion, which gives the impression that these examples could be found anywhere, that this is a general phenomenon, potentially infinitely broad. Meanwhile, Chapter 5 heralds a reversal of these scales, since it explores only one long poem by des Forêts, but does so in some depth, picking up thematic and structural patterns that reverberate throughout the poem. This analytical procedure educes a different kind of intensity, demonstrating that multiple limit structures can be compressed tightly across just one poem, as though one could spend infinitely long finding further, deeper, layers of limits within a single text.

Chapter 1: Figures of the Limit Experience

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to establish a basic topological understanding of the figure of the limit. This chapter develops the idea that there is a limit structure, that it replicates itself inexactly across multiple instantiations, and that it can be tracked across them. The structure of the limit experience remains analogous in each context, no matter how far its content may vary. While the limit experience has all manner of important resonances, ranging from language, the literary and, of course, the poetic, to psychological and emotional experiences, the structure of the limit experience is what binds this thesis together as a common thread. This chapter deals with reflections around the limit structure in a topological, abstract, quasi-geometric, and spatio/temporal register. Later chapters will refer back to these initial sketches as an explanatory resource, guiding the reader to see the limit experience in other places. In this way, the limit as a figure of the limit experience forms the central thread of the analysis. However, as will become apparent, as a single case study, the limit is no more essential philosophically than those other figures. Indeed, part of its role is to usher in other exemplary figures. Nonetheless, as we begin to examine the figures of the limit experience, it makes sense to start with the limit itself.

Inside/outside

Conceptually speaking, the limit acts as a fireguard or division, keeping the inside inside and the outside outside. The limit closes the inside off against the outside, the surrounding space, and holds the inside together. But this limit cannot hold the inside back without also facing the outside. Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe point out that the limit is not only ‘a form of classification or a way of making and marking distinctions’, but that ‘borders [...] also imply interactions’.²⁶ A line can divide two entities from one another, but it persists as their border and line of connection. As a negotiation of difference, the boundary binds both parties to their intertwined configuration, and therefore to each other. Derrida’s words are instructive here. As in the liminal figure of the *brisure*, meaning ‘hinge’, ‘joint’ and ‘break’,²⁷

Le dehors entretient avec le dedans un rapport qui, comme toujours, n’est rien moins que de simple extériorité. Le sens du dehors a toujours été dans le dedans, prisonnier hors du dehors, et réciproquement.²⁸

²⁶ Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe, ‘Introduction’, in *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, ed. by Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), p. 2.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 96.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

The inside and the outside are not associated by a simple relation of uncompromising exteriority. The meaning of the outside is also in the inside (and therefore, in a sense, outside of itself). And the same is true reciprocally for the inside, which takes its meaning from the outside.

A space that is truly, entirely and only inside is impossible. Having no relation of inside/outside, it could not be 'inside' in any meaningful sense. What is more, it would have no topographical form. There can be no inside without outside. This problem is not isolated to the very edge or centre of the liminal dividing line: it is not simply that the limit is *touching* both the inside and the outside at once, but that the inside and the outside are reciprocally co-constitutive of one another. If we try to conceptually inscribe a space within the inside that would be entirely inside, the limit problem follows us closely behind: whenever we attempt to close off the inside, a new limit is instituted and, with it, a new relation to the outside. Thus, at *any* point within the inside, a conceptual appeal to the outside is being made. The same is true in reverse, too. It is not possible to conclusively delineate the inside from the outside by means of a rigid, strict dividing limit.

And what is the status of the limit line itself? Nicholas Royle comes up against the limit problem in his *Critical Thinkers* guide to Derrida, when trying to write a text box. 'Is the text in the box separate from the text outside the box? How is it linked? What is the border, the margin or frame?'²⁹ Royle reflects that there is always a box *in* the box and a box *outside* the box. There is a box in the box because the inside of the limit faces inside, to keep the inside in, and there is a box outside the box because the outside of the limit faces outside, to keep contact with the outside that gives it substance and frames it as a box. Royle goes on: 'A box is only a box thanks to this duplicity'.³⁰ The border is outside the work, past its outer edge, as well as inside it, part of it. This conceptual splitting and doubling divides the limit line *itself* in two, between inside and outside (see the section entitled 'Limitrophie' for more details on splitting and multiplying).

As Stephen Fox writes,

A new logic is needed, or rather a new way of thinking since traditional 'logic' is *par excellence* reliant upon neat and tidy boundaries between one class and another, in the manner of set theory and the logic of Russian Dolls, where containers are not leaky and the boundaries constituting the walls can be forgotten because it is presumed that they do what is intended, that is, in the logocentric theory of Western logic, keep the inside separate from the outside.³¹

²⁹ Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³¹ Stephen Fox, 'Viral Writing: Deconstruction, Disorganization and Ethnomethodology', *Scand. J. Mgmt.*, 12.1 (1996), 89-108 (p. 98).

This ‘new way of thinking’ avoids the binary logic of inside and outside, which yields under its own weight to an inside/outside structure, both halves of which depend on one another. Because of this limit structure, it is not obvious exactly where the line is, or which side is the inside and which is the outside.

In *De la grammatologie*, Derrida argues that an understanding of ‘la trace’ is necessary before any other opposition can be thought: ‘cette trace est l’ouverture de la première extériorité en général, l’énigmatique rapport [...] d’un dedans à un dehors: l’espacement’.³² For Derrida, this trace or spacing is an abstract instantiation of the ‘enigmatic relation’ of an inside to an outside in general, and therefore akin to the limit between inside and outside. As a form of relation, the trace also opens up the ‘first exteriority in general’, the very possibility of there being an outside. Without this, the outside could not appear.

Limit/limitlessness

This section sets out the crossing-point of limit and limitlessness and the two terms’ reciprocal co-implication. It is also the first example of where the limit structure applies analogically to something other than itself: ‘inside/outside’ and ‘limit/limitlessness’ can be mapped onto one another. Replicating itself across different contexts, the limit starts to reveal its role as a figure of structural shorthand. A similar limit structure applies to ‘limit/limitlessness’ as to ‘inside/outside’, because any border consists of ‘two mutually reinforcing faces of inclusion and exclusion and of openness and closure’.³³ From the above explanation of limits, it follows that the very notion of the containing limit cannot exist without a conceptual reliance on limitlessness and the possibility of transgression. The same goes vice versa, in which limitlessness relies on the limit for its existence. This is different from the ‘inside/outside’ co-constitution, but closely related to it. To borrow the words of Foucault, ‘La limite et la transgression se doivent l’une à l’autre la densité de leur être: inexistence d’une limite qui ne pourrait absolument pas être franchie; vanité en retour d’une transgression que ne franchirait qu’une limite d’illusion ou d’ombre’.³⁴

³² Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 103.

³³ Henk van Houtum and Stephen F. Wolfe, ‘Waiting’ in *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, p. 129.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘Préface à la transgression’, p. 237.

Since the limit is always gesturing at the outside which lies beyond it, and tacitly confessing its reliance on its opposite, the limit is, in a sense, its own undoing. It calls to its role as fireguard, rigid division, maker and marker of distinctions but it also calls to its opposite: the limitlessness that makes the limit possible. As Blanchot tells us, the limit cannot exist without being crossed: ‘il n’y aurait limite que si la limite est franchie, révélée comme infranchissable par le franchissement’.³⁵ The limit is crossable and/or uncrossable. If one marks a division, one needs to make that mark on something; if one sets the scissors to work, they need to cut into something—a something which predates the scissors. That something is limitlessness itself, which renders the limit theoretically crossable in the same breath as instituting it as a limit. If we try to imagine a truly complete blockage, this would not meaningfully be a limit. Not only would it have no relation to any outside, but furthermore it would have no relation to limitlessness, and therefore it would not be limiting *against* anything. A pure limit is a strategic and partial concept.

As Leslie Hill asserts in his *Writing at the Limit: Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot*, the work of Blanchot and others is bound up with this question of the limit. These writers take up a position

in relation both to the limit as such [...] and to the limitlessness silently evoked by the limit as a condition both of its possibility and its impossibility. [...] For if the limit requires limitlessness in order to function as what it is, so the limitlessness that is a condition of the limit effectively removes from the limit the stability that would allow it to present itself properly as what it purports to be.³⁶

The limit seems to hold us back with one hand, whilst with the other it shows us the infinite. It is therefore not the case that we can simply refigure all limits as permeable, spilling out onto a beyond, because they are also genuinely impermeable. This structure of passage *and* non-passage is an important feature. Additionally, as Johan Schimanski explains, when the border is crossed, ‘Its status as a barrier is compromised; it reveals itself as a passage. The border is both affirmed and denied’.³⁷ The crossing manoeuvre can be mental or physical. The line is affirmed as a limit, since it requires a ‘crossing’ and therefore marks a real distinction, but it cannot entirely prevent passage or keep the inside insulated against the outside. Schimanski uses the word ‘de(-)limit’, like Derrida’s ‘dé-limitation’³⁸ to describe this ambivalent denial and affirmation of the border.

³⁵ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 634.

³⁶ Hill, *Writing at the Limit*, p. 2.

³⁷ Johan Schimanski, ‘Crossing and Reading: Notes towards a Theory and a Method’, *Nordlit*, 19 (2006), 41-63 (p. 45).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45. Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 32.

Blanchot writes about an experience which has the power to render ‘compatible l’inconciliable’ and maintain ‘une distance, un intervalle et comme un vide, petit abîme infranchissable et cependant à tout instant et par distraction franchi (mais jamais aboli)’.³⁹ The topology of the limit experience shines brightly here. The interval is uncrossable but nonetheless crossed, without being abolished. It is infinitesimal as well as infinite, a void as well as a passage:

C’est ce vide—infime, infini—où, qu’on le nomme passage du signifiant au signifié, du sujet à l’objet, de la pensée au monde, du visible à l’invisible, ont lieu la conversion et le renversement—ou, plus précisément, c’est en ce vide que la contrariété des termes, deux par deux opposés, à la fois s’éprouve comme radicale différence, puisque la discontinuité empêche que ces termes (ou ces moments) ne se fassent suite, et se consume comme unité.⁴⁰

Blanchot’s comment on the ‘la contrariété des termes, deux par deux opposés’ demonstrates that the structure of the limit experience is a doubled one, proceeding in multiples of two, pairs exactly like ‘outside/inside’ and ‘limit/limitlessness’. Blanchot goes on: ‘chaque fois, discontinuité, division, unité exigent d’être pensées et portées à l’absolu’.⁴¹ ‘Limit/limitlessness’ is not a middle ground somewhere in between discontinuity and continuity, division and unity—it is the experience of both poles together. The same is true of the limit structure, in this instantiation and across others.

Iipse

The *ipse* is critical to the infrastructure of thinking that attempts to ignore and exclude the presence of the limit structure and its double face. Similar to the purely hindering and containing limit, the *ipse* (Latin for ‘self’ and ‘identical’) is a round, circular or spherical figure bounded by a firm, impenetrable limit. As Derrida explains, this figure encompasses:

la rotation ou le roulement, [...] la rondeur ou la rotundité giratoire du rond qui tourne en rond, [...] vers soi et sur soi, [...] à soi et sur soi de l’origine, qu’il s’agisse de l’auto-détermination souveraine, de l’auto-nomie du soi, de l’*ipse*, à savoir du soi-même qui se donne à lui-même sa loi, de toute auto-finalité, de l’auto-télie, du rapport à soi comme être en vue de soi, à commencer par soi à fin de soi, autant de figures et de mouvements que j’appellerai désormais, pour gagner du temps et parler vite, rondement, l’*ipséité* en général.⁴²

³⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *L’Amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 260.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 261.

⁴² Jacques Derrida, *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 30.

The topology of this round, autonomous shape is the epitome of a strategic exclusion. It functions to maintain the purity of the outside by keeping the outside out. ‘La restauration de la pureté intérieure’ depends on the institution of a ‘mythe’, the myth of the *ipse*,⁴³ which would serve to ‘remettre le dehors à sa place. Tenir le dehors dehors’.⁴⁴ The inside remains full, unadulterated and internal, meaning that the outside is kept absolutely separate from it. The identity of the *ipse* is self-same, perfectly bounded, indivisible and undifferentiated. It is ‘la plénitude inentamée, la continuité vierge de la non-coupure’.⁴⁵ According to Jane Clare Jones, the *ipse* as a figure of sovereignty bears ‘a spatial topology and a curved trajectory which arcs back, ouroborically referring the self to itself and disclaiming any relation to an-other that exists outside’.⁴⁶ The logic of the border as containment and incision from the outside is what defines the *ipse*, also conferring territorial legitimacy upon it. However, as Jones rightly notes, ‘the drawing of a border between the inside and the outside’ gives rise to the characterisation of that border as ‘Janus-faced’.⁴⁷

The border of the *ipse* must, in order to carry out its own logic, face both inwards, towards the inner circle that it is protecting and shielding, and outwards, towards the very outside from which it is attempting to secure independence and immunity. These two functions of the border—as we have explored already here—are inseparable as well as seemingly contradictory. The border has two faces, inside and outside, and a line can never be drawn between or behind them, lest the limit problem follow us closely behind. The *ipse*, therefore, both does *and* undoes itself, revealing that the inside relies on the outside by means of the very limit that was supposed to prevent that from happening. The circle cannot perfectly close upon an untouchable interiority. Instead, we are forced to adopt ‘a sort of patience concerning every assumption of what is going on in any act of “fencing-in”’.⁴⁸

The question of the absolute self-identity of objects—the existence of the *ipse*—is also the question of the proposition ‘A=A’.⁴⁹ ‘If the proposition A=A is certain then the proposition “I

⁴³ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 147.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 336.

⁴⁶ Jane Clare Jones, ‘Sovereign Invulnerability: Sexual Politics and the Ontology of Rape’ (doctoral thesis, Stony Brook University, December 2016), p. 101.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 101. See also Henk van Houtum, ‘The Janus-Border of the Monad and the Nomad’ in *Debating and Defining Borders*, ed. by Anthony Cooper and Søren Tinning (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

⁴⁸ Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ A=A cannot be formally or logically deduced, but is left sitting as an ungrounded assumption that axiomatically undergirds formal logic.

am” must also be certain’.⁵⁰ The ‘I am’, the neatly defined concept, the $A=A$, and the *ipse* all rely on this limited perspective of closure and self-identity as signified by the shape of the orb. As Derrida remarks, separating inside from outside is ‘le geste inaugural de la “logique” elle-même, du bon “sens” tel qu’il s’accorde avec l’identité à soi de ce qui est: l’étant est ce qu’il est, le dehors est dehors et le dedans dedans’.⁵¹ This logic gives rise to the first of Aristotle’s fundamental principles of thought: the law of identity, which states that everything is identical with itself. The limit experience is a violation of this law, more akin to the mathematical notion of equivalence than to strict equality. We will turn to Aristotle’s second principle—the law of non-contradiction—in the next section, entitled ‘Black/white’.

The minute that anything takes up space, its very existence exposes that thing to the outside, to everything that it is not. In Jean-Luc Nancy’s memorable expression, ‘l’Un purement un est moins que l’un: il ne peut être ni pose, ni compté. L’un proprement un est toujours plus que l’un’.⁵² Nothing can be completely absolute in the sense of having no exteriority and not being compelled to maintain contact with any exteriority at its limit. Such an absolute would be ‘an essential contradiction, since not only would it have to be separated from its outside by a limit, but this limit itself would have to be without relation to its outside, the enclosure itself would have to be enclosed’.⁵³ The limit problem is always one step ahead, because whenever one draws another enclosure to fully and finally protect the *ipse* by instituting a new limit, one creates a new outside. Likewise, iterability dooms the *ipse* by introducing variation even in the most self-same repetitions, but it also makes the *ipse* possible, securing its self-identity across those repetitions, giving meaning to its ‘I am’. The formation of the *ipse* entails a strategic denial of all exteriority and a narcissistic focus on the identity of the interiority. It is an ‘either/or’ structure that disavows its own relationality and thus stands in for the impenetrable limit and the impossible. It keeps itself to itself as much as possible, consistently re-closing the limit that would protect it from the outside, and thus repeating the gesture of ‘either/or’ *ad infinitum*. The way I am using ‘limit’ is slightly different, since the notion of the limit is already complicated by its relation with as well as its lack of relation to limitlessness. The limit exemplifies the ‘rapport sans rapport’ of the limit experience in a way that the *ipse* does not.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Sämthliche Werke, Vol. 1* (Berlin: Veit, 1845-6), p. 95, cited in Vladimir Tasic, ‘Poststructuralism and Deconstruction: A Mathematical History’, *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 8.1 (2012), p. 179.

⁵¹ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 147.

⁵² Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 60.

⁵³ Marie-Eve Morin, ‘Worlds Apart: Conversations between Jacques Derrida & Jean-Luc Nancy’, *Derrida Today*, 9.2 (2016), 157-76 (p. 163).

⁵⁴ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 68.

Black / white

If we accept that A is not absolutely identical to A, we also accept that A can be something other than A—indeed, A can be not-A. This sets about violating Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction, one of the foundations of Western thought. The logic of the *ipse* places enormous emphasis on the inside-vs.-outside distinction, presumed to be one of pure exteriority that can cleave inside from outside. What is more, the dream of a rigid inside-and-outside opposition goes on to provide the pattern for all oppositional thinking:

Pour que ces valeurs contraires (bien/mal, vrai/faux, essence/apparence, dedans/dehors, etc.) puissent s’opposer, il faut que chacun des termes soit simplement extérieur à l’autre, c’est-à-dire que l’une des oppositions (dedans/dehors) soit déjà accréditée comme la matrice de toute opposition possible.⁵⁵

This logic, along with Aristotle’s law, asserts that oppositions are absolute. A can never be not-A; it is impossible for ‘being A’ to ever mean ‘not being A’; something can *either* be A *or* not-A, never both. If $A = A$ is the logic of the *ipse*, $A \neq \neg A$ is the logic of black-and-white thinking.

In the thinking of the limit experience, by contrast, A and not-A are brought into close, intimate contact along the border line. Indeed, according to Jean-François Lyotard, ‘une pensée par oppositions [...] ne correspond pas aux modes les plus vivaces du savoir postmoderne’.⁵⁶ This allows for truth and falsity to be brought together, too. One usage of the term ‘dialetheia’ refers to a sentence which is both true and false, violating ordinary Western philosophical common sense. Aristotle criticises Heraclitus for endorsing dialetheism, as in the famous fragment B 49a: ‘We step and do not step into the same rivers; we are and we are not’. The understanding of the limit experience that I am developing here is not identical to dialetheism strictly speaking, because there true and false overlap completely, and here the argument is that true and false are inseparably connected in every instantiation of their use. ‘Is’ and ‘is not’ are not *identically* true of the same object (as we shall see in the next section, on ‘Fluidity’), but they co-exist, so in a sense they are both true, but they are also both untrue.

It is also worth mentioning Derrida’s formula regarding possibility and impossibility. When the conditions of possibility of something turn out to be its conditions of impossibility, it becomes im/possible. This leads to a situation in which, to use Derrida’s words, ‘ce “possible” n’est pas

⁵⁵ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 117.

⁵⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 29.

simplement “différent de” ou le “contraire de” “impossible””; rather, “possible” et “impossible” veulent dire le même’.⁵⁷ One implies the other, even as it represses it. In another instantiation, this is true of the im/possibility of the limit as well. We understand that limitlessness is a condition of the possibility and the impossibility of the limit—and that, likewise, the condition of possibility of the limit (that it be uncrossable) is what renders it impossible as well as possible. Whichever way we look at this, we can map it onto ‘true/false’. For instance, if it is true that the uncrossable limit is a condition of the limit’s possibility, it is also false, because that limitedness is also a condition of the limit’s impossibility. The same manoeuvre can be applied to or seen at work in the ‘inside/outside’ nexus, too.

Interestingly for our purposes, dialetheism has been observed as part of ‘transition states’:

when I exit the room, I am inside the room at one time, and outside of it at another. Given the continuity of motion, there must be a precise instant in time, call it *tt*, at which I leave the room. Am I inside the room or outside at time *tt*? Four answers are available: (a) I am inside; (b) I am outside; (c) I am both; and (d) I am neither. There is a strong intuition that (a) and (b) are ruled out by symmetry considerations: choosing either would be completely arbitrary. [...] As for (d): if I am neither inside nor outside the room, then I am not inside and not-not inside; therefore, I am either inside and not inside (option (c)), or not inside and not-not inside (which follows from option (d)); in both cases, a dialethic situation. Or so it has been argued.⁵⁸

The type of experience that gives rise to this problematic, as the crossing of a threshold does, is a limit experience. The coinage of the word ‘dialetheism’ took inspiration from a passage by Ludwig Wittgenstein on Russell’s Paradox: ‘Why should Russell’s contradiction not be conceived of as something supra-propositional, something that towers above the propositions and looks in both directions like a Janus head? [...] The proposition that contradicts itself would stand like a monument (with a Janus head) over the propositions of logic’.⁵⁹ Again, the co-existence of contrary elements looms large as a Janus-faced figure, like the one referenced by van Houtum and Jones earlier. It is a limit figure that opens one onto the other and holds them in close union whilst also keeping them separate.

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Dire l’événement, est-ce possible? avec Gad Soussana et Alexis Nouss* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), p. 86.

⁵⁸ Graham Priest, Francesco Berto and Zach Weber, ‘Dialetheism’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/dialetheism>.

⁵⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, Part IV’ in *The Collected Works of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Charlottesville: InteLex, 1998), p. 256.

Fluidity

The ‘both/and’ structure involves a connection of both terms, with no border between them; however, just as the limit is present in limitlessness, inside the ‘both/and’ is an ‘either/or’ structure. Total connection and incision are present ‘at once’. This logic serves to push the ‘both/and’ back to a further level: *both* ‘both/and’ *and* ‘either/or’ are genuinely held together in this limit structure. As we unpack the consequences of this approach, it is worth examining another figure which needs to be questioned, the flip side of the *ipse*. This figure is fluidity, or perfect continuation, which makes A and not-A identical—in fact, makes them A=A. I refer to it as ‘fluidity’ because it involves a pure flow from one side of the limit to the other, a pure homogeneity of inside and outside. The concept of fluidity strategically ignores and denies the limitedness of the limit.

For example, when Derrida describes the so-called centre of a structure as the interpretative key which fixes a text’s play, we might recognise the spherical presence of the *ipse* in the figure of the ‘centre’, which has traditionally claimed a total independence from the structure it governs: ‘On a [...] toujours pensé que le centre, qui par définition est unique, constituait, dans une structure, cela même qui, commandant la structure, échappe à la structuralité’.⁶⁰ But the problem appears the other way around, too. Derrida suggests that a structure without a centre ‘représente l’impensable même’.⁶¹

[P]our une pensée classique de la structure, le centre peut être dit, paradoxalement, dans la structure et hors de la structure. Il est au centre de la totalité et pourtant, puisque le centre ne lui appartient pas, la totalité a son centre ailleurs. [...] Le concept de structure centrée [...] est contradictoirement cohérent.⁶²

The centre is part of the wider structure, but it remains differentiated from it (‘ne lui appartient pas’); we might imagine that it is pinched and pleated up, and consequently sticks out from the rest of the structure. The centre’s in/dependence frustrates the pure fluidity that would otherwise connect the centre in a smooth and undifferentiated flattening motion to the rest of the structure. (This recalls Kurt Gödel’s canonical insight that a complete system is not consistent and a consistent system is not complete.)

⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, *L’Écriture et différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), p. 410.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 409.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Turning to another example, let us admit for now that concepts are not ‘closed by a frontier’, but rather have an ‘open texture’, according to Wittgenstein.⁶³ This means that membership of a concept category is not a simple black-and-white, yes-or-no, either/or question. The definition of a concept does not involve drawing, *ipse*-like, a perfectly englobing sphere. Waismann demonstrates this by reflecting on the definition of gold:

The notion of gold seems to be defined with absolute precision, say by the spectrum of gold with its characteristic lines. Now what would you say is a substance was discovered that looked like gold, satisfied all the chemical tests for gold, whilst it emitted a new sort of radiation? ‘But such things do not happen.’ Quite so; but they might happen, and that is enough to show that we can never exclude altogether the possibility of some unforeseen situation arising in which we shall have to modify our definition. [...] In short, it is not possible to define a concept like gold with absolute precision, i.e. in such a way that every nook and cranny is blocked against entry of doubt. That is what is meant by the open texture of a concept.⁶⁴

Even though we can resolve individual uncertainties by expanding or contracting definitions, we cannot do away with the future promise of vagueness; for any proposed iteration of the definition, there will be hypothetical cases that call it into question. Hence the definition itself is non-exhaustive. Open texture is therefore a topological rendering of something that Waismann also calls ‘the possibility of vagueness’.⁶⁵

But how open is open texture? David Boersema complains that ‘neither Wittgenstein nor Waismann make it clear how open open texture is’.⁶⁶ What is for sure is that open texture is not entirely open; in Boersema’s words, ‘open texture is not “wide open texture”’.⁶⁷ If concepts were fluid with one another, or opened out onto one another completely, the limits between them would vanish and the concepts would no longer be meaningful or useable. Because of this double requirement undergirding the existence of a concept—being neither entirely enclosed to an inside nor entirely exposed to an outside—one might begin to think of the edges of a concept as sites of liminality.

A restrictive, strategic appeal to fluidity is also at work in another move that ignores the thinking of the limit: when inside and outside are considered to be perfect inversions of one another. Forming each idea solely by the negation of the other idea, the two things, inside and outside, are

⁶³ F. Waismann, *How I See Philosophy*, ed. by R. Harré (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1968), p. 42.

⁶⁴ Waismann, p. 42.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ David B. Boersema, ‘Wittgenstein on Names’, *Essays in Philosophy*, 1.2 (2000), Article 7, 1-12 (p. 7).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

no longer meaningfully different. Under this philosophical model, inside can be derived from outside, and vice versa. There is nothing contained in one that is not contained in the other; white can be derived entirely from black and has nothing of its own. This perfect inversion is really just a projection, implicitly following the logic of fluidity which allows us to derive B from A and A alone. We think we have A and B, or not-A, which are opposites in a binary dualism, but we have simply A and A again, as nothing but A is in fact required. Thus, the dualism collapses back into an *ipse* figure, a new monad, when the flattening inversion fails to take into account any differential relationship between the terms.

Derrida is unsympathetic to this dualism model, strategically positioning himself against its metaphysical inheritances: '[t]ous les dualismes [...] sont le thème unique d'une métaphysique dont toute l'histoire a dû tendre vers la réduction de la trace [...] [la] subordination de la trace à la présence pleine'.⁶⁸ The relationship of inside and out that takes place in the limit experience is not a dualism in the sense of a perfectly oppositional form. The terms never perfectly align or swallow one another in a perfect self-correspondence: the folded structure of relation 'empêche [...] cette représentation réfléchissante de se replier ou de se reproduire de façon intérieure et adéquate à elle-même, de se dominer ou comprendre elle-même, tautologiquement'.⁶⁹

The same suspicion must be conferred onto dialectical syntheses, because they collapse, reduce, and smooth out oppositions into a neat resolution. The thinking of the limit requires that oppositions in synthesis remain fraught by the original contradiction rather than entirely synthesised to a third position. Gilles Deleuze is right in saying that a perfectly resolved dialectic is a dead end which elevates the importance, in the end, of identity rather than difference. Not only does it synthesise its own terms, it also synthesises contradiction itself. The dialectic, at least in the Hegelian imagination, is

le chemin sans issue qui la [la contradiction] ramène à l'identité [...]. C'est seulement par rapport à l'identique, en fonction de l'identique, que la contradiction est *la plus grande* différence. Les ivresses et les étourdissements sont feints; l'obscur est déjà éclairci dès le début. Rien ne le montre mieux que l'insipide monocentrage des cercles dans la dialectique hégélienne.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 104.

⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p. 151. See also Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). Gasché's work on mirroring shows that Derrida's project counters the play of reflections in Hegel's work, which assumes the possibility of self-unification and self-return after seeing oneself reflected in another, such that the other is effectively assimilated. The back of the mirror is the behind-the-scenes which liminally undercuts the mirror's perfect reflectivity.

⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), pp. 338-39.

Bataille and Heidegger criticise the Hegelian dialectic because of its false fluidity: it does not account for the ‘not’. There remains a residue of the ‘not’, a *négativité sans emploi* that is not overcome or assimilated into the dialectical synthesis.⁷¹ For Heidegger, G. W. F. Hegel’s philosophy enacts ‘a complete *dissolving* of negativity into the positivity of the absolute’.⁷²

Se rapprocher / s’écarter

The nature of the limit structure and the way it holds opposing pairs in relation with each other could tempt us to call the limit a ‘paradox’. The *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines a paradox as ‘a situation or statement that seems impossible or is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics’, which seems an accurate portrayal of our limit situation. The term ‘paradox’ (from the Greek *paradoxon*, meaning ‘contrary to opinion’) perhaps implies, though, that there is something strange or disorderly about this holding together of conflicting terms. But why must this be the case? The so-called paradox is our starting point, rather than a surprise result. The reciprocal tangle of features is still there, and the experience of that tangle might still be called ‘paradoxical’ or ‘contradictory’, but we need to drop the comparison with something more realistic, more orderly, that we imagine to exist elsewhere.

This limit takes shape via a double movement of towards/apart. Blanchot’s formulation of the ‘rapport sans rapport’ emphasises this duality, bespeaking a relation which occurs but also withdraws.⁷³ In Hill’s terms, Blanchot’s use of this enigmatic expression signals ‘a fundamental imperative of thinking’: the affirmation of difference, of a bare relationality.⁷⁴ It establishes ‘a thinking of relation that, simultaneously withdrawing and redrawing itself, and the one by virtue of the other, only occur[s] by dint of the unbridgeable separation between its terms’.⁷⁵ Blanchot’s chapter ‘L’Expérience-limite’ concerns itself with the manner in which apparent opposites seem to hold each other up. When Aristotle formulated his explanation of the law of non-contradiction, he dismissed Heraclitus’s belief that everything ‘is’ and ‘is not’. Blanchot, by contrast, leans on Heraclitus. He evokes ‘cette relation mystérieuse [...] relation selon la double direction de “se

⁷¹ Denis Hollier, *Le Collège de Sociologie (1937-1939)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 76.

⁷² Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Vol. 68* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1993), p. 14, cited in Karin de Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger’s Encounter with Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), p. 298.

⁷³ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 68.

⁷⁴ Leslie Hill, *Nancy, Blanchot: A Serious Controversy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018), p. 54.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

rapprocher-s'écarter.⁷⁶ This double relation encompasses both sameness and difference, both proximity and distance, a movement forwards and back, towards and away. This relation is oxymoronic from the outset, a 'rapport de contrariété', 'le rapport secret des contraires'.⁷⁷ The doubleness cannot be resolved, for it is a relation 'qu'il est nullement en notre pouvoir de maîtriser une fois pour toutes'.⁷⁸

Limitrophie

The limit structure is connected to repetition by the doubling action of the line: any 'inside/outside' limit involves two liminally related things, and thus produces two figures ('either/or'), one figure ('both/and') and no figures ('neither/nor'). Each of these has a liminal relation to the other two, since there being two figures relies on the presence of one and no figures, and so on. For Blanchot, the relation just described might happen at the 'entre-deux', the 'le lieu même du milieu', dancing on the figure of the limit.⁷⁹ Similarly, Fox claims that deconstruction 'paradoxically, [...] "centres" on the boundary'.⁸⁰ The notion of centring on the boundary clearly has an affinity with the thinking of the limit experience. Nevertheless, it is not possible to position oneself neatly on the boundary line. As Schimanski notes, 'the border is split when crossed'.⁸¹ When we divide using a limit, since the limit line cannot create a clean-cut edge, the line produces two areas in addition to the one that it cut into. By the same token, the limit line itself becomes divided. It is divided between separation and join, and it is also doubled, giving its two Janus-like faces. But is the limit doubled only once, or does this doubling also get doubled, and so on, two by two?

To answer this question, we can look to Derrida's *L'Animal que donc je suis*, which turns on the notion of *limitrophie*. Derrida seeks neither to efface limits in favour of homogeneity, nor to reify or affirm the 'seule ligne indivisible [...] unilinéaire' to which philosophers ever since Aristotle have been wedded.⁸² Instead, he makes his way to a limit concept that is 'non oppositionnelle et infiniment différenciée'.⁸³ The limit becomes a 'frontière plurielle et surpléée', a 'bordure

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 125, p. 128.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 135.

⁸⁰ Fox, p. 99.

⁸¹ Schimanski, 'Crossing and Reading', p. 45.

⁸² Jacques Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), p. 53.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 173.

multiple et hétérogène'.⁸⁴ This limit still has all of the features that this chapter has outlined so far. But, on top of that, it is complex, mobile, thickened, and plural, constantly being multiplied and divided:

[L]a *limitrophie*, voilà donc le sujet. Non seulement parce qu'il s'agira de ce qui pousse et croît à la limite, autour de la limite, en s'entretenant de la limite, mais de ce qui nourrit la limite, la génère, l'élève et la complique. Tout ce que je dirai ne consistera surtout pas à effacer la limite, mais à multiplier ses figures, à compliquer, épaissir, délinéariser, plier, diviser la ligne justement en la faisant croître et multiplier.⁸⁵

The limit—chasm of separation, hinge between two sides—also gives rise to 'l'expérience proprement transgressale, sinon transgressive, d'une limitrophie'.⁸⁶ Furthermore, multiplication and division are two sides of the same coin.⁸⁷ As with the French *dédoublement*, meaning both splitting and duplicating, when a gene divides it also doubles, creating two. This is how Derrida can speak of 'dividing the line [...] by making it multiple'.

Following on from this, on the theme of multiplication, Derrida's comment on the difference between 'blurring' and 'multiplying' a limit is illuminating. He appears much keener on the latter than the former:

No, on the contrary, you have to multiply the differences, not blur the differences. [...] More differences, yes. [...] All these differences have to be taken into account in a new fashion; whereas if you draw a single or two single lines, then you have homogenous sets of undifferentiated societies, or groups, or structures.⁸⁸

In the service of fidelity to the structures described, it is better to multiply differential 'lines' rather than blur or obfuscate them. Instead of one single limit line giving rise to a doubled relationship between inside and outside, same and different, limitedness and limitlessness, and so on, we can conceive of every pair as the institution of another line, all of which palimpsestically overlay one another. After all, thanks to the limit structure, categorisation 'ne permet pas de "couper", une seule fois, là où l'on voudrait couper en général'.⁸⁹ Cutting always requires *more*

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ To anticipate Chapter 4, this leads onto the figure of the fold, because when one folds a piece of paper one creates two halves: dividing, but also *multiplier*.

⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'On Reading Heidegger: An Outline of Remarks to the Essex Colloquium', *Research in Phenomenology*, 17 (1987), pp. 171-185, pp. 187-188, www.jstor.com/stable/24654858.

⁸⁹ Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, "'Il faut bien manger" ou le calcul du sujet' in *Points de suspension*, ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 1992), p. 299.

cuts, a multiplication of differences. Affirming all these pairs at once requires multiple layers or perspectives on a limit which can thus be conceived of as multiple and re-doubled as well as internally divided. These terms can themselves shift places and reconfigure themselves into new in- or out-groupings. This is how the act of cutting gives rise to a multiplicity of cuts. Thanks to the differential dimension of the limit problem, and the fact that a limit operates on and in multiple different figures, what seems at first to be a single cut unfurls into many more differences and cuts than are originally obvious. The figure of multiplication and *limitrophie* therefore gives us another perspective on the topology of the limit.

Structure

‘Tout commence par la structure, la configuration ou la relation’.⁹⁰ The connection between doubled pairs hints at the emergence of a bigger structure. In ‘Limitrophie’, we imagine these pairs as separate instantiations of the limit, all of which can be brought to bear on or found in the same region, and which therefore overlay one another. But in this system of exchanges between ‘inside/outside’, ‘presence/absence’, ‘possible/impossible’, and so on, the interconnection between terms gets considerably more complex. Just as the *ipse* is unable to attain full closure, each term cannot be cut off from what surrounds it, and this chains it to other similar terms in a reciprocal co-implication. In an article entitled ‘Deconstruction as Second-Order Observing’, Niklas Luhmann frames this systematic feature as the ‘possibilities of antonym substitution’:⁹¹

If we start with the form of nature and cross its boundary with a specific intent, what do we find? Perhaps grace, which presupposes new distinctions, such as grace/work, grace/justice, grace/creation of order. The other side may be civilization; it may be technology, and we will feel the need for further distinctions such as civilization/culture [...]. The other side can be specified in several distinct ways.⁹²

Each liminal pair (such as, in Luhmann’s example, ‘nature/grace’) is connected to other terms (‘grace/work’, ‘grace/justice’, etc.), leading to other pairs that branch off into new networks. (See Chapter 3 for an investigation of the possibility of identifying meta-level features in this network or web, such as compression.) The terms branch inwards in a chain, too. For instance, if we attempt to think about the limit line in isolation, we find that it has a limit relationship with the outside on one side, and the inside on the other side. The outside is both inaccessible and

⁹⁰ Derrida, *L’Écriture et la différence*, p. 419. My emphasis.

⁹¹ Niklas Luhmann, ‘Deconstruction as Second-Order Observing’, *New Literary History*, 24.4 (1993), 763-82 (p. 771).

⁹² *Ibid.*

accessible to the limit line itself, and the same goes for the inside. This creates two new limit figures: ‘limit/outside’ and ‘limit/inside’.

Every pair leads to other pairs. As such, eventually all terms are connected to each other by one route or another. An unstable web or network is formed, composed of limit structures. In *Positions*, Derrida refers to an ‘enchaînement qui fait que chaque “élément” [...] se constitue à part de la trace en lui des autres éléments de la chaîne ou du système. [...] Rien, ni dans les éléments ni dans le système, n’est nulle part ni jamais simplement présent ou absent’.⁹³ This chaining of elements which are each poised at the limit of presence and absence, and therefore all knotted together, gives rise to ‘une structure et un mouvement [...] le jeu systématique des différences, des traces de différences, de l’*espacement* par lequel les éléments se rapportent les uns aux autres’.⁹⁴ This interlinking is systematic.

The structure of connected terms emerges *from* the features of the limit figure, not deterministically, but contingently, and two by two. When Gasché and Luhmann propose systematising and formalised readings of Derridian structurality, they begin with the rejection of the strict distinction that would cut inside off from outside. For Gasché, the marking of one term by another is the ‘*minimal structure*’ which precludes total presence and eventually links all elements to one another.⁹⁵ Such critics variously refer to an ‘architecture’,⁹⁶ ‘economy’,⁹⁷ or ‘infrastructures’.⁹⁸ Royle’s comments on the word ‘term’ assert the same point:

But even these ‘terms’ are not ‘terms’ in the sense of something final, self-enclosed [...] (‘term’ comes from the French *terme*, a limit, from Latin *terminus*, a boundary). Each of these peculiarly non-terminal terms is part of what Derrida has called an open ‘chain of substitutions’.⁹⁹

So, it is precisely the limit figure, once extrapolated out across multiple instantiations, which gives us the broader architecture: an ever-shifting, endless web of limits. As Derrida expresses it, ‘le tremblement de chaque bordure v[ient] à se propager sur toutes les autres’.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), p. 38.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Gasché, p. 187.

⁹⁶ Luhmann, p. 769.

⁹⁷ Irene E. Harvey, *Derrida and the Economy of Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

⁹⁸ Gasché, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Royle, p. 14, citing Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Derrida, *La Genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), p. vii.

We have seen that this differential matrix renders each term im/possible because each of them is chained to something that simultaneously undercuts and facilitates it. But what about the word ‘simultaneous’? We have imagined the limit structure as a spatial topology, a differential web of spacing, but it is also a temporal web. There are limits in ‘past/future’, ‘before/after’, ‘old/new’. There is an endlessly divisible limit between one unit of time and the next. The figure of the *ipse* lurks in both temporal and spatial realms of ‘presence’. We can easily reimagine limitation as stoppage, not just in space, but also in time; likewise, we can map limitlessness onto endlessness and interminability in time as well as in space. Time and space are inextricable, and they have a limit relation with each other: ‘space/time’. What differs in time also differs in space, and vice versa. The dimensions of space and time facilitate each other, and are inconceivable without each other, but cannot be collapsed together into a single substance. They are qualitatively different. The limit’s spatial dimension or spacing is therefore part of the differential spatio/temporal structure that Derrida calls ‘l’articulation de l’espace et du temps’, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space.¹⁰¹

The web is really a matrix of space/time, where divisions within and between space and time are both subject to and acting out the limit structure. On the dynamic figure of the economy, specifically in the context of Derrida’s ‘Force et signification’, Ian Maclachlan writes that ‘if the figure of economy is to be preferred, this will involve reconceiving what we understand by an economy. [...] [I]t will be constituted by differential relations that are at once, to paraphrase and extend [Derrida’s] remark, geometrical and dynamic, quantitative and qualitative, spatial and temporal’.¹⁰² In the same vein, Martin Hägglund announces the ineradicability of spatio/temporal relation; it is an ‘absolutely general condition’.¹⁰³ We are all in this network or differential economy of limit structures traced across space and/or time at any given moment.

The limit and its transgression go off in one direction in a spatial register: preservation of and breaking free of borders. But they also work in a temporal register: progressing onwards and staying still. The limit structure gives rise to a double gesture of holding onto the past while moving forward into the future. These occur at once, or *à la fois*. Now we see why this is a split and doubled simultaneity. The freshness of the new cannot come in without involving itself in a limit relationship with the old, and the chain of pairs carries the old with it even as time pushes forward into the new. The old can never quite be left behind, and is therefore not fully and finally

¹⁰¹ Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 99.

¹⁰² Ian Maclachlan, *Marking Time: Derrida, Blanchot, Beckett, des Forêts, Klossowski, Laporte* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 21-22.

¹⁰³ Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 3.

‘old’ or finished with; the new is both connected to every other new and old ever experienced, but is also unique and singular. Following a temporal logic of ‘chaque fois une fois’, each time is the one and only time, but marked by the co-constitutive connection that makes it a repetition, mooring it to the past and future.¹⁰⁴ In Blanchot’s words, this temporality engenders ‘une expérience à la fois unique et banale’, caught in the tension between genesis and structure.¹⁰⁵

Balance

Reciprocity, balance, reversibility, symmetry, correspondence... There is some relationship of similarity between inside and outside, but what is it? As discussed in ‘Fluidity’, the two terms of a pair are not identically symmetrical as a projection, a binary opposite, or a perfect mirror image would be. As Luhmann writes, ‘Observations are asymmetric (or symmetry-breaking) operations. [...] The inner side is the indicated side, the marked side. [...] Nevertheless, all observations have to presuppose both sides of the form they use as distinction or “frame”’.¹⁰⁶ Limit relations are not temporally reversible: this is perhaps not obvious with ‘inside/outside’, but it certainly is with ‘life/death’. Despite the potential mappings outlined, it is undeniable that past, present, and future are qualitatively different due to the directionality of time; and even if referral backwards is always occurring, for instance, through chains of causality, it is different from our forward-looking relationship to the future. Nor are limit relations necessarily spatially symmetrical, a fact most visible in figures involving an original plus a smaller parasite, prosthesis, margin, or supplement.

However, these figures *are* balanced in a certain sense, such that no term is absolutely primary: ‘[ils] ont entre eux cet étrange rapport: l’un est toujours le supplément de l’autre’.¹⁰⁷ In biology, even parasitism is a form of symbiosis. Just as the original needs and does not need the supplement, reciprocally the supplement needs and does not need the original. For instance, if theory is the ‘servant of experiment’, this does not eradicate experiment’s reliance on theory for its organisation and conditions of meaning; thus, experiment is also the servant of theory. We could just as well prioritise the second term over the first, since both exist and they are co-implicated. Such reasoning is also why none of these exemplary figures should be taken as inherently, rather than strategically, primary.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Derrida, ‘Penseur de l’évènement’.

¹⁰⁵ Blanchot, *Amitié*, p. 259.

¹⁰⁶ Luhmann, p. 769.

¹⁰⁷ On painting and writing in Plato’s philosophy, Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 215.

¹⁰⁸ We find ourselves at the classic critique of binary hierarchies which has been taken up politically by interpreters of deconstruction. One/many, masculine/feminine, ideal/material, inside/outside, cause/effect:

Illustrating this, in one vignette from ‘L’Expérience-limite’, Blanchot explores how the gods in Ancient Greek poetry will intervene before letting a mendicant starve. The *suppliant* is humiliated, but his powerlessness is converted into a different type of power when the gods rush to his aid. Society thereby maintains an overall sense of measure, and Zeus’s scales are kept in balance: ‘Lorsque la puissance passe la limite, compromettant l’équilibre, intervient, en faveur de l’homme sans ressources [...] un autre pouvoir qui renverse la situation de force’.¹⁰⁹ This act of balance nonetheless contains numerous asymmetries. Rather than restoring a perfect equilibrium, the gods tip the balance in favour of the beggar, creating another imbalance: ‘C’est donc cela, la mesure: quand il n’y a pas de milieu’.¹¹⁰ Likewise, the gods use a different kind of power from the usual hierarchy based on wealth: ‘La mesure ne mesure pas seulement la puissance en la rendant égale; elle ouvre une autre Dimension’.¹¹¹ The gods cannot fully overwrite the mendicant’s powerlessness, but upon another layer his indigence becomes a different type of power. These palimpsestic layers cannot be permanently hierarchised either, though they are not reversible or symmetrical. In this space, which Blanchot refers to as ‘l’espace de l’entre-deux où se rencontrent les hommes qui tout sépare’,¹¹² the overall effect is one of balance and measure, preventing complete abjection of any individual. This balance does not engender a resolution. The dichotomy of powerful and powerless is, in fact, brought out more acutely by its staging in the structure: ‘la rigueur du dilemme n’est nullement affaiblie, mais rendue plus essentielle par la supplication’.¹¹³ The to-and-fro multiplication of layers shows only that hierarchies of value are suspiciously mobile.

Transcendence

What claims can this limit structure make for itself? Is there anything outside of it? What exceeds the structure? The limit structure appears here as a theoretical abstraction derived from a similarly abstract notion of a limit. However, to prefigure and lay the ground for the argument made in Chapter 3 ‘Exemplarity’ regarding the exemplary status of these limit figures, it is important to recognise that this theoretical structure is not invulnerable to change nor to inputs from the empirical world. Indeed, it has been said that the limit structure is caught at the ‘the turnstile of

their interdependence means that, despite the irreversibility and asymmetries that we may find between terms that relate across a limit, attempting to entirely erase the contribution of one side is always an unacknowledged exclusion and a form of misrepresentation.

¹⁰⁹ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 133.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

these mutually dependent positions of the empirical and the transcendental'.¹¹⁴ This concept of 'quasi-transcendentality', a term originally coined by Gasché, refers to a certain 'complication of the empirical and the transcendental'.¹¹⁵ As Schimanski suggests, 'all borders have a topographical and a symbolic aspect' in the sense that they refer to the way things on the ground happen to be as well as symbolising them; borders "topographicalize" or "territorialize" symbolic differences, and at the same time "symbolize" or "conceptualize" topographical and territorial differences'.¹¹⁶ The transcendental structure is exceeded by the empirical in two important ways. First, it is doubled and multiplied; second, it is split and divided. Let us look at each of these in turn.

Firstly, as in Derrida's aforementioned notion of the 'centre' from 'La Structure, le signe, et le jeu' and in Luhmann's concept of second-order observing, we know that the structure can observe its own workings, because it is doubled against itself. When Blanchot talks about the structure of the limit experience and its dynamic configurations in time and space, he calls it 'Différence': 'il y a comme un sens au-delà du sens'.¹¹⁷ *Différence* is initially positioned as transcendent, undergirding or presiding over meaning as an organising principle which allows the to-ing and fro-ing of other differences. However, the 'énigmatique' *Différence* can also be made to speak, 'parle en vertu de l'énigme [...] en la faisant parler'.¹¹⁸ This requires self-observation of the system by the system. One way of imagining this is to introduce another layer of *Différence* that is outside of (as well as a continuation of) the system. As Blanchot explains, the umbrella appeal to *Différence* must always be pushed back. Blanchot remarks upon the progress of this shift from a simple *différence*, to a secondary, capitalised *Différence*, and then to a glimpse of 'une différence plus cachée, celle du "Tout-Un"'.¹¹⁹ This complication, multiplication or dissemination of its mastery is the condition which allows *Différence* to govern in this contingent manner at all.

The border between inside and outside is im/possible to maintain, not just because of the plain 'inside/outside' interconnection, but because the *observer* adheres to the logic of 'inside/outside' and does not, extending itself from the inside even as it observes itself from the outside. Luhmann characterises observation as 'nothing but making a distinction to indicate one side and

¹¹⁴ Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 205-06.

¹¹⁵ Bennington and Derrida, p. 268, p. 206.

¹¹⁶ Schimanski, 'Crossing and Reading', pp. 52-53.

¹¹⁷ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 129.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131. My emphasis.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-31.

not the other', or, in other words,¹²⁰ creating an 'inside/outside' or 'marked/unmarked' pair. Without such an introduction of a limit,

[the system] could not make the (reentering) distinction of self-reference and external reference. It could not even match external and internal states. It could not separate the observer from the observed. It could not produce cognition.¹²¹

When *Différence* observes itself, in Blanchot's model, it places itself on the inside, and it observes from the outside; it therefore places itself on the outside, too. It then needs another layer of observation to observe it doing this, hoping, perhaps, to see it all. But, as Luhmann posits, 'At the level of second-order observing, everything becomes contingent, including the second-order observing itself'.¹²² All in all, this doubling of the system precludes the closed edge that would grant the system pure transcendence.

This observer effect can also be expressed as the importance of preserving different levels when describing phenomena (such as 'sum of parts/greater than sum of parts'). As Roger Scruton states, 'levels really matter, because you end up describing something else at the higher level'.¹²³ The upshot of this is that, at the cost of resolving the contradiction, reductionist and transcendent explanations make less contact with reality (a point I pick up in the Conclusion). Reductionism and transcendence may seem to smooth matters out, but, in Scruton's terms, 'If you can't live with that belief, to what extent are you committed to its truth? It doesn't touch all aspects of reality'. It is 'a truth' that our experience 'can be described *in this other way*', i.e. at another level.

Secondly, and relatedly, the structure is divided internally. This becomes clear if we think about the relationship between the differential matrix and the fragmentary limit figures, some of which I am listing here, that cannot be fluidly integrated into it. The logic of exemplarity means that each example fractures the system's totality, as well as exemplifying it and supporting it. The limit structure describes the world in a certain way and, in doing so, makes a claim for it philosophically. Meanwhile, it maps a variety of empirically sourced figures that exist on their own terms, be it in the world or in the mind. This constitutive empirical repetition internally punctuates the transcendent authority of the limit structure. Bennington describes this structural

¹²⁰ Luhmann, pp. 773-74.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 774.

¹²² Ibid., p. 769.

¹²³ 'Higher' here is a contingent rather than a properly hierarchical descriptor. Roger Scruton and Nigel Warburton, 'Roger Scruton on Human Nature', *Philosophy Bites*, podcast, 29 August 2017, <https://philosophybites.com/2017/08/roger-scruton-on-human-nature-1.html>.

punctuation thus: ‘This analysis does not ruin the transcendental by bringing it back down to a harsh reality [...] but contaminates it with the contact of what it attempted to keep at bay, whereas it lived only on the basis of that keeping at bay’.¹²⁴ The concept and the instantiation require one another, support and appeal to one another, whilst fissuring and contaminating one another. There is a limit relationship between the empirical and the transcendental, the exemplary figures and their conceptual architecture. Indeed, Bennington states that this ‘double movement’ bridges the ‘tension in Derrida between apparently immodest assertions embracing the whole of metaphysics and a minute attention paid to the finest grain of the texts read’.¹²⁵ When a transcendental pattern emerges, it comes from observation or induction rather than deduction (see Chapter 3 for a fuller explanation).

The structure is not fully transcendent, as it does not achieve self-sameness on the inside, nor immunity from the outside. It cannot be seen in its entirety, but nor can it be dismissed. According to Donna Haraway’s formulation, ‘Only the god trick is forbidden’,¹²⁶ but to be more precise we might say that a transcendental ‘god’ can be spoken of only in a way that is ‘fissuré’, ‘éclaté’, ‘écarté’.¹²⁷

Experiment

The quasi-transcendental framing of the limit structure maps onto the structure of the experiment in its pursuit of knowledge. The word *expérience* indeed means both ‘experience’ and ‘experiment’ in French. Derrida says that the so-called philosophy of the trace is ‘identified not with a project of mastery but with a project of ἐπιστήμη, enquiry, knowledge, science’.¹²⁸ (Again, these arguments will be picked up for further development in Chapter 3.)

The examples here parallel the arguments made just above in ‘Transcendence’. Firstly, since a system cannot observe itself from outside without also being inside itself, an objective, view-from-nowhere observation is unattainable because we cannot interrogate and remove our own role as observer. Thomas Nagel posits that ‘there is a real world in which we are contained, and

¹²⁴ Bennington and Derrida, p. 277.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 278.

¹²⁶ Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’ in *Technology and the Politics of Knowledge*, ed. by Andrew Feenberg and Alastair Hannay (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 175-94 (p. 186).

¹²⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *L’Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 70.

¹²⁸ Derrida, ‘On Reading Heidegger’, p. 181.

that appearances result from our interaction with the rest of it. [...] However often we may try to step outside of ourselves, something will have to stay behind the lens, something in us will determine the resulting picture'.¹²⁹ While experimental observations give an increasingly accurate model of the observed world, we are not able to gain a complete overview because something always remains 'behind the lens'. Formulation and interpretation of experiments are gestures that precede and exceed the frame of the experiment, whilst remaining part of it. Scientific results do not have an immaculate conception, and, for instance, 'the goal of removing subjectivities has never been met. All observations are "theory-laden"; that is, making any observation requires the acceptance of background assumptions—a system of beliefs to interpret what it is that we are seeing'.¹³⁰ Empirical science relies on procedures and assumptions that are features of the observation operation, and these are not fully recuperable or explainable by whatever theoretical structure is being used. We can observe the scientific method by studying science itself; nonetheless, we can never completely exit this chain of observers.

Secondly, just as each element in the structure 'gard[e] en lui la marque de l'élément passé et se laiss[e] déjà creuser par la marque de son rapport à l'élément futur', the experimental structure faces both backwards and forwards to that which it is not.¹³¹ The gesture of departure found in the experiment 'est radicalement empiriste. Elle [la sortie] procède à la manière d'une pensée errante sur la possibilité de l'itinéraire et de la méthode. Elle s'affecte de non-savoir comme de son avenir et délibérément *s'aventure*'.¹³² The errant empiricism of the scientific method builds up knowledge from the accumulation of data, but this does not directly translate to metaphysical, transcendent certainty about the workings of the empirical world. Neuroscientist Colin Hales explains that 'empirical science never explains (why, what necessitates it). It describes (what happens, how it will appear when you look). We then construct "virtual" explanations that serve as understanding'.¹³³ David Hume famously alleged that there is a lack of certainty in this method of inductive reasoning and inference from experiment when matters of fact are concerned.¹³⁴ Experimental science has to be open to surprising results. As experimental observers, we are privy only to a succession of events. Experiment can therefore never yield a watertight explanation of some original blueprint. It gives models that attempt—often with excellent accuracy—to predict the future. New results can be assimilated, but, in the movement of enquiry

¹²⁹ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 68.

¹³⁰ Joey Sprague and Diane Kobryniewicz, 'A Feminist Epistemology' in *Handbook of the Gender of Sociology*, ed. by Janet Saltzman Chafetz (New York: Springer, 2006), pp. 25-43 (p. 26).

¹³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), p. 13.

¹³² Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 232.

¹³³ Colin Hales (@Dr_Cuspy), *Twitter*, 9 Feb 2020.

¹³⁴ James Ladyman, *Understanding Philosophy of Science* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 33.

and experiment, there will always be a further beyond. An experiment is an admission that one might not know, that the future cannot be guaranteed, and that the transcendental theory derived cannot be understood except through its reliance on the empirical.

If some features of a given program can only be determined by running it (as in computer science's halting problem), the model collapses into the process measured, and there is no possibility of doing an experiment. On the other hand, theory cannot absorb the future, and nor can it absorb all levels of emergence. Theoretical physicist Steven H. Simon recounts:

People frequently have the feeling that if you continually ask 'what is it made of' you learn more about something. This approach to knowledge is known as *reductionism*. For example, asking what water is made of, someone may tell you it is made from molecules, then molecules are made of atoms, atoms of electrons and protons, protons of quarks, and quarks are made of who-knows-what. But none of this information tells you anything about why water is wet, about why protons and neutrons bind to form nuclei, why the atoms bind to form water, and so forth. [...] Even more interesting is the possibility that we understand very well the microscopic theory of a system, but then we discover that macroscopic properties *emerge* from the system that we did not expect.¹³⁵

As with Scruton's 'levels', scientists cannot smoothly, *fluidly* derive one experimental level from another. According to *mathematical* induction, we can deduce the sequence of integers from only the numbers 0 and 1, or climb up a ladder given only the first rung and one further step, to be added over and over again; future conclusions are entirely predictable from the information contained within the premises. But that is the logic of fluidity. Every experimental structure must reach out to things which it cannot entirely anticipate and rely on things it does not include. The quasi-transcendentality of the structure allows us to theorise and infer norms, rather than being stuck in plain empiricism: 'Il s'agit de penser par là à la fois la règle et l'événement, le concept et la singularité'.¹³⁶ It is a Derridian 'transcendentality that runs through empiricism (a quasi-transcendentality)', allowing us to 'move away from the circular consequence of the empirical structure'—allowing us to make situationally functional abstractions.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, the experimental method remains a limit structure facing onto and emerging from the unknown, and therefore permeated by the unknown.

Describing the journey past the limit felt in a drug trip, Derrida writes,

¹³⁵ Steven H. Simon, *The Oxford Solid State Basics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 3.

¹³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), p. 215.

¹³⁷ Nicole Anderson, *Derrida: Ethics under Erasure* (London: Continuum Books, 2012), p. 159.

Je ne trouve pas de meilleur mot que *expérience*, à savoir le voyage qui passe la limite. Expérience *entre* deux expériences: *d'une part* la traversée, l'odyssée, [...] le rapport à l'autre et l'ouverture au monde en général; et *d'autre part* l'expérimentation organisée, l'expérimental comme 'voyage organisé'.¹³⁸

The word *expérience*, experience and experiment, is doing double duty here. On the one hand, both parts of it refer to a voyage into the unknown; on the other hand, it evokes the organised structure of experimentation, designed to secure knowledge, with the outcome predicted in advance. And what about the 'entre' between these two experiences?

Expérience *entre* deux expériences [...] Que signifie cet *entre*? L'*entre* signifie peut-être que l'expérience à laquelle je me réfère, la pensée de cette expérience, ou cette expérience comme pensée, ne se laisse pas encore déterminer à partir des oppositions reçues, par exemple nature/technique, nature/artifice, non-travail/travail, expérience naturelle/expérimentation artificielle, etc.¹³⁹

There is no clear-cut opposition between the structured artifice of experimentation that we associate with rigour and laboratory workers and the more recreational and 'natural', free-flowing experience of a drug trip. Instead, there is a limit relationship, and a network of doubles emerges: 'experience/experiment', and the 'experience/experiment' *between* two experiences/experiments.

Neither / nor

Before we turn back to the question of experience in 'Experience of the aporia', there are a couple more features of the structure to point out. In this limit framework, the question of the 'and'—'ce qu'est le "et", ce que veut et ne veut pas dire, ce que fait et ne fait pas un et'¹⁴⁰—is of utmost importance. But this 'and' relates to and contains a great deal, including, as we've seen, the 'either/or'. Derrida sums this up here:

Même 'l'un ou l'autre' (disjonction ou alternative) suppose quelque 'l'un et l'autre'.
Même la barre oblique de l'opposition, et par exemple *et/ou* entre *et* et *ou*, ou entre *et* ou *ou*, suppose encore un 'et'. Ou *ou*.¹⁴¹

The limit structure is the 'both/and' *and/or* it is the 'either/or': the two approach and withdraw from each other at the limit. But what about the 'neither/nor'?

¹³⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Rhétorique de la drogue' in *Points de suspension*, pp. 241-67 (pp. 255-56).

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'Et Cetera... (and so on, und so weiter, and so forth, et *ainsi de suite*, und so überall, etc.)' in *Cahier de l'Herne: Derrida* (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 2004), pp. 21-34 (p. 23).

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 25.

The ‘neither/nor’ appeared in the example of threshold dialetheias above in ‘Black/white’. The figure also crops up in references to suspension, such as in Hill’s characterisation of Blanchot’s work as ‘suspend[ing] [...] all relation both to being and to non-being’ and dedicating itself ‘not to identity, meaning, or self, but to the infinite alterity of that which is unknown, to a beyond that corresponds to an idea *neither* of transcendence *nor* of immanence’.¹⁴² This does not simply mean that being, non-being, transcendence and immanence have no relevance here. If Hill is listing these figures, he thinks that they bear some relation to Blanchot’s concerns. And yet, Blanchot tells us that we are caught in ‘cette ambiguïté dans laquelle nous nous disséminons, ne demeurant pas, allant et venant sans cesse, toujours ici et là, et cependant nulle part [...], monde où rien n’est présent ni absent, où il n’y a ni proximité ni lointain’—neither here nor there, present nor absent, close nor far.¹⁴³ Likewise, Derrida comments that there are

certains marques, disons [...], que j’ai appelées *par analogie* (je le souligne) des indécidables [...] qui ne se laissent plus comprendre dans l’opposition philosophique (binaire) et qui pourtant l’habitent, lui résistent, la désorganisent mais *sans jamais* constituer une troisième terme, sans jamais donner lieu à une solution [...] le *supplément* n’est ni un plus ni un moins, ni un dehors ni le complément d’un dedans, ni un accident, ni une essence, etc.; l’*hymen* n’est ni la confusion ni la distinction, ni l’identité ni la différence, ni la consommation ni la virginité, ni le voile ni le dévoilement, ni le dedans ni le dehors, etc. [...] l’*espacement*, ce n’est ni l’espace ni le temps.¹⁴⁴

It is not that the figures listed simply have *nothing to do* with ‘inside/outside’, ‘identity/difference’, and so on. These figures remain of immense importance for Derrida’s project. Further proof of this is the fact that readings of Derrida which themselves emphasise the inside/outside distinction have positioned his work as ‘neither inside nor outside’, or perhaps ‘both (and neither) inside and outside’.¹⁴⁵ So, what is going on here?

The ‘neither/nor’ is another limit figure which both repels and adjoins, albeit now in a negative mode. The ‘neither/nor’ does not cancel out the ‘both/and’ or the ‘either/or’. It is a plausible extension of the limit figure, based on the following reasoning. Imagine two terms in a liminal pair, such as A/B. When we move from one term to the next, we leave one term behind (‘either/or’) *and* we retain a connection to it (‘both/and’). These two operations remain incompatible (or in/compatible), so there is an ‘either/or’ at work there too. There is an ‘either/or’ and a ‘both/and’: either A or B, *and/or* both A and B. But what if the term we leave behind is

¹⁴² Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 142. My emphasis.

¹⁴³ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 138.

¹⁴⁴ Derrida, *Positions*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁴⁵ John Caputo, ‘Derrida, A Kind of Philosopher’, *Research in Phenomenology*, 17 (1987), 245-59 (p. 247).

already doubled or split? It certainly is, in fact, because it is implicated in chains both smaller and bigger than it. So, the term A could be renamed X/Y. When we leave A behind, this amounts to not choosing X/Y. We have chosen *neither X nor Y*.

On Derrida's long string of negations, which I have abridged above, Marian Hobson is right in stating that Derrida implies and brings together both strong and weak negation. Weak negation 'denies both sides of a pair of complementary opposites (and thus leads to paradox)', and seems to function within the listed pair, whereas strong negation 'denies opposites which are not exhaustive', suggesting the inapplicability of both, and thus discarding a 'whole' pair.¹⁴⁶ Strong negation entails weak negation, since to deny the pair is to deny each term therein. Using my topology, weak negation is a limit within a pair (the version of the limit seen in 'Inside/outside'). Strong negation is a limit *between* pairs (the negated version of the limit seen in 'Structure'). Hobson remarks on the chaining effect of pair to pair, propelled by the strong negation of each one:

This has the further effect of increasing hesitancy, not just about the pairs, but about their relation to each other: are they additional or disjoint? [...] [I]t seems to put forward a pattern of dissymmetric but continuous extension through rejected pairs that would be negated, but from which there is constant movement on.¹⁴⁷

Though we have negated both X and Y, the strange thing is that we have also chosen both of them (both A and B, both X and Y), and one of them (both A and B, either X or Y). 'Neither/nor' is really just an extension of the 'either/or' (which comes with the 'both/and'): when the term we are putting outside or moving on from is two-fold, we include neither of them—in the same move, of course, as including both of them, and just one of them. Derrida's phrase '[n]i/ni, c'est à la fois ou bien ou bien' means that a 'neither/nor' is simultaneously an 'either/or'.¹⁴⁸

Lastly, given that, despite all the difficulties, there remains the possibility of saying no, parts of the structure become unreachable. The logic is the same as 'inside/outside'. It is just multiplied out along a chain. They are not behind a single locked door, but carried off forever in a chain of refusals (see Introduction). The repeated refusal of terms ('neither/nor') serves, as in a Derridian *dénégation*, as repeated confirmation of their relevance ('both/and') as well as their irrelevance ('either/or'). These parts of the structure are unreachable and reachable at once. Another

¹⁴⁶ Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 151.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁴⁸ Derrida, *Positions*, p. 59.

formulation of this might be to say that the term is *neither* unreachable *nor* reachable. The *Merriam-Webster English Dictionary* defines the word ‘either’ as meaning ‘being the one or the other of two’, as in ‘take either road’; but also as ‘being the one and the other of two: each’, with the example of ‘flowers blooming on either side of the walk’ and ‘plays either instrument well’.¹⁴⁹ By contrast with the double affirmation of the ‘both/and’, the ‘neither/nor’ is the ‘either/or’ turned inside-out and figured as a double refusal. Hopefully it is becoming apparent that the ‘either/or’, ‘both/and’ and ‘neither/nor’ all entail each other: the limit structure that gives us one also delivers the other two along with it. Like the more obviously figurative examples, these three ways of relating are all instantiations of the limit figure, and are related to one another across their own limits:

- 1) All of either/or and both/and and neither/nor /
- 2) Not either/or nor both/and nor neither/nor /
- 3) One (and/or two) of either/or or both/and or neither/nor

Experience of the aporia

The limit structure’s quasi-transcendentalism is more than an incidental feature. The limit experience pervades life, as though life itself were composed of paradoxes, or, better, aporetic experiences. As Derrida tells us, ‘[e]n fait il s’agit d’un seul potentiel aporétique qui se distribue à l’infini’.¹⁵⁰ The experience of the aporia becomes ‘the very ordeal of all experience’, of all meaningful structures.¹⁵¹ This section ties together the various strands of this first chapter with reference to the experience of the aporia. Derrida asks rhetorically in *Apories*, ‘Peut-on parler et en quel sens d’une *expérience de l’aporie*? [...] [U]ne expérience est-elle possible qui ne soit pas expérience de l’aporie?’.¹⁵² As with both transcendence and the closed borders of the *ipse*, the category of experience is not a given; in using it, we must avoid speaking of ‘the experience as such’, because the aporia cannot be experienced ‘*comme telle*’.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ ‘Either’ in *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2020), www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/either.

¹⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), p. 48.

¹⁵¹ Rafael Pangilinan, ‘Heidegger, Derrida, and the Aporia of Death’, *Lumina*, 21.2 (2010), p. 3.

¹⁵² Derrida, *Apories*, p. 35.

¹⁵³ Ibid. See also Derrida, ‘On Reading Heidegger’, p. 181: ‘If the experience of the trace is the experience of presence, then you have no experience of the trace. [...] [I]n the experience of the trace as such, the experience as such of the trace as such—precisely the as such does not work any more’.

Derrida approaches the question of the edge line explicitly in a topological register. He makes a distinction between the Greek words *problema* and *aporia*. A ‘problem’ focuses on the crossing or compromising of a line or border, such as the transgression of an *ipse*:

[L]à où se voit compromise l’identité ou l’indivisibilité d’une ligne (*finis* ou *peras*), l’identité à soi et donc l’identification possible d’une bordure intangible, le passage de la ligne devient un *problème*. Il y a *problème* dès que la ligne de bordure se laisse menacer. [...] Il y a *problème* dès que cette division intrinsèque divise le rapport à soi de la frontière et donc l’être-soi-même, l’identité ou l’ipséité de quoi que ce soit.¹⁵⁴

The threatening of the *ipse*’s sovereign borders is only a preliminary part of the puzzle, as we know, although it contains the seeds of everything that is to follow. Next, Derrida details the characteristics of the *aporia*. ‘Aporia’ denotes an impasse, a non-passage, a path that is barred or not yet forged; but, here, it also has a doubled, layered and differential structure just like that of ‘Inside/outside’. Passage and non-passage are coupled liminally in ‘la possibilité et/ou l’impossibilité du passage’.¹⁵⁵ The *aporia* takes place in the slippery, differential ‘structure de la temporalité’ discussed earlier in ‘Structure’, revealing ‘une dissociation instantanée du présent’.¹⁵⁶ It is thus ‘plutôt [...] l’*expérience* du non-passage’—a limit experience, the experience or experiment of the *aporia*.¹⁵⁷ In Derrida’s formulation, both ‘experience’ and ‘*aporia*’ tell of both the passage and the non-passage, though in terms of associations he suggests that *aporia* might tend to lean more towards the latter, and experience more towards the former: ‘la nécessité de l’*expérience* même, l’*expérience* de l’*aporie* (et ces deux mots qui disent le passage et le non-passage s’accouplent ainsi de façon aporétique), l’*expérience* comme endurance ou comme passion, comme résistance’.¹⁵⁸ The relation of experience to *aporia* is also a limit figure, not only ‘un *ou bien ou bien*’, but also a ‘both/and’.¹⁵⁹ Looking closer, the *expérience* is the same experience/experiment that we met earlier, in ‘Experiment’.

The *aporia* involves ‘un même devoir qui, de façon récurrente, interminablement, se dédouble, se fissure, se contredit sans cesser de rester le même’.¹⁶⁰ The plural logic of the limit experience, with all the doublings, splittings and contradictions that have been explored, is coiled up in this figure. This extends to the theme of exemplarity which has haunted this chapter:

¹⁵⁴ Derrida, *Apories*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37

On voit peut-être s'esquisser ainsi une logique plurielle de l'aporie. Elle paraît assez paradoxale pour que le partage entre de multiples figures de l'aporie n'oppose pas les unes aux autres mais installe la hantise de l'une dans l'autre.¹⁶¹

These 'figures de l'aporie', this web of examples (a thought which Chapters 2 to 5 will demonstrate and develop), interpenetrate each other. And each of them, in Derrida's account of the aporia, contains traces of the 'either/or', 'both/and' *and/or* 'neither/nor'. The 'either/or': 'dans un cas, le non-passage ressemble à une imperméabilité; il tiendrait à l'existence opaque d'une frontière infranchissable'.¹⁶² The 'both/and': 'Dans un autre cas, le non-passage, l'impasse de l'aporie tient au fait qu'il n'y a pas de limite [...] la limite est trop poreuse, perméable, indéterminée, il n'y a plus de chez-soi ni de chez-l'autre'.¹⁶³ And finally, the 'neither/nor':

Et enfin, aporie du troisième type: [...] L'impasse même serait impossible. La venue ou l'avenir de l'événement n'aurait aucun rapport avec le passage de ce qui passe ou se passe. Il y aurait dans ce cas aporie parce qu'il n'y a même pas lieu pour une aporie déterminée comme expérience du pas ou du bord, franchissement ou non de quelque ligne [...]. Il n'y aurait même pas de place pour l'aporie, faute des conditions topographiques ou, plus radicalement, faute de la condition topologique elle-même.¹⁶⁴

No longer able to constitute itself around a limit-line, the very aporia itself is now slipping away into the 'neither/nor', which (as explored just a moment ago in 'Neither/nor') is the potentially radical distancing that comes as a consequence of the other two logics: the structure creates un/reachable terms which, by way of multiple limit structures, stay further out of the way than any others.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 45-47.

Chapter 2: Literature and the Limit Experience

Chapter 1 suggests that the experience of the im/possible is fundamentally and emergently ubiquitous in systems produced by interrelated combinations of elements. This aporetic structure affects all systems of meaning and meaning-making, and literature is just one such system among others. Narrowing our focus to literature—and from Chapter 3 onwards, even to one generic subclass of literature, that is to say, poetry—as a particular or privileged site for this experience is not necessarily intuitive. This chapter tackles the question: why has literature become such a focal point for Blanchot, Derrida, and other thinkers of the limit experience? I pursue some non-exhaustive but prominent examples of how critics and theorists have hitherto connected literature and the poetic with the limit experience. The accumulative mode of enumeration, structured as examples of literary limit experiences, paves the way for the discussion of exemplarity in Chapter 3. These examples support my argument insofar as they help to demonstrate what many critics have argued before now: that literature is important in and relevant to the experience of the limit.

I have no grievance with the literary-theoretical analysis relayed in this chapter, except that I find many of these framings—to a greater or lesser extent—excessively individualistic, in that they lack a full apprehension of the more general framework in which they sit. In Chapter 3, it will be a matter of *expanding* the analysis around the importance of literature—or, to be even more precise, providing an explanation for the current state of the field that, in doing so, goes beyond it, and advocates for poetry's importance. Before beginning with examples, then, I would like to highlight three significant avenues along which the analysis has not yet been pushed to its own conclusions.

Observations

- 1) Recalling the question motivating us here (why and how is literature a privileged site for the limit experience?), it is notable that none of the arguments advanced in this section really account for why literature is a privileged site *over life itself or any of the other examples of the limit experience*. Writing is given a special status by admirers of Blanchot's thought, but, as Paul Hegarty indicates: 'The point is made (perhaps too often) that Blanchot's literature is about literature, which in turn is about its own (im)possibility [...] (why are theorists so keen to reduce philosophies of paradox, death, love,

impossibility to the writtenness of the writing?)'.¹⁶⁵ The literary is certainly a fruitful site for encounters with the aporetic limit experience. But is it *privileged* above others? I would say so, but this argument requires careful treatment, and critics usually point out merely that the literary *is characterised by a given limit experience* or, better, hint that it *is full of limit experiences*, often very sophisticated ones. I would agree; but so is life, so that alone is not enough of an argument. Literature includes life, but life includes literature, so the inclusion of life in literature is also not an argument for the prominence afforded to literature (in a sense, *over* life) here. (My argument in Chapter 3 revolves around a refreshed exemplarity that newly justifies the attention paid to poetry as a mode.)

- 2) Relatedly, the aporetic features of literature evoked here map inexactly onto one another. Even though a given feature may be presented by commentators as the unique trait that makes literature literary, as we discuss each of them in turn, we can see that, in the end, they are all connected together by various terms and equivalences. They are all limit experiences, structurally akin to the patterns disclosed in Chapter 1. The exemplary relationship of inexact equivalence or analogy between these doubled pairs (among themselves and with respect to other limit experiences) should not go unremarked: it is not just a curiosity or repetition. (It is, in fact, part and parcel of how literature comes to be an exemplary site of the limit experience.)
- 3) It is worth noting that, if and when 'poetry' is mentioned by name in these examples, it is almost never in reference to poetry as a mode or genre of writing as distinct from prose and with its own formal conventions. Rather, it refers to poetry as a subcategory or variant of the literary, an archetype of that vague quality known as the poetic. 'Poetry' here is not a descriptor unique to poems but is instead just another word for literature, 'poetics' (i.e. a theory of the literary), or literary language. In general, there is little real distinction made between modes of literature in this field of literary philosophy. I find this acceptable theoretically (since it is strategic for reasons of scope, and critics still address literature's liminality across various examples and from various perspectives), but it is an omission nonetheless. Similarly, critics have not generally recognised the formal and structural properties of a text as something overarchingly important in an understanding of literature and the limit experience. This omission is a running theme that

¹⁶⁵ Paul Hegarty, 'Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing', *Modern Language Review*, 94.1 (1999), 209-10.

I would urge readers to look out for in what follows. (In Chapter 3, I give some thoughts about how this bias against formal patterns and generic structures came to be generalised, as an inheritance from Heidegger, and how a refreshed theory of exemplarity can help to reinvigorate—and, in fact, relies upon recuperating—these lost elements, especially those of poetry.)

Im/possible

So, how does the limit experience play out in literary writing? As a starting point, Leslie Hill explains the links between literary language and non/relationality with reference to Blanchot, for whom ‘what is singular about literature’ is ‘the infinite paradoxicality of its essential non-essentiality and the boundless peculiarity of its relation to its own limits’.¹⁶⁶ As expected, there is a reciprocal relationship between limit and limitlessness (‘Limit/limitlessness’), in which the literary limit is ‘a function or effect of the limitlessness on which it is necessarily premised’ just as literature’s ‘limitlessness itself is inseparable from its own necessary interruption’.¹⁶⁷ This aporetic logic of the limit, in which the limit is both/and, either/or, and/or neither of these, is according to Hill ‘absolutely fundamental to Blanchot’s account of literature and the literary’.¹⁶⁸ The literary limit structure affects ‘the relationship between inside and outside, first and second, general and particular’.¹⁶⁹

I agree with Hill’s approach to literature and the limit experience almost entirely, save the above list of caveats. Hill acknowledges that what Blanchot and others refer to as ‘poetry’ is actually a style of writing rather than a distinct genre; he pitches the conversation as being about ‘that writing that [...] Blanchot continued till the end to address *as literature or poetry*’.¹⁷⁰ In this model, poetry and prose are made of the same type of discourse, cut from the same cloth. When Hill touches on Blanchot’s reading of Friedrich Hölderlin’s verse—a reading that turns on the tension between ‘two dissymmetrical forces’, the containing function of the limit and the threat and overflow of limitlessness—Hill claims that ‘The affirmation of this dual logic is [...] also an essential element in all Blanchot’s critical writing on literature in general’.¹⁷¹ The same

¹⁶⁶ Hill, *Blanchot*, p. 93.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Leslie Hill, “‘Distrust of Poetry’: Levinas, Blanchot, Celan’, *Modern Language Notes*, 120.5 (December 2005), 986-1008 (p. 1008). My emphasis.

¹⁷¹ Hill, *Blanchot*, p. 96.

conspicuous omission is true in Hill's treatment of the relation of poetry to the limit experience, which he frames around Blanchot's response to poet Paul Celan's death, an event he describes as intertwined with 'the possibility and impossibility of poetry itself [...] as an encounter'.¹⁷² There, too, the threads of Hill's analysis, following Blanchot, seem to involve textuality in general rather than poetry as a mode. Nonetheless, his analysis tackles various key aspects of the liminality of literature.

The main argument in Hill's article on Blanchot and poetry revolves around 'this possible-impossible relation with the outside'.¹⁷³ We could sketch out the connections here: a possible relation with the outside = limitlessness/an impossible relation with the outside = limit. (These connections could easily be reversed, since one could just as well posit that a possible relation to the outside requires a sense of limits—to produce the outside in the first place—and that an impossible relation is generated by limitlessness—where the distinctions required are simply not available and therefore no relation to an outside is possible.) This im/possible relation or encounter, in a sense, *is* poetry—just as it is literature and the literary in the above example. Poetry is interpreted as a turning, a disjunction, a change of rhythm 'which inscribes another way of being-in-relation, perhaps, one that is thinkable only in terms of infinite finitude, the limitlessness of the limit'.¹⁷⁴

The streak of liminal logic ('both/and', 'either/or', 'neither/nor') in Hill's and Blanchot's version of poetry is clear from their flip-flopping over the notion of trust. Hill writes that poetry is 'not a thing to be trusted or distrusted. Neither the one nor the other'.¹⁷⁵ This is the 'neither/nor'. As Hill concludes, the Celan's poetic agenda 'displays its trust in poetry [...] only insofar as it radically accentuates its distrust of all poetry'.¹⁷⁶ This is the 'both/and' and/or the 'either/or'. This turning reciprocity of 'in/finitude', 'dis/trust', and other similar figures is what Blanchot affirms as 'the groundless ground of all poetry'.¹⁷⁷ 'Dis/trust' would map onto 'the im/possibility of trust' just as 'in/finitude' would map onto 'the im/possibility of finitude', and so on endlessly with other figures. Literature and poetry themselves are figured as sites of this ever-revolving liminality.

¹⁷² Hill, 'Distrust of Poetry', p. 987.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 994.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 996.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1000.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Meaning

The fact that the limit experience haunts meaningful systems is not coincidence, but rather comes down to the fact that the limit structure is also held to be *what produces meaning* in systems. Following Ferdinand de Saussure's original insights on the subject, meaning is structural, and it derives from differential systems: 'Although meaning is in first instance produced by difference, it is at a more fundamental level produced by the structure: by the *relations* between signs that make up a language, or, to give this a wider application, between the elements that together make up a given structure'.¹⁷⁸ Discursive meaning is subject to the complexities of the limit structure (see Chapter 4, 'Textile'): 'Meaning is an endless web, each part of which depends on and refers to others, so that we never get a full, final grasp of what is being referred to. Meaning is always deferred; there is always further *différance*'.¹⁷⁹ The liminality of meaning stems partly from the unstable border around concepts, which disseminates references into each other, into other contexts, and into their referents. By Derrida's reckoning, 'à reconsidérer le problème du sens et de la référence, il faut redoubler de prudence. La "dialectique" du même et de l'autre, du dehors et du dedans, de l'homogène et de l'hétérogène, est, vous le savez, des plus retorses'.¹⁸⁰ Meaning is endlessly 'disseminated' this way, always haemorrhaging out of a given context, but also contained within it—underdetermined *and/or* overdetermined.

Language, meaning, and reference are sites of the limit experience. In the following quotation, Derrida further clarifies that words are a microcosm or, rather, another smaller scale example of the same structure that 'governs' experience in general:

C'est que cette unité de la forme signifiante ne se constitue que par son itérabilité, par la possibilité d'être répétée en l'absence non seulement de son 'référént', ce qui va de soi, mais en l'absence d'un signifié déterminé [...]. Et j'étendrai même cette loi à toute 'expérience' en général s'il est acquis qu'il n'y a pas d'expérience de pure présence mais seulement des chaînes de marques différentielles.¹⁸¹

A 'possibilité structurelle' blooms when marks are in/separable from specific references, and this can be extended to all experiential structures. As this quotation reveals, the intelligibility conferred by the limit structure participates on the even smaller scale of the mark or sign, too. A

¹⁷⁸ Hans Bertens, 'Reading for Form II' in *Literary Theory: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 60.

¹⁷⁹ David D. Roberts, *Nothing but History: Reconstruction and Extremity after Metaphysics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 196.

¹⁸⁰ Derrida, *Positions*, p. 90.

¹⁸¹ Derrida, *Marges*, p. 378.

word's coming to meaning via repetition is a limit between the unchanging identity of the word, which percolates through contexts and remains constant over time, and the flexible currency of its meaning in practice, its ability to signify differently according to its context. Its very sameness is singular (there is only one of it) but also general (it recurs across multiple examples). Likewise, its variability is general (it recurs across multiple examples) and singular (it can refresh itself to mean a new thing every time). The mark's liminality gives it a useful identity in a chain of meaning, through time and space: 'La différence, c'est ce qui fait que le mouvement de la signification n'est possible que si chaque élément [...] se rapporte à autre chose que lui-même'.¹⁸²

Non / sense

To return to Hill's article on the 'Distrust of Poetry' with this in mind, it becomes clearer that Hill's reflections on liminality in literature are situated in relation to *language*—with an emphasis on questions that speak to the limits of language, such as 'how to name the outside', if such a thing is possible, or how to apprehend 'the exteriority of language to itself'.¹⁸³ The relation of one term to its own exteriority or outside is a limit experience, whether that term is language or something else. The question of *literary* language's exteriority to itself is taken up with even more enthusiasm in the critical literature. The argument engages the liminal opposition between ordinary language and extraordinary language, which I refer to as 'extra/ordinary' language. Hill is against conferring value on a work or text simply by virtue of the fact that it is 'hoisted clear of so-called everyday discourse', because this defines literature only by negation—negation of 'the very norms literature on this account is in fact deemed to transgress'.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, to wager the distinctiveness of literature on this straight dialectical inversion would not lead us very far (see Chapter 1, 'Fluidity'). Instead of going down that route, the relevant current in contemporary studies claims that literature's liminality resides in the *co-implication* of meaningful language and meaningless language, of sense and nonsense.

It is probably easy enough to see how 'meaning/meaninglessness' could start to map onto 'limit/limitlessness'. Again, these connections could go either way, but in Blanchot's taxonomy 'meaning' is 'outside-facing' (like Chapter 1's *fluidity*) and 'meaninglessness' is 'inside-facing'

¹⁸² Jacques Derrida, *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 46.

¹⁸³ Hill, 'Distrust of Poetry', p. 1000. This seems to be true even when the stated topic is 'poetry's own exteriority to itself' (p. 995).

¹⁸⁴ Hill, *Blanchot*, p. 92.

(like the *ipse*).¹⁸⁵ Consequently, his mapping sees ‘limitless’ meaning as the fodder of ‘ordinary’ referential language, as contrasted against ‘extraordinary’, bounded, autotelic language. These two halves exist in a liminal relation with one another, so literature includes both aspects: sense and nonsense. In this model, for literary language to be a site for the limit experience, both sides of the duality must co-exist in it without being dichotomised or collapsed into one. Following Blanchot more closely now, we can see that literature is shared and divided (*partagée*) between two slopes of writing: ‘La littérature est partagée entre ces deux pentes. La difficulté, c’est que, bien qu’en apparence inconciliables, elles ne conduisent pas à des œuvres ni à des buts distincts et que l’art qui prétend suivre un versant est déjà de l’autre côté’.¹⁸⁶

What are these slopes? On the first slope, that of ‘ordinary language’ and ‘meaning’, we have the everyday speech of reference, where one can say what one means. This is a writing that faces outwards to others and to things. Here, writing seems to make contact with reality. But it would be naïve to think that writing could ever be pure reference, flush with the singularities of the real. As Simon Critchley explains, ‘the desire to reveal that which exists prior to all revelation—which revelation destroys—is destined to fail because each poem is a revelation and hence conceals what it is meant to reveal’ (note again the slippage between poem and literature).¹⁸⁷ Meaningful prose is always also impoverished or excessive in its expression; it offers us the referent, but the referent a little detached from itself, removed from its real existence (‘peut être détachée d’elle-même, soustraite à son existence’).¹⁸⁸ For Blanchot, this first slope is animated by a concealment or negation (*négativité*), because its operation is that of destroying the uniqueness targeted by the reference in order to refer to it.

The second slope of literature is what, in the words of Kevin Hart, ‘renders negativity unemployed. Literature will have no work to do—or, if you prefer, its work will *be* this nothing’.¹⁸⁹ This slope reveals the weakness of the aforementioned negative, by showing a language not reliant on its operation. It is a ‘double absence’, of both the deadly act of reference *and* the object referred to. It is a kind of self-reflexive Mallarméan end-in-itself. On the second

¹⁸⁵ It seems, in fact, more common for limitlessness to be associated with meaningless, the idea being that meaning bleeds out and, overflowing its container, becomes unmanageable, dissolute, and unparseable, while limits are more widely associated with secure meanings akin to bordered ‘definitions’ (the inverse of Blanchot’s two slopes).

¹⁸⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *La Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 321.

¹⁸⁷ Simon Critchley, *Very Little—Almost Nothing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 71.

¹⁸⁸ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 313.

¹⁸⁹ Kevin Hart, *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 86.

slope, writing is cut off from reference, becoming extraordinary and nonsensical. It is a floating realm of imagined concepts, absent of meaning except the circular non/meaning of referring to itself. But it would be likewise naïve to think that a purely conceptual realm can stably exist, a ‘pouvoir vide’ unsullied by any nod to reference or relation to uniqueness (see Chapter 1, ‘Ipse’).¹⁹⁰ The inward-facing *ipse* of the second slope inevitably faces onto its outside, revealing what it tried to conceal, meaning something when it tried not to. Even if I try to deny the negative by believing only in pure concept, I cannot eradicate the referential negativity of my own concept, so denial and affirmation of the negative remain aporetically linked. Blanchot warns: ‘Devriendrait-elle aussi muette que la pierre, aussi passive que le cadavre enfermé derrière cette pierre, la décision de perdre la parole continuerait à se lire sur la pierre et suffirait à éveiller ce faux mort’.¹⁹¹

Literary writing has an irreducible, independent (or, to use the Heideggerian term, ‘self-secluding’) quality that resists theorisation or mobilisation in the service of meaning. Blanchot calls this ‘désœuvrement’. As Blanchot puts it, we are responsible ‘de rapports nouveaux, toujours menacés, toujours espérés, entre ce que nous appelons œuvre et ce que nous appelons désœuvrement’.¹⁹² Writing takes the form of an *experience* of ‘un/working’, tipped between reason and unreason, productivity and unproductivity: ‘Écrire comme désœuvrement (au sens actif de ce mot), c’est le jeu insensé, l’aléa entre raison et déraison’, ‘comme non produite, non mise en œuvre, l’expérience du désœuvrement’.¹⁹³ Though these terms back onto and into each other, ‘désœuvrement’ is the ‘meaningless’ counterpart to the meaningfulness of ‘œuvre’: it is the unproductive matter which undergirds and undercuts productivity, whether in literary œuvres or the inactive negativity of the Hegelian dialectic. And literature involves the doubling and intertwining of these two slopes, sense and nonsense, common language and extraordinary language.

William S. Allen’s treatment of ‘poetic language’ and how it relates to the limit experience follows the same blueprint, looking to the play of ‘limit/lessness’ and ‘meaning/lessness’ to develop an understanding of the specificity of literary language. Allen claims that the etymological meaning of ‘experience’ is ‘a traversing of a certain limit, in this case, the limit of

¹⁹⁰ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 18.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 317-18.

¹⁹² Maurice Blanchot, *La Communauté inavouable* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), p. 93.

¹⁹³ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 594, p. 623.

language as it presents itself'.¹⁹⁴ Very quickly, the limit experience of *poetry* is established as being a property of language—and, more specifically, a property of literary language *as meaning/lessness*, since Allen then moves into a discussion reminiscent of the two slopes. 'The poem', he claims, 'appears as an instance of language that seems to evade or resist [...] any complete understanding' and is not 'fully used up in the act of communication' and yet, 'even if it seems to evade ordinary discourse a poem does not lack significance [...] although it [...] seems to refer to nothing, but itself'.¹⁹⁵ This is not dissimilar to conventional claims about poetry, such as poet Louise Glück's insight that 'Poetry survives because it haunts and it haunts, it is simultaneously clear and utterly mysterious, because it cannot be entirely accounted for, it cannot be exhausted'.¹⁹⁶ Poetry (although already 'poetry' for Allen has clearly begun to mean 'poetic language') bridges meaning and non-meaning, creating a thickened ambiguity.

One's positioning on these two slopes is precarious, mobile, and limitrophic. It seems to veer towards one pole, then suddenly switches back:

Chacun comprend que la littérature ne se partage pas et qu'y choisir précisément sa place, se convaincre qu'on est bien là où on a voulu être, c'est s'exposer à la plus grande confusion; car déjà la littérature vous a insidieusement fait passer d'un versant à l'autre [...] Là est sa trahison, là aussi sa vérité retorse.¹⁹⁷

Here we see the 'either/nor' ('la littérature ne se partage pas'), followed by a version of the 'both/and' ('[la littérature] vous a changé en ce que vous n'étiez pas'). (The 'neither/nor' involves passing out of literature, a moment which will be dealt with further down, in 'Outside literature'.) When Critchley says that 'the situation of the writer is thus always caught *between* the two slopes', this 'between' strictly speaking has the liminal status of the limit experience, rather than being a stable intermediate position.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ William S. Allen, *Ellipsis: Of Poetry and the Experience of Language after Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Blanchot* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 1.

¹⁹⁵ Allen, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹⁶ Louise Glück, *American Originality: Essays on Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2017), p. 162.

¹⁹⁷ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, pp. 321-22.

¹⁹⁸ Critchley, *Very Little*, p. 72.

Night/day

There is an ‘experience of ambiguity’ at the heart of this framing already.¹⁹⁹ Critchley asserts that ‘For Blanchot, the situation of literature [...] is *ambiguity*’ and that ‘*ambiguity is the truth of literature, and perhaps also the truth of truth, which is to say that truth is something duplicitous and bivalent*’.²⁰⁰ Indeed, as I am arguing, it is rare to find just one ambiguity, just one aporetic pair, because these ambiguous structures are always already multiplied (or *duplicated*): the ‘slopes’ model of ‘non/sense’ is inexactly mappable onto not only ‘extra/ordinary language’ and ‘limit/limitlessness’ but also ‘singular/general’, ‘transcendence/immanence’, ‘re/presentation’, ‘material/ideal’, and ‘text/writer’ or ‘text/reader’ (since the outward focus of the first slope faces the audience, while the second elevates the work as an end in itself). In fact, there is further complexity to the picture of the two slopes painted above, because the ‘extra/ordinary’ or ‘non/sensical’ language pair is not stable by itself. There is a double aporia going on behind the scenes—behind both ordinary and extraordinary language.²⁰¹

The aporia at work (or at play) ‘behind’ the two slopes of language can be conceived of as a refactoring or division of the linguistic aporia back to one of its constituent factors: the condition of im/possibility for both terms, which is itself im/possibility or liminality. For Blanchot, as shown, ‘par une de ses faces, la poésie fait sens, mais par une autre elle le défait’.²⁰² As a result of this duality, poetry ‘lie dangereusement la possibilité de parler à une impossibilité qui en devient comme la condition’.²⁰³ One way of figuring this background condition of a general ‘im/possibility’ is as an *origin*, though a problematised one. The text asks itself how to recover its origin: ‘Quelque chose a disparu. Comment le retrouver [l’origine], comment me retourner vers ce qui est *avant*, si tout mon pouvoir consiste à en faire ce qui est *après*?’²⁰⁴ When literature searches for what comes before it, its ‘exteriority to itself’, the limits of literature come up against their own common conditions of im/possibility, *a major one of which is im/possibility itself*. This ‘im/possibility’ is the limit experience of ‘Non/sense’ drawn out in another example, set back a level from specific concerns about meaning, almost as though it has been divided through mathematically. It is then given a metaphorical name by Blanchot: ‘night/day’, ‘twilight’ or ‘the

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁰¹ I think this is true for all aporetic structures, but this one has been given prominence by Blanchot, and that has filtered down into the critical literature too.

²⁰² Blanchot, *Part du feu*, pp. 75-76.

²⁰³ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 76.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 316.

other night'. Again, this limit experience is seen as characteristic of literature in particular. Literature is confronted by the other night, 'the night which the Orphic text contemplates as it fails to resolve itself in the calm of the *first* night'.²⁰⁵

The first night, to go back to the two slopes, would be the second slope, modelled on the inward-facing closure of the *ipse*; the day would re/present the first slope, that of infinitely flowing meaning. In 'Le Regard d'Orphée', the myth of Orpheus is used to show that the *day* and the *night* are intertwined in the way described earlier in 'Non/sense': the activity of the day, which, for our purposes, is making meaning, naming, and so on, is removed in the night, which is its intertwined opposite, providing a space for rest and for the fullness of the day's activity to blossom.²⁰⁶ This night also faces onto its outside: in Blanchot's words, the shifting movement between night and day produces a crossing point, an 'étrange lumière impersonnelle'.²⁰⁷ The movement of withdrawing and returning that relates the night to the day and vice versa is figured as sunrise and sunset, dawn and dusk. This is the schema given in *L'Espace littéraire*, where a second night appears, lacking the rounded purity of the first night: 'Mais quand tout a disparu dans la nuit, "tout a disparu" apparaît. C'est *l'autre* nuit. La nuit est apparition du "tout a disparu" [...] Cette nuit n'est jamais la pure nuit. Elle est essentiellement impure'.²⁰⁸

The tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is emblematic of the elusiveness of the dawn and dusk, the liminal moments that in turn come to represent the im/possibility of the day and the night. There is a 'both/and', 'either/or' and/or 'neither/nor' relation between night and day. Orpheus goes into the night, the first night, to bring Eurydice back to the day ('both/and'), but the two lovers can never fully meet because he cannot turn to look at her when the day is in full force, since the opposites, day and night, cannot communicate ('either/or'). What is produced 'instead' (though this 'instead' is in relation to *both* both terms together *and* each term separately) is neither night nor day but another night, a morning and evening glow ('neither/nor'). Eurydice is often considered to be doubled here: she is the 'night' *and* the 'other night'. I wonder if Orpheus should not also be doubled (he is the 'day' and the 'other day').²⁰⁹ Indeed, for Blanchot, this 'day/other day' structure is perceptible in Hölderlin's poetry:

²⁰⁵ Barnaby Norman, 'The Other Night: The Archaeology of Myth in the Writing of Mallarmé and Blanchot', *MHRA Working Papers in the Humanities*, 5 (2011), p. 1.

²⁰⁶ Blanchot, *Espace littéraire*, pp. 179-84.

²⁰⁷ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 318.

²⁰⁸ Blanchot, *Espace littéraire*, pp. 213-14.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70. See note 9.

Le Sacré, c'est le jour: non pas le jour tel qu'il s'oppose à la nuit, ni la lumière telle qu'elle rayonne d'en haut, ni la flamme qu'Empédocle va chercher en bas. C'est le jour, mais antérieur au jour, et toujours antérieur à soi, c'est un avant-jour, une clarté d'avant la clarté et de laquelle nous sommes le plus proches, quand nous saisissons l'éveil, le lointain infiniment éloigné du lever du jour, qui est aussi ce qui nous est le plus intime, plus intérieur que toute intériorité.²¹⁰

Here, the temporality looks backwards rather than forwards. The poem is not just the day itself: it is also the sacred, the day *before* the day, that which makes the day day. This 'other day' is what makes the day and the night possible without being anything transcendent (such as a god-like maker—it's too translucent and contingent for that; it is more like a twilight peek at that which subtends both day and night as their condition of im/possibility).

Imagining the temporal cycle of days and nights allows us to see how the question of the day or night's possibility is also the question of their im/possible point of origin. Taking the night as his example, Barnaby Norman demonstrates that we can imagine the condition and exterior of the night as a form of origin, thereby explicitly highlighting the temporal dimension of the metaphor (which is entirely appropriate given that night and day are temporal phases): '[t]he *other* night "appears" as the ever receding, ungraspable origin of the work; impossible to integrate in the work, it works towards its disintegration, or *désœuvrement*'.²¹¹ And the 'avant-jour' of dawn is also, structurally speaking, the 'autre nuit' that comes before the day in the Orphic model, reiterating the 'day/night' pairing and the importance of the liminal twilight.

Additionally, because of the circularity of the day/night cycle, neither day nor night (*and/or both/either*) can be said to be chronologically prior. Both origin and end—which can map directly and/or in reverse order onto sunrise and sunset—encounter liminality as a precondition of their ability to end or start the day. The liminal structure applies, then, to the end as well as to the origin. This is why whichever slope of literature one tries to move away from will pop back up again in its 'other' form: 'En niant le jour, la littérature reconstruit le jour comme fatalité; en affirmant la nuit, elle trouve la nuit comme l'impossibilité de la nuit. C'est là sa découverte'.²¹² Lastly, in keeping with this circular logic of beginnings meeting ends, we cannot assume that the Orphic quest moves from the second slope to the first, from night to day, i.e. as a quest for the general meaning 'prior' to any specific meaning. Even this is aporetically doubled: the first slope is also seeking its origin, the 'prior' general meaning that supports its referential meaning.

²¹⁰ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 124

²¹¹ Norman, p. 8.

²¹² Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 318.

To reiterate, this liminal im/possibility is seen as a condition of im/possibility not just for night and day themselves, but also for ‘the work’, for literature and poetry. The Orphic structure is conceived of as writerly and literary: ‘Écrire commence avec le regard d’Orphée’.²¹³ Through the figure of Orpheus, known in the Greek myth as a poet, literature becomes a mediator, a ‘medial way’ or a ‘liminal medium’ between worlds and modes.²¹⁴ More specifically, literature is characterised by Blanchot and his critics as the place where art begins to perform the contortions of self-reflection and to interrogate its own rhythms (its origins and ends): in other words, to ask the question in literature of where literature itself came from (‘Le langage de la littérature est la recherche de ce moment qui la précède’).²¹⁵ Hill goes so far as to say that ‘the unnameable night before night constitutes the only (im)proper object (or absence of object) that literature may claim as its very own’ as well as being ‘irrepressibly alien to it’.²¹⁶ Although this search for origins perhaps cannot help but take on the status of a transcendental quest (Hill calls the search for its abyssal origin and identity ‘the fundamental aporia’ of ‘literature “as such”’),²¹⁷ literature’s reflexive capacity for self-interrogation by virtue of its distinctive qualities is merely one example of the experience of transition in general, of becoming and ending, of the im/possibility of dis/appearing (‘ce mouvement par lequel sans cesse ce qui disparaît apparaît’)²¹⁸. It is merely one example of the problem of the origin. Additionally, I argue that it is merely one exemplary site where literature’s liminality is visible. That liminality is endlessly receding, split, doubled and reiterated across different examples. And each of those examples is invested with a level of importance by critics, who do not necessarily engage with a wider awareness of the incredibly close structural similarities that marry them all together in a differential matrix.

Genre

Let us turn our attention now to another cluster of aporias identifiable within literature, specifically in its relation to genre categories. To state the obvious, literary writing is often sub-categorised into genres based on formal characteristics, thematic content, and so on. Works fit into these institutional, general categories but they also problematise them, since no work can be permanently ‘fluid’ with its genre category (Chapter 1, ‘Fluidity’). This is another instantiation of

²¹³ Blanchot, *Espace littéraire*, p. 184.

²¹⁴ Michael Dillon, ‘Post-Structuralism, Complexity and Poetics’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 17.5 (2000), 1-47 (p. 35).

²¹⁵ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 316.

²¹⁶ Hill, *Blanchot*, p. 60.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²¹⁸ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 318.

the limit experience: there is always an outside and a further perspective to any box that is proposed.²¹⁹ In the same vein, structuralist Tzvetan Todorov argued that works of literary value create their own new genre categories rather than simply fitting in obediently to existing ones.²²⁰ A work surpasses and undercuts ‘its’ genre through the force of its singularity. However, it is also not possible to fall out of the boxes entirely, since for every literary text some relation with the literary is demanded and already exists. In ‘La Loi du genre’, Derrida exposes the so-called paradoxes that crop up when we define and demarcate literary texts. There is not a state of utter lawlessness nor a total unravelling of genre categories, but rather a law of lawlessness: a ‘loi d’impureté ou un principe de contamination’, ‘la loi et la contre-loi’, a relationship of liminal ‘*participation sans appartenance*’.²²¹ None of the generic labels we apply are perfect matches, but texts are recognisable within the system, even as inverted or rebel genres. Employing a structuralist tone, Derrida asserts that he will attempt to ‘formuler’ in as ‘elliptique, économique et formelle’ as possible a manner ‘la loi de la loi du genre’.²²²

Rather than simply proposing that genre categories are aporetic, Derrida goes further, arguing that genres can a) dictate what they should contain and/or b) describe what they happen to contain. These two ways of defining genres are not mutually exclusive; like limit and limitlessness, though not perfectly mapping onto them, prescriptive genres and descriptive genres are ‘ni séparables ni inséparables’ (as well as separable *and/or* inseparable).²²³ The terms of this ‘odd couple’ call to each other across a limit experience:

Mais toute l’énigme du genre se tient peut-être au plus près de ce partage entre les deux genres du genre qui ne sont ni séparables ni inséparables, couple irrégulier de l’un sans l’autre dont chacun se cite régulièrement à comparaître dans la figure de l’autre, disant simultanément et indiscernablement ‘je’ et ‘nous’.²²⁴

Derrida does map this onto limited and limitlessness when he suggests that normative and prescriptive genre involves thinking of its demarcation lines in purist terms: ‘il faut respecter une norme, il ne faut pas franchir une ligne limitrophe, il ne faut pas risquer l’impureté’.²²⁵ However, again, I would argue that these terms could just as easily apply the other way around, since descriptive approaches *can* be just as limiting as prescriptive ones (they are simply limited by

²¹⁹ See Royle, p. 14.

²²⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, ‘L’Origine des genres’ in *La Notion de littérature* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), pp. 27-46.

²²¹ Derrida, *Parages*, pp. 254-56.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* On the ‘je’ and the ‘nous’, see ‘Self/other’ later in this chapter.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

what exists, rather than by generic norms fed down). Either way, these two definitions of genericity are cross-contaminated, says Derrida; this is, as will by now be familiar, because of the ‘axiome d’impossibilité’, the law of impurity or principle of contamination that is ‘la condition de possibilité de la loi’.²²⁶ These two laws are counter-laws to each other but also prop each other up. In this specific case, this is because for a genre to be normative it also relies on the properties of the genre ‘on the ground’; and for a genre to be descriptive it must generate a sense of what is included by that genre, which cannot help but segue into a decision-making parameter about what may and may not be included in that genre. Limitrophie happens straight away: ‘La ligne ou le trait qui semblaient séparer les deux corpus d’interprétation sont aussitôt affectés d’une perturbation essentielle [...] division interne du trait’.²²⁷ When the ‘trait’ that marks the edge of belonging of the genre becomes divided and/or doubled in this way, it creates a sort of pocket at the margin, a yawning limitrophie, a looping paradox or ‘fold’ (see Chapter 4).

Another limit experience concerning genre involves the fact that the marker of a genre—the category marker itself—does not belong to the genre it describes/prescribes. The idea here, again from ‘La Loi du genre’, is based on the premise that membership of a class is determined by whether some identifying (and identifiable) trait is present. Just as each member of the class is singular (unique, exemplary) yet belongs (and thus is representative, typical) (see Chapter 3, ‘Exemplarity’), so is each trait: it is remarkable, noticeable, but also ubiquitous across the group: ‘[e]n tant que marque, un tel trait distinctif est toujours *a priori* remarquable’.²²⁸ A given designation, say, ‘this text is poetic’, does not itself bear that trait, i.e. the looked-for marker is not poetic. To be in a genre one must have a mark but that mark cannot be completely *of* the genre: it is an aporia that yokes together inclusion and exclusion at the boundary line. Thus, being part of a genre is also a non-generic act. This point of connection with an outside is a point of liminality, an opening which prevents the genre box from closing (but also allows it to stand). ‘La re-marque d’appartenance n’appartient pas.’²²⁹

Crucially, and yet again, we are asked to accept that there is something fundamentally literary about this occurrence, this law of interconnection, something that has to do with ‘un certain rapport entre ce qui vient à peine de se passer et *l’origine de la littérature*, aussi bien que son

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 254.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 263.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 264. Derrida’s luminous language here evokes the discussion in ‘Night/day’: Derrida says that the mark itself ‘ne voit pas le jour ou ne se donne pas le jour’ and that ‘dès qu’il y a ce clin d’œil, [...] à l’instant même où s’y entament un genre ou une littérature, la dégénérescence aura commencé, la fin commence’ (p. 265). This blinking twilight is beginning and end.

aborigine ou son avortement'.²³⁰ More specifically, Derrida claims the aporetic self-awareness of the im/possible mark is 'absolument nécessaire et constitutive dans ce qu'on appelle l'art, la poésie ou la littérature'.²³¹ He asserts that there is something especially artistic, poetic or literary about this extra layer of self-awareness or liminality. Note again how 1) the poetic is conceptually blurred into the literary and 2) the layers of limit experiences at work in genre are then explicitly identified with this poetic literary experience.²³² This leads to an understanding of '[le] genre poétique ou littéraire comme genre des genres' (see 'Figure of Figures' below).²³³ Finally, we have also seen here how the notion of genre classification and of taxonomy in general becomes, in fact, a discussion of the limit: the *boundary* of the class, inclusion and exclusion, and their aporetics:

Cet axiome de non-fermeture ou d'incomplétude croise en lui la condition de possibilité et la condition d'impossibilité d'une taxinomie. Cette inclusion et cette exclusion ne restent pas extérieures l'une par rapport à l'autre, elles ne s'excluent pas, mais elles ne sont pas davantage immanentes ou identiques l'une à l'autre. Elles ne font ni une ni deux.²³⁴

Singular / general

Continuing the discussion of the various ways in which literature is a site of the limit experience, we turn now to look at how the literary language balances the singular and the general under the nominal umbrella of 'poetry'. In Derrida's 'Che cos'è la poesia?', 'poetry', as expected, acts as a stand-in for a more widespread literary experience. Derrida clarifies that he is talking 'seulement du poétique en général' rather than 'de la poésie', about an experience that can go even 'au-delà des langues'.²³⁵ He renounces literary definitions of poetry, 'coupant avec la poésie discursive, et surtout littéraire'.²³⁶ According to Timothy Clark, in Derrida's essay, 'the poetic is inherently contradictory'.²³⁷ Derrida impresses upon his reader that the experience of a poem is not about its title, form, content, rhetorical flourishes, its status as a made thing (*poesis*), its place in literary history, or anything else of the kind. The 'poetic' here is a particular *configuration and event*,

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 255. My emphasis.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 263.

²³² Derrida also claims that Blanchot's récit 'La Folie du jour' has *poetic* consequences ('dans l'ordre de la poétique', as contrasted with a simple account of an event). Ibid., p. 274.

²³³ Ibid., p. 263.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 265.

²³⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Che cos'è la poesia?', *Po&sie*, 50 (1989), 109-12 (p. 110), <https://po-et-sie.fr/texte/che-cose-la-poesia/?poetes=jacques-derrida>.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 111.

²³⁷ Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 265, p. 261.

structural, in space and in time: ‘Seulement une contamination, telle, et tel carrefour, cet accident-ci’.²³⁸

This crossroads is between ‘reader/poem’, a limit which here directly and strategically corresponds to an ‘inside/outside’, and ‘singular/general’. Derrida plays on the double meaning of the phrase *apprendre par cœur*: the poem reader does not read it in the traditional way, but becomes either its keeper (having learnt it ‘by heart’) or its repeater (having learnt it ‘by heart’). There is a contradictory twisting-together of one idiosyncratic notion of the poem—as a precious jewel that must be safeguarded in one’s deepest heart—and a second notion of the poem—as a reproduction repeated again and again by the reader through rote learning. The poem wants to be cherished and preserved as an ‘intangible singularité’,²³⁹ and interpreted in terms of itself only, like the *ipse*: ‘détruis-moi, ou plutôt rends mon support invisible au-dehors [...] sans support extérieur’.²⁴⁰ The request is to ‘retenir par cœur une forme absolument unique [...] le rêve d’*apprendre par cœur* [...] l’impossible [...] l’expérience poématique’.²⁴¹ On the other hand, if the poem is sequestered away *inside* the reader, this means the poem is exposed and dependent on an *outside*, and worse, on the generality of repetition, becoming ‘plus menacé que jamais dans sa retraite’.²⁴² Hence, ‘La mémoire du “par cœur” se confie comme une prière, c’est plus sûr, à une certaine extériorité de l’automate, aux lois de la mnémotechnique, à cette liturgie [...] qui surprend ta passion et vient sur toi comme du dehors’.²⁴³ As Derrida puts it, the poem remembered by heart becomes ‘à la fois public et privé, *absolument* l’un et l’autre, absous de dehors et de dedans, ni l’un ni l’autre’.²⁴⁴ So, the inside is singular/general and so is the outside, and inside/outside are cross-contaminated as usual. In the poem, these aporias move rhythmically: ‘le cœur te bat, naissance du rythme, au-delà des oppositions, du dedans et du dehors’ (‘interior/exterior’) and ‘[r]éitére en murmurant: ne répète jamais...’ (‘general/singular’).²⁴⁵

²³⁸ Derrida, ‘Che cos’è’, p. 111.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 110, p. 112.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 110, p. 111.

²⁴² Ibid., p. 110.

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 111.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

Ideal/material

The crossing-point between the ideal and the material is another place where a limit in literature has been identified by critics. The composition of the sign is thought of as having two parts, one ideal and one material, though these cannot be strictly dichotomised. Derrida's meditation on poetry's preservation ('Singular/general') is also connected to, as Clark writes, the 'drive to render the poetic event independent of any material support (paper, ink, any medium of archiving)'.²⁴⁶ This total ideality constitutes a *very* restricted perspective on literature's operation. Clark and other critics are at pains to show that the 'autonomy of the signifier' account of literature's potential ignores the crossover that occurs between ideal and material, and so becomes unhelpfully limited: 'assertions of the "autonomy of the signifier" involve a dichotomy of the material and the ideal, the argument being that the former (in the shape of certain phonemes or graphemes) often determines the latter'.²⁴⁷ As Clark points out, the 'causal efficacy' of this account would rely on *not*, ultimately, divorcing the material from the ideal.²⁴⁸

The aspect of the word that can be unthinkingly repeated could be strategically dichotomised as the material aspect, because it is the 'earth' of language, the unknowing raw material that language mills and reuses for multiple meanings. Plato's criticism of material writing as opposed to immaterial speech is analogously based on the understanding that it constitutes a form of repeating without knowing. Plato sets the phoneme over and against the grapheme, speech against writing, and the ideal against the material. So, the philosophical tradition stemming from his thought tends to repress the materiality of the word and treat the word as though it is an unmediated source of pure meaning. Inscription's material sensuality is reduced to a corrupted copy of the ideal voice.²⁴⁹ At best, writing has been seen as superfluous to the production of meaning which takes place, supposedly, in the ideal. Derrida is not in agreement with this interpretation, appreciating that *materiality is meaningful too*. This brings him to *writing*. Derrida is intrigued by 'l'espace étrange [...] *entre parole et écriture*' and what lies 'au-delà aussi de la familiarité tranquille' of 'l'illusion qu'elles font deux [are separate]'.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration*, p. 263.

²⁴⁷ Timothy Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 146.

²⁴⁸ Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot*, p. 146.

²⁴⁹ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 110.

²⁵⁰ Derrida, *Marges*, p. 5.

Derrida shows that Plato's attempt to secure the boundary of the idea against writing is unstable. Plato's 'eidos' (phoneme, speech, the ideal)—the immaterial, distinct, and self-present 'voix' which is supposed to produce 'la signification naturelle et universelle' and therefore to cultivate a 'un rapport de proximité essentielle et immédiate' between the idea and the soul that receives it²⁵¹—is not self-sufficient, but in fact relies on the material in order to function. Plato's conceit of simple, clear-cut oppositions falters when exposed to the fact that the phoneme, far from excluding reproducibility, relies on it, and indeed it retains a material aspect: its inscription in recognisable words and sounds.

Or cette ambiguïté, Platon, par la bouche du roi, veut la maîtriser, en dominer la définition dans l'opposition simple et tranchée: du bien et du mal, du dedans et du dehors, du vrai et du faux, de l'essence et de l'apparence.²⁵²

By highlighting their mutual co-constitution, Derrida troubles the idea that speech is pure ether, directly communicative luminosity (self-same, perfect, and untouchable) and that writing is all material, muddled, and meaningless. Lastly, Derrida's famous neologism 'différance' refers to the whole restless matrix: 'une structure et un mouvement [...] le jeu systématique des différences, des traces de différences, de l'espacement par lequel les éléments se rapportent les uns aux autres'.²⁵³ The words *différance* and *différence* are homophones which are *not* spelt the same way, so the difference between the two words is only clear in written language. Therefore, writing is not inferior to speech; it embodies different sets of meaning from those held by speech. Second, writing is not external to or even the opposite of speech: the *différance* between speech and writing can itself be meaningful, and this affects both sides.

This material corporeality of the word can be separated out, just not fully and finally (see 'Embodiment' in Chapter 5). One can introduce the non-verbal (non/verbal) aspects of the word into the more strongly verbal (non/verbal) aspects:

What I do with words is make them explode so that the non-verbal appears in the verbal. That is to say that I make the words function in such a way that at a certain moment they no longer belong to discourse, to what regulates discourse. [...] And if I love words it is also because of their ability to escape their proper form, whether they interest me as visible things, letters representing the spatial visibility of the word, or as something

²⁵¹ Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 22.

²⁵² Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 117.

²⁵³ Derrida, *Positions*, p. 38.

*musical or audible. [...] Thus, I explain myself with the bodies of words—here I think that one can truly speak of ‘the body of a word’.*²⁵⁴

In alignment with this tradition, Michel Dillon posits that ‘Language is a system of radical relationality whose very liveliness is a function of the duality it displays by virtue of always already also being in indissoluble relation with the radically non-relational’.²⁵⁵ As in ‘Im/possible’, in this formulation, literature is so relational that it contains the aporia ‘relation/non-relation’ (embodied in the forward slash itself—see Chapter 4). According to Dillon, this insight ‘ramifies in all sorts of ways’ but ‘finds its expression especially through post-structuralism’s poetic sensibility’.²⁵⁶ What is this poetic sensibility for Dillon? It is the aporetic crossover of the ideal and the material: ‘namely the idea that a poem is made of words, not of images or meanings’.²⁵⁷ This ‘poetic sensibility’ is that of ‘a certain experience with language’ which resists ‘codifying [...] signification’ and instead gives an experience of ‘meaning[/]lessness’ and of ‘that in the sign intractable to the sign’ (i.e. the material, illegible stuff of the sign).²⁵⁸ This poetic attunement is also ‘corporeal’, says Dillon, rooting it in the material and bodily aspects of language rather than the ethereal.²⁵⁹

Performative / constative

The word *différance*, thanks to the operation outlined above, is a performance of as well as a reference to its meaning, because it means two non-identical things at once and does so twice: first ‘deferral/difference’ and second ‘difference/*différance*’. According to J. L. Austin, utterances are either constative or performative, terms which map inexactly onto the notions of ‘descriptive’ vs. ‘transformative’ as well as ‘representational’ vs. ‘presentational’ (where the ‘re’ of ‘representation’ is also the ‘re’ of ‘repetition’). This is not dissimilar to ‘representationalism’, as defined by Karen Barad, since it keeps the layer of representation separate from the layer of action. For Barad,

representationalism is the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be

²⁵⁴ Peter Brunette and David Wills, ‘The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida’ in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, ed. by Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 9-32 (pp. 19-20).

²⁵⁵ Dillon, pp. 30-31.

²⁵⁶ Dillon, p. 31.

²⁵⁷ Gerald Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), cited in Dillon, p. 32.

²⁵⁸ Dillon, p. 32.

²⁵⁹ Dillon, p. 33.

independent of all practices of representing. That is, there are assumed to be two distinct and independent kinds of entities—representations and entities to be represented.²⁶⁰

However, the distinctions between ‘descriptive/transformativ’ and ‘constative/performativ’ are ‘never stable’, says Royle, following Derrida.²⁶¹ With a performative act, such as the US Declaration of Independence, it is im/possible to say, ‘on ne peut pas décider [...] si l’indépendance est *constatée* ou *produite* par cet énoncé’.²⁶² Is it stated/constative/descriptive/represented or produced/performed/transformed/presented? Writing is both/either/neither depicting and/or/nor transforming. Linking to ‘Ideal/material’ above, is description loftier and more ideal while enactment is more embodied and material? No, because the links also criss-cross: description and representation rely on material forms via the repetition of inscription, since they are ‘corrupt copies’; performance and presentation are events, so they rely on ephemeral and speech-like qualities as well as the more obviously presentational, ‘just-there’ qualities of matter and body.

Another way of approaching this duality is to think about the separation between a text and its subject matter: is it separate from it, describing it from outside, or fluid with it, actually part of its happening? John Phillips describes the poetic with reference to this structural splitting. The response to the question ‘what is poetry?’, Phillips claims, is split between two answers: poetry itself, as a performative response that can perhaps only answer for itself, and a constative description of what poetry is, which talks about poetry from the outside. It is ‘as if the answer has to take place on a kind of split level of discourse that is neither quite constative nor purely performative. Poetry must (be the) answer (to) the question, what is poetry?’.²⁶³ The external descriptor and the internal enactment of the thing are folded together. For Blanchot, ‘parler poétiquement, c’est rendre possible une parole non transitive qui n’a pas pour tâche de dire les choses (de disparaître dans ce qu’elle signifie), mais de (se) dire en (se) laissant dire, sans toutefois faire d’elle-même le nouvel objet de ce langage sans objet’.²⁶⁴ How interesting that there is a reversal of terms again here! In Blanchot’s formulation, constative description involves *disappearing into* what is described whilst textual performativity involves a distancing in order to let the text speak ‘for itself’.

²⁶⁰ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 46.

²⁶¹ Royle, p. 27.

²⁶² Jacques Derrida, ‘Déclarations d’Indépendance’ in *Otobiographies: L’Enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), p. 20.

²⁶³ John W. P. Phillips, ‘The Poetry Thing (On Poetry and Deconstruction)’, *The Oxford Literary Review*, 33.2 (2011), 231-43 (p. 232).

²⁶⁴ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 524.

Derrida, too, is always ‘work[ing] to abolish the distance between what he is writing *about* [...] and what his writing is *doing*’,²⁶⁵ though I think ‘abolish’ is imprecise: it is more of a limitrophic multiplying effect than an abolition of difference. Derrida pursues writing which attempts to ‘se livrer à une performativité poético-littéraire’ in addition to or as well as constative pronouncements (and note, yet again, the here-unexplained introduction of both literature and poetry into this definition).²⁶⁶ Continuing to think about the poetic as a site of this crossing, Jacques Rancière describes this paradox in the following terms: ‘[La] forme [du poème] doit être en même temps le corps et l’idée de son idée’.²⁶⁷ And, as Juliet Steyn affirms, in poetry we find ‘more than the simple presence of a “désœuvrement éternel”’; the actual work of poetry is, in its particularity [...] linked to the enacting of this complex relation; its being presented’.²⁶⁸ As this indicates, even poetry’s self-conscious *presentation* of its own liminal *désœuvrement* maintains a kind of *representational* streak, too.

Active/passive

The aporias of ‘performative/constative’ and ‘representational/presentational’ discussed above can be seen as further examples of iterability—as well as of ‘inside/outside’, since of course they are linked by the aporia ‘one/two’. This aporia of repetition asks the question: is the work *repeating* something passively or is it actively creating something new? The answer is: both/either/neither. Literature is ‘ce qui arrive’, though an actor is essential to allow that happening to take place.²⁶⁹ Let us now home in briefly on that aporia of ‘activity/passivity’, no longer in relation to the text’s own work in the world, but a new context: the author’s role and the aporia of ‘writing/being written’.

According to Hobson, in Sollers’s novel *Nombres*, Derrida alerts us to a ‘proliferation of doubles (the sense of a process of writing of the sense of process of writing of the sense)’.²⁷⁰ This seems to refer to a layered structure in which writing as an active process (‘writing of the sense of process’) merges with writing as a passive process (‘the sense of a process of writing’). This limit

²⁶⁵ Peggy Kamuf in Jacques Derrida, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 221.

²⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida and Derek Attridge, ‘Cette étrange institution qu’on appelle la littérature’, in *Derrida d’ici, Derrida de là*, ed. by Thomas Dutoit et Philippe Romanski (Paris: Galilée, 2009), pp. 253-92 (p. 274).

²⁶⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Mallarmé: La Politique de la sirène* (Paris: Hachette, 2006), p. 105.

²⁶⁸ Juliet Steyn, *Other Than Identity: The Subject, Politics and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 15.

²⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Passions* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 90.

²⁷⁰ Hobson, p. 81.

experience is married to another ‘similar series’, pinpointed as ‘(the process of writing the experience of the subject as writing) so that writing and being written fold into each other’.²⁷¹ This is the aporia of ‘subject/text’ and the question of which is doing the writing. Is the subject writing down his or her experience, or is the writing forming the experience of the subject? The (poetically) chiasmic phrasing just cited gives away that it is both/either/neither. The effect is rather like that of Derrida’s word *différance*, whose ‘-ance’ ending, Derrida writes, ‘reste indéciise *entre l’actif et le passif*. Et nous verrons pourquoi ce qui se laisse désigner par “différance” n’est ni simplement actif ni simplement passif, annonçant ou rappelant plutôt quelque chose comme la voix moyenne’.²⁷² Similarly, Jonathan Culler feels that ‘as in most other human activities of any complexity, the line between the conscious and the unconscious is highly variable [and] impossible to identify’.²⁷³ There are no clear-cut lines between that which authors consciously produce and that which they passively repeat as a conduit.

Self/other

William W. Young claims in a discussion of Blanchot’s *Part du feu* that poetry provides a paradoxical combination of safety and danger, annihilation and affirmation: ‘Poetry is a means of putting oneself in danger without running any risk, a mode of [...] destruction of self, that comfortably leaves space for the surest affirmation of self’.²⁷⁴ Alterity is not an attribute—it exists in relation only, and is therefore relational or structural in nature. On the one hand, reader/writer/text are alienated from each other by unbreachable walls of unreadability, which create ‘l’impossibilité [...] d’accéder à son propre sens [du texte], au contenu peut-être inconsistant qu’il garde jalousement en réserve’.²⁷⁵ And yet, the unreadable is generated by ‘une illisibilité qui n’arrête pas sur un front d’opacité. Au contraire, elle fait repartir et la lecture et l’écriture et la traduction. L’illisible n’est pas le contraire du lisible’.²⁷⁶ The unreadable also *sets off* the reading, makes it possible. The opaque limit of the ‘surface externe’ becomes ‘interne’, a point of departure.²⁷⁷ Unreadability (author/text barred from reader) is the condition of readability (imagined here as ‘access’ of reader to author/text), and vice versa. For a text to be ‘un/readable’

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Derrida, *Marges*, p. 9.

²⁷³ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 137.

²⁷⁴ William W. Young, *Uncommon Friendships: An Amicable History of Modern Religious Thought* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), chapter 5.

²⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, ‘Préjugés: Devant la loi’ in Jacques Derrida and others, *La Faculté de juger* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), p. 128.

²⁷⁶ Derrida, *Parages*, p. 161.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 243.

is also part of its ‘non/sense’ and ‘un/working’, but it is more intimately felt: this aporia captures the reader’s experience of being faced with the im/possible task of interpretation.

When critics write about an author or text, they keep their own voice but also incorporate the perspective of the other: this results in a doubled critical text. Derrida adapts his critical prose to its object of study ‘sans mimétisme, mais en incorporant en quelque sorte la signature de l’autre. Si la chance vient, un autre texte peut s’annoncer, un autre événement, irréductible à l’auteur ou à l’œuvre dont il faudrait pourtant parler aussi fidèlement que possible’.²⁷⁸ Incorporating the other’s signature, another text takes shape which is irreducible to either self or other, the critic or the author/work about whom the critic attempts to speak faithfully. The reader’s affirmation is both non-essential and essential. While a text still exists in some sense without a reader, for Blanchot, for a literary work to count as a work, it requires this liminal interplay: ‘l’œuvre est œuvre seulement quand elle devient l’intimité ouverte de quelqu’un qui l’écrit et de quelqu’un qui la lit’.²⁷⁹ And yet, author and reader are somewhat out of joint with each other and with the text; there is what Blanchot calls ‘une dissymétrie dans les rapports de communication’.²⁸⁰ Neither author nor reader can know with certainty what the text is or what it is going to do; it has a partial life of its own.

Literature also implicates the limit experience of ‘self/other’, in which one’s own subjectivity is found to rely on other people. The aporia of intersubjectivity undergirds subjectivity; it is an outside which is already also on the inside of the subject. Thomas Trezise surmises that ‘subjectivity expresses itself to the extent, and only to the extent, that it has always already been forced outside of itself, that it is always already intersubjective’.²⁸¹ For Blanchot, intersubjectivity is introduced once a narrative or poem starts being written, because the textual voice is inside/outside of the author’s voice: ‘La voix narrative qui est dedans seulement pour autant qu’elle est dehors, à distance sans distance, ne peut pas s’incarner [...] elle est toujours différente de ce qui la profère, elle est la différence-indifférente qui altère la voix personnelle’.²⁸²

Linked to ‘un/readability’, yet another answer to the question of poetry’s connection to the limit experience hinges on the notion of ‘un/translatability’. The encounter with what is strictly

²⁷⁸ Derrida, *Points de suspension*, p. 201.

²⁷⁹ Blanchot, *Espace littéraire*, p. 29.

²⁸⁰ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 5.

²⁸¹ Thomas Trezise, *Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 27.

²⁸² Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, pp. 565-66.

speaking ‘un/translatable’ is a kind of limit experience, and it is something of a cliché that poetry in particular is untranslatable, perhaps even defined by its untranslatability. Michael Holland has argued that poetry evokes a movement of untranslatability, suspended (as a translation) between source and target languages. For Holland, this is summed up in the French word *mouvement*, which ‘momentarily’ becomes ‘suspended outside of language, in between two versions of itself’ as ‘it occupies in the translator’s mind the same dimension to which, in the writer’s language, it refers’.²⁸³ Blanchot replies to Celan that they may be foreigners, but they are nonetheless bridged together by their two similar experiences of foreignness: ‘des étrangers mais tous deux étrangers ayant à supporter encore en commun cet égarement de la distance qui nous tient absolument à l’écart’.²⁸⁴ For his part, on translation, Derrida writes,

Un texte ne vit que s’il sur-vit, et il ne sur-vit que s’il est *à la fois* traductible et intraduisible [...] Totalement traductible, il disparaît comme texte, comme écriture, comme corps de langue. Totalement intraduisible, même à l’intérieur de ce qu’on croit être une langue, il meurt aussitôt.²⁸⁵

If a text is totally translatable, it ceases to have borders; it blurs fluidly into other texts, which replicate it exactly. If a text is totally untranslatable, its borders are so impassable that it ceases to be intelligible. And, as hinted, this untranslatable in-between moment or movement is also found in poetry. In poetry, for Holland, ‘what is foregrounded is the *movement* itself that poetry initiates [...] a permanent state of oscillating instability and *vertige*’, overflowing both its own and other dualisms.²⁸⁶ The aporetics of ‘un/translatability’ permeate a poem at every scale, large and small, given that each word and phrase of a poem requires un/translating.

Figure of figures

Having seen the array of ways in which literature comes to exemplify the limit experience, let us now illustrate the more dramatic claim that *this varied pattern of exemplification is what characterises the literary*. Another way of phrasing this is that the literary (or literature, or ‘the poetic’) comes to act as a *figure of figures*, a shorthand word for all the literary axes of liminality listed above, including their interconnections. In this way, we return to where we started in ‘Im/possible’: literature’s own liminality. Since literature has become an example of the

²⁸³ Michael Holland, ‘Translating *Mouvement*, Translating Movement’, *Paragraph*, 43.1 (March 2020), 84-97 (p. 92).

²⁸⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *Le Dernier à parler* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1984), p. 91.

²⁸⁵ Derrida, *Parages*, pp. 147-48.

²⁸⁶ Holland, pp. 90-91.

im/possible itself, it has also become a meta-example, an example that seems to encompass or explain the other examples listed in this chapter (in a way that ‘Self/other’, for example, does not so readily do—though it could). This also takes to a new level the idea that the generic subdivisions within literature are not relevant: literature becomes a figure, indeed, a figure of figures—and so does poetry. This is what motivates Michel Lisse when he remarks that the deconstructive project, ‘[e]n associant poésie et expérience à vif de la spectralité de la langue [...] en vient à faire de la poésie une sorte de trans-genre: il y aurait de la poésie partout, de l’essai au théâtre en passant par le roman’.²⁸⁷ Poetry is a quasi-transcendental uber-genre, the genre of genres (see ‘Genre’). In Derrida’s own words, ‘Ne spécifions même pas la poésie, car poésie est l’élément de sa langue même, le genre le plus général de tous les genres, à chaque instant, la puissance génératrice de toutes ses œuvres, à quelque genre qu’elles appartiennent’.²⁸⁸ Although the discourse does not expose the full systemic logic, this stage in the critical argument is important for my own argument. It takes us halfway to the conclusion: poetry and literature are, in a sense, exemplarity itself. As Chapter 3 shows, the part that is missing is the recognition that poetry and literature are not identical categories, that poetry is a generically and formally distinct mode of writing, and therefore that it is possible to argue that poetry is more exemplary.

Blanchot conceptualises the ‘space of literature’ as a universe with a negative rather than positive curvature, giving us the image of an ‘Univers (terme dès lors trompeur) infigurable, échappant à toute exigence optique, échappant aussi à la considération du tout, essentiellement non fini, désuni, discontinu’.²⁸⁹ This negatively curved space would call to humankind ‘pour la première fois’, compelling us to ‘prendre la mesure d’une extériorité non divine, d’un espace tout de question, excluant même la possibilité d’une réponse, puisque toute réponse tomberait nécessairement à nouveau sous la juridiction de la *figure des figures*’.²⁹⁰ The ‘unfigurable’ described here is not pure limit *or* pure limitlessness (despite the ‘non-finite’ descriptor). Rather, its disunified universality is down to the experience that whatever moves we make will lead us into new versions of the same pattern. As Chapter 3 will demonstrate further, literature (language, text, poetry, etc.) comes to exemplify this fractal experience of the limit structure. Being capable of conceiving of this hyperbolic space, writes Blanchot, is being capable of literature, since literature can keep bending and turning away from (without ever fully escaping) its own meaning, becoming the institution *of* the un/figurable.

²⁸⁷ Michel Lisse, ‘Apories de la poésie’, *Les Lettres romanes*, 64.1-2 (2010), 77-91 (p. 85).

²⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Genèses, généalogies, genres et le génie: Les Secrets de l’archive* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 28.

²⁸⁹ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 514.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

Blanchot describes literature as an experience of antagonism between pairs of impulses and features that are ‘irréconciliables et inséparables’: moving together and moving apart, meaningful and nonsensical, possible and impossible, delimited and shapeless, work and worklessness (*œuvre* et *désœuvrement*), all taking shape through the parallel demands of reading and writing.

Blanchot’s accumulation of these pairs in quick succession emphasises their parallel status:

Il est, dans l’expérience de l’art et dans la genèse de l’œuvre, un moment où celle-ci n’est encore qu’une violence indistincte tendant à s’ouvrir et tendant à se fermer, tendant à s’exalter dans un espace qui s’ouvre et tendant à se retirer dans la profondeur de la dissimulation: l’œuvre est alors l’intimité en lutte de moments irréconciliables et inséparables, communication déchirée entre la mesure de l’œuvre qui se fait pouvoir et la démesure de l’œuvre qui veut l’impossibilité, entre la forme où elle se saisit et l’illimité où elle se refuse, entre l’œuvre comme commencement et l’origine à partir de quoi il n’y a jamais œuvre, où règne le désœuvrement éternel. Cette exaltation antagoniste est ce qui fonde la communication et c’est elle qui prendra finalement la forme personnifiée de l’exigence de lire et de l’exigence d’écrire.²⁹¹

In *L’Écriture du désastre*, Blanchot asserts that this double movement is the rule of every writing and reading practice—‘giving withdrawing’ (‘le “se donner se retirer”’; also see Chapter 1, ‘Se rapprocher/s’écarter’).²⁹² Derrida, likewise, depicts literature as a network of limit experiences, interwoven with the fabric of everyday life:

un réseau différentiel, un tissu de traces renvoyant indéfiniment à de l’autre, référées à d’autres traces différentielles. Le texte alors déborde, mais sans les noyer dans une homogénéité indifférenciée, les compliquant au contraire, en divisant et démultipliant le trait, toutes les limites qu’on lui assignait jusqu’ici, tout ce qu’on voulait distinguer pour l’opposer à l’écriture (la parole, la vie, le monde, le réel, l’histoire, que sais-je encore, tous les champs de référence, physique, psychique—conscient ou inconscient—, politique, économique, etc.)²⁹³

(As mentioned, it is not yet clear why literature would be *more* adept at doing this than real life itself would, given that they both contain and spill out into each other: if anything, there is a sort of balance or symmetry here that could be framed as something like ‘literature/life’.) One can imagine this series of differential traces, co-referring across differences and unities, overrunning all limits while still maintaining them as limits (‘sans les noyer dans une homogénéité indifférenciée’), and dividing and multiplying those limits to produce a fractal multiplying effect. The limit experiences that characterise literature are all connected together by aporetic relations, across which meaning bleeds out and in, and Derrida, like Blanchot, uses the rhetorical device of

²⁹¹ Maurice Blanchot, *Une voix venue d’ailleurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), pp. 65-66.

²⁹² Blanchot, *Écriture du désastre*, pp. 170-71.

²⁹³ Derrida, *Parages*, pp. 127-28.

enumerating these pairs, to include ‘language/literature’, ‘writing/speech’, ‘literature/life’, ‘real/unreal’.

Blanchot’s ‘space of literature’ thus becomes a shorthand for the differential matrix of the limit structure—a ‘geometry’ of ‘the unfigurable’.²⁹⁴ The literary work becomes a richly interlinked space that ‘discern[s] proximities, one might say radical proximities, between what appears to be so heterogenous and distant’.²⁹⁵ Plotnitsky argues that these are not merely abstract thoughts about literature and writing, but rather multi-layered structures composed of figures and elements. As Blanchot puts it, ‘L’écrivain doit en même temps répondre à plusieurs commandements absolus et absolument différents, et sa moralité est faite de la rencontre et de l’opposition de règles implacablement hostiles’.²⁹⁶ The poetic is a common critical reference for much the same reason as ‘writing’ is here. Poetic or literary language seems to not only open up a radical non/relationality or limit experience, as in ‘Im/possible’, but also to stand in for that concept at a more meta-descriptive level.

Similarly, in Blanchot’s essay ‘Poésie et langage’, ‘poetry’ is held to be something bigger than an individual work; it is a quality or state that can be created by poems.²⁹⁷ This ‘état’ is on the one hand ‘très singulier’, produced only by the specific poem that produced it, meaning that ‘La poésie ne supporte pas d’être comparée. Elle est à elle-même inconnue. Elle repousse ce qu’il y a de distinct et de commun dans les images qu’on donne d’elle’.²⁹⁸ A ‘paradoxe’ arises, because this poetic state is also something transcendent, the same across multiple encounters pertaining to different poems (so the ‘origin’ and the ‘anteriority’ referenced here serve to emphasise the temporal aspect of this ‘generality’, which relies on continuity through time as well as space):

en même temps, il nous semble si fondamental que nous l’identifions avec le sentiment originel [...] nous touchons une réalité par rapport à laquelle il [le poème] n’est rien. Bien plus encore, nous sommes reportés à une disposition fondamentale qui nous rend comme antérieurs au poème [...] Les vers n’ont pas d’autre raison d’être que le pouvoir dont ils sont issus.²⁹⁹

Again, *the fact that poetry is capable of holding these two incompatible things together comes to be the primary meaning of ‘the poetic’ (‘the literary’, etc.)*. The field starts to refer to a

²⁹⁴ Plotnitsky, ‘Georges Bataille’, p. 172.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 173.

²⁹⁶ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 303.

²⁹⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *Faux Pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 157.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 157-58.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 157-59.

transcendent category, an institution. Poetry starts to mean: the im/possibility of the im/possibles. It is the limit experience at one remove, one layer of meta-metaphoricity above from the simple paradoxes that are everywhere: the figure of figures.³⁰⁰

The notion of literature as a figure of figures is implicitly related to and reliant on the examples, shown here, that present literature as non/sensical, as non/classifiable, as singular/general, as ideal/material, etc. No one of these is sufficient to explain its status, because that status seems to derive from literature's inclusion of so many of these axes, to the extent that it becomes exemplary. Literature comes to stand for the place, sometimes even the only place, which has the right to say everything and anything: '[elle] suppose le droit de tout dire [...] quel que soit le genre (roman, poésie, récit, essai) [...] Elle est, comme l'art, porteuse d'une déconstruction générale. Rejetant tout calcul, elle généralise la greffe et l'hybridation' (note the collapsing together of genres).³⁰¹ One important caveat: literature is not absolutely primary, despite standing frequently as a figure of figures. Each of the figures of limit experiences listed in this chapter (and in Chapter 1) is also a figure of figures. Chapter 3 advances an argument for why literature is nonetheless a privileged site for this type of exemplarity.

Outside literature

Lastly, I would like to dwell on one limit experience that is not held within or under the figurative umbrella of literature but rather stands at its edge: 'literature/life'. We are moving to the limit of literature itself now, where it meets its outsides. As previous thoughts about 'literature/life' and the 'neither/nor' have foreshadowed, since both involve passing somewhat out of literature, literature, even as a figure of figures, is not a closed system. It has an outside, albeit one that is implicated in a pattern of mutual inclusion as well as exclusion. There are always further layers that are outside/inside of the figure of figures (as indeed all its figures, bigger and smaller, are—inside of it because they are another one of its figures, and outside of it because they are not encompassed by it).

The intersection of 'literature/life', literature and its others, is dealt with repeatedly in this critical tradition. In 'La Loi du genre', Derrida states that 'en dérobant les bords qui séparent mode et

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 159.

³⁰¹ Pierre Delain, 'Derrida: La Littérature', Derridex, idixa.net, www.idixa.net/Pixa/pagixa-1703131018.html.

genre', a story or text has also 'débordé et divisé les limites entre la littérature et ses autres'.³⁰² In a previously cited quotation, Derrida lists all of the things that the textual 'tissu de traces' touches, including overrunning its own limits, even those that appear to be non-literary or non-writerly in nature ('tout ce qu'on voulait distinguer pour l'opposer à l'écriture'): speech, life, the world, the real, history, body, mind, conscious, unconscious, politics, economics, and so on.³⁰³ When speaking of Heraclitean 'Différence' (Chapter 1, 'Transcendence'), Blanchot implies that this literary mode 'may no longer function as literature in any conceivable sense' *because and in spite of* the fact that the definition he gives of it 'appears to permit us [...] to apply this term to virtually anything'.³⁰⁴ Text is interwoven with and flows out into life itself. Similarly, when Derrida suggests that he is perhaps neither a writer nor a philosopher, with this 'neither/nor' he is moving outside of and across the limit of both fields whilst still touching each and both of them, figured spatially: 'À s'interroger sur les limites de ces espaces, la "littérature" ou la "philosophie", je me demande si on peut encore être tout à fait un "écrivain" ou un "philosophe". Je ne suis sans doute ni l'un ni l'autre...'.³⁰⁵ We could imagine this as a kind of Venn diagram, situating us at the intersection of neither/nor, either/or, both/and philosophy and literature.

One of the institution of literature's outsides is life itself. While Roland Barthes argues that 'la vie ne fait jamais qu'imiter le livre, et ce livre lui-même n'est qu'un tissu de signes', this could easily be reversed such that books imitate—or, more accurately, *share a parallel structure with*—life.³⁰⁶ Tackling the work of Jorge Luis Borges, Blanchot perceives that 'le livre est en principe le monde [...] et le monde est un livre'.³⁰⁷ There is no 'outside world' to appeal to as a refuge from the differential structure of the 'literary' limit experience. This interwovenness occurs *because of literature's own liminality and its place as figure of figures*. While a reality exists *outside* of literature, it is a reality made up of meanings and structures, with all that entails, and therefore it is also included *inside* literature as a figure of figures. The world and the book 'se renvoient éternellement et infiniment leurs images reflétées'.³⁰⁸ This capaciousness of literature as figure of figures extends to life, to experience in general, whilst also standing on the edge of life (since life remains an outside as well as an inside): 'Expérience de l'être, rien de moins, rien de plus, au

³⁰² Derrida, *Parages*, p. 287.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-28.

³⁰⁴ Plotnitsky, 'Georges Bataille', p. 182.

³⁰⁵ Derrida, *Points de suspension*, p. 201.

³⁰⁶ Roland Barthes, *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), pp. 65-66.

³⁰⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 131.

³⁰⁸ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, pp. 116-19.

bord du métaphysique, la littérature se tient peut-être au bord de tout, y compris d'elle-même. C'est le plus intéressant qui soit au monde, plus intéressant que le monde peut-être'.³⁰⁹

In 'Ponctuations: le temps de la thèse', Derrida asks, 'quand et comment l'inscription devient-elle littérature et que se passe-t-il alors? A quoi et à qui cela revient-il? Qu'est-ce qui se passe entre philosophie et littérature, science et littérature, politique et littérature, théologie et littérature, psychanalyse et littérature[?]'.³¹⁰ Again, the parallelism of these listed pairs ('philosophy/literature', 'science/literature', 'theology/literature' and 'psychoanalysis/literature') invites comparison between them. Each of these institutional outsiders to literature are connected to literature by a limit experience. The limit experience acts as a 'string' that ties together literature and these other institutions. This string is both descriptive (the two fields are connected, and it shows this) and performative (the reason the fields are connected is because of the unacknowledged but nonetheless present liminality of the non/literary field). We will look briefly at the first two examples in the list here, science and philosophy. The field of scientific enquiry is a parallel field to the literary, for reasons developed in 'Experiment' from Chapter 1. Blanchot asserts that the limit experience is both *a scientific and a non-scientific process*, at the intersection of the two: 'Démarche donc, j'y insiste, de savant et de non-savant, à l'intersection des deux et permettant peut-être, sinon de les réconcilier, du moins de mieux entendre la nécessité de leur opposition'. Literature, which welcomes everything, is alone ready to welcome it: 'La littérature, qui accueille tout, est seule prête à l'accueillir'.³¹¹ The gap between these statements, the logical leap, is of interest here. Science stands both outside of and inside of literature as figure of figures. Literature both includes and excludes science. The aspects that literature both borrows from and lends to science—for instance, the fact that experiments are both scientific and a leap outside of science—are literature's own aporetics.

As with science, it is literature's challenge to philosophy by virtue of literature's very liminality that connects the two disciplines. Michael Payne suggests that the sharp conceptual distinction that has historically been drawn between literature and philosophy was strategically, even politically motivated: '[i]nvoking, as though it is secure, a distinction between literature and philosophy [...] has made it possible to put certain writers—such as Plato or Rousseau or Derrida himself—into the category of literature [...] because what they write challenges a certain view of philosophy'.³¹² There is a first-order connection between the two fields, meaning that each of

³⁰⁹ Derrida and Attridge, 'Cette étrange institution', p. 267.

³¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), p. 443.

³¹¹ Blanchot, *Amitié*, p. 268.

³¹² Michael Payne, 'The Survival of Truth after Derrida', *Cultural Values*, 4.1 (2000), 127-34 (p. 127).

them relies on terms and assumptions developed in the other;³¹³ but, more than that, in Attridge's terms, there is something about literature which poses a challenge to the 'what is' and to logical assumptions about essence and identity.³¹⁴ Literature takes Western-philosophical assumptions about what it does (e.g. form vs. content, subject vs. object, presence vs. absence, nature vs. culture, matter vs. meaning, aesthetics vs. morals, fantasy vs. reality) and shows up the liminal versions of the same themes ('form/content', 'subject/object', 'presence/absence', 'nature/culture', 'matter/meaning', 'aesthetic/moral', 'fantasy/reality'... as my examples in this chapter have sought to demonstrate), 'showing them to be other than the self-consistent, controlling categories they are usually taken to be'.³¹⁵ Rationalist philosophy supplies some of the conceptual scaffolding for the limit experience: transcendence, logical inference, the 'sense' in 'non/sense', etc.—and all of these are subject to the limit experience too. This disseminates *into philosophy the liminality for which literature has come to stand*. Blanchot adopts a compassionate attitude towards the resistance that philosophers, linguists, scientists and so on feel in response to this claim about literature as meta-canopy: 'Qu'une telle démarche ne puisse satisfaire personne, ni les linguistes (par exemple), ni les philosophes, on le comprend'.³¹⁶

This strand of modern French thought has been criticised for supposedly being irrational and excessively literary. In 'Comment la littérature est-elle possible?', Blanchot writes, 'C'est un fait. La littérature existe. Elle continue d'être, en dépit de l'absurdité intérieure qui l'habite, la divise et la rend proprement inconcevable'.³¹⁷ But literature is only really 'absurd' from the perspective of disciplines that operate according to different logics from it. (This brings us back to points raised in Chapter 1, 'Se rapprocher/s'écarter', when we saw that calling the limit experience a 'paradox' is a decision already laden with assumptions about the viability of liminal ways of thinking. It is also possible to use 'absurd' in an affectionate way, of course.) It is when literature is looked at as a category juxtaposed to other categories—rather than in terms of what it is composed of and how those elements interrelate—that it becomes obvious that literature is identified with 'absurdity' *because* it is closely identified with liminality itself, because it is a figure of figures. There is a double complaint here, a double threat caused firstly by the interpenetrating contact with a discipline outside philosophy and secondly by the high degree of

³¹³ Deconstruction not only scrutinises philosophical assumptions but also performs the fact that literature and philosophy are not sharply divisible by crossing easily and fluently between the literary and the philosophical.

³¹⁴ Derek Attridge, 'Introduction: Derrida and the Questioning of Literature' in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 2-3.

³¹⁵ Attridge, *Acts of Literature*, p. 3.

³¹⁶ Blanchot, *Amitié*, p. 268.

³¹⁷ Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, p. 97.

liminality of that same literary discipline (i.e. literature as a figure of figures for liminality). These two complaints are sometimes erroneously blurred, making literature the sole site of the ‘literature/philosophy’ or ‘inside/outside’ join (i.e. because of literature’s increased liminality, *all* liminality seems to be literary). In actual fact, literature is no more ‘responsible’ for the join with science and philosophy than *they* are. Though this join may not be admitted by the analytic Western tradition’s own tenets, their logic contains the seeds of illogic within it—and so, we don’t need literature for this, strictly speaking.

By the same token, liminality itself appears and disappears in the poetic work; liminality is an outside to literature as well as inside it, because it belongs to other disciplines too. Earlier in this chapter, in ‘Im/possible’, we learnt that poetry has been said to revolve around a ‘possible-impossible relation with the outside’.³¹⁸ We have now seen that, taken further, this positions poetry or literature as a figure of figures. This characteristic im/possibility, however, is also an *outside* to poetry and literature—like the genre marker (discussed in ‘Genre’)—because it is not strictly speaking only literary. In ‘La Parole sacrée de Hölderlin’, a commentary on Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin, Blanchot identifies this structure at work. He argues that poetic language cannot bring about a complete reconciliation of humans and ‘the Sacred’ (i.e. the ‘other day’ discussed in ‘Night/day’ above, another figure for liminality itself). ‘The Sacred’ cannot *fully* reveal itself in poetry; however, the poet can produce the mode of writing where the im/possibility of this revelation can be safeguarded. ‘The Sacred’ can both appear and not appear, according to the movement of dis/appearance discussed above in ‘Night/day’:

Comment le Sacré [...], qui est ce qui ouvre à condition de ne pas se découvrir, ce qui révèle parce qu’irrévélé, peut-il tomber dans la parole, peut-il se laisser aliéner jusqu’à devenir, lui pure intériorité, l’extériorité du chant? A la vérité, justement, cela ne peut pas, c’est l’impossible. Et le poète n’est que l’existence de cette impossibilité, de même que le langage du poème n’est que le retentissement, la transmission de sa propre impossibilité.³¹⁹

Literature liminally straddles even the relationship between liminality and liminality’s own outside. It is impossible for ‘the Sacred’ to fall into or to be fully rendered knowable in language, speech, or song, and yet this very impossibility can exist in and be transmitted via poetry, by virtue of the poet and the poem (‘l’existence de cette impossibilité’). Thus, by dint of being a figure of figures in a capacious sense, embracing everything, including things which do not seem to belong neatly anywhere, literature pursues this logic to come to re/present the liminal itself,

³¹⁸ Hill, ‘Distrust of Poetry’, p. 994.

³¹⁹ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 128.

which is not itself strictly speaking literary. Derrida describes literature as ‘une institution qui tend à déborder l’institution’ and refers to it as ‘cette institution sans institution’.³²⁰ The duality is highlighted forcefully with the claim that ‘[la littérature] est à la fois institution et contre-institution, placée à l’écart de l’institution, à l’angle que l’institution fait avec elle-même pour s’écarter d’elle-même’.³²¹ In this tradition, literature therefore comes to re/present the counter/institution *par excellence*.³²²

What of the philosophers’ complaint that literature is *more* literary than the disciplines it borders and consumes, that its derangement is more pronounced? In one sense, such protest is illegitimate: the figure of figures’ liminality cannot rightly be *separated* from the philosophical, because, by the logic of the limit, philosophy *also* contains the inside/outside join (and therefore contains the literary and all the complexity that literature brings) as well as its own structures of liminality within it. To restate this more plainly, the co-constitution of philosophy and literature voids one set of arguments for why literature is special, since literature’s mutual inclusion with other disciplines implies that those other disciplines also experience mutual inclusion. In another sense, however, there is truth to the idea that literature is a ‘better’ figure of figures than other disciplines. This could explain why Derrida states that ‘Mon intérêt le plus constant, je dirai avant même l’intérêt philosophique, si c’est possible, allait vers la littérature, vers l’écriture dite littéraire’³²³ and that ‘Mon “premier” désir ne me portait sans doute pas vers la philosophie, plutôt vers la littérature, non, vers quelque chose que la littérature accueille mieux que la philosophie’.³²⁴ Why this role emerges from literature and poetry specifically is explored in the next chapter. This line of argument also reaffirms the purpose of running through so many examples of literary deconstructive logics in this chapter: to explicitly show the working behind how and why literature functions as a figure of figures.

³²⁰ Derrida and Attridge, ‘Cette étrange institution’, p. 256, p. 262.

³²¹ Derrida, *Points de suspension*, p. 357.

³²² As I begin to do in the Introduction, my specific claim must be distinguished slightly from Bataille’s and others’ view of literature as an explosive counter-institution. Otherwise, it risks casting literature in the role of the ‘other’, in which it becomes definable as the place where rules and traditional models are broken, without duly heeding the institutional side not just of literature itself but also of that very breaking, which is also a sewing together.

³²³ Derrida and Attridge, ‘Cette étrange institution’, p. 253.

³²⁴ Derrida, *Points de suspension*, p. 127.

Chapter 3: Poetry and the Limit Experience

Exemplarity

Chapter 2 discusses numerous examples of the intersection between the thought of the limit experience on the one hand and literary writing, literature, and poetry on the other. As it confirms, examples of this conjunction have been pursued along various axes, by critics and thinkers alike. It is not yet clear, though, why *poetry* or the poetic would be a privileged mode for the writing of the limit experience, nor what the terms ‘poetry’ and ‘the poetic’ are supposed to mean when used in this context.

As the latter half of Chapter 1 expressed, there is more to the limit experience than individual pairs such as ‘im/possible’, ‘non/sense’, ‘night/day’, ‘general/singular’, ‘ideal/material’, ‘performative/constative’, ‘active/passive’, ‘self/other’, ‘space/time’, and so on. These limit experiences a) can be mapped onto one another, b) are structurally parallel, c) are therefore partially interchangeable as examples of the limit experience, and d) are interconnected at various distances. All of these aporias are intertwined together into a structural matrix of similarity and difference, with points of crossover, overlap and nesting to which I have gestured throughout Chapters 1 and 2. Understanding this network of relations and its fragmentary limit figures can help us delve further into locating the literary limit experience. We can really go down the rabbit hole, probing what it means if literature is structured as a matrix of interconnected axes of liminality, and specifically what this means for poetry.

Firstly, I would like to develop a model of the exemplary structure which can be found implicitly at work throughout Derrida’s and Blanchot’s own *œuvres*, throughout this thesis, and throughout the limit structure itself. Derrida and Blanchot structure their bodies of work using examples to reinforce and attract support for their hypotheses, and to show the efficacy of their methodologies. In *Apories*, Derrida gives a list of examples of aporias.³²⁵ These include: the border as limit or the border as tracing; ‘aporétologie ou aporétographie’ (highlighting the spatial, topological and graphical dimensions of the aporetic structure); limitrophie; margins of undecidability: ‘la liste interminable de tous les quasi-concepts dits indécidables qui sont autant de lieux ou de dislocations aporétiques’; the double bind (see Chapter 5); incorporation and introjection in mourning (and here Derrida cites books and pages where he has discussed this

³²⁵ Derrida, *Apories*, pp. 35-38.

opposition); paralysis and the “contradiction non dialectisable” from *Parages* (picked up in Chapter 5); iterability; im/possibility (phrased as ‘des conditions de possibilité comme conditions d’impossibilité un peu partout’); the other; the gift; and questions of juridical, political or ethical responsibility concerning borders. This remarkable list shows that Derrida sees his œuvre as many of his readers un/consciously see it: as a series of examples that exemplify aporetics. When Royle lightly and parenthetically comments that ‘for “gift” in that last sentence you might readily think to substitute “deconstruction”, “text”, “supplement”, “différance”, “the secret” and so on’,³²⁶ Royle is also admitting—especially with that ‘and so on’—that all of these terms are examples of the same thing: the limit structure. Blanchot, too, uses stories, parables, and commentary on literary texts as *examples* in order to build up his impressions of and theory of the literary and non-literary worlds, ‘using this or that recent publication as a springboard for further reflection [...] [on] some of the more important and urgent questions for thought itself’.³²⁷ (As noted in the Introduction, I have also structured this thesis as a series of examples.)

In each case, the examples in question are chained together by substitutions, across limits, but are kept together nonetheless in a ‘text’ or web of ‘différance’; this second text is fractally bigger than each of the examples individually, but remains structurally comparable. (We will come back to this idea of scale or size in just a moment.) As we have seen in previous chapters, there is one iterability which repeats itself across different contexts, aporetically constituting itself through those singular repetitions. As Derrida writes, ‘Il n’y a pas d’idéalisations sans itérabilité (identifiante), mais pour la même raison, en raison de l’itérabilité (altérante), il n’y a pas d’idéalisations tenues pures, à l’abri de toute contamination [...] En fait il s’agit d’un seul potentiel aporétique qui se distribue à l’infini’.³²⁸ Unsurprisingly, this is a parallel structure to exemplarity; indeed, one is the example of the other, and vice versa.

Next, we must address the question: how and why does the process of providing examples add to our understanding of the exemplified thing? The process is a little mysterious; Derrida speaks of ‘l’exemplarité avec toute l’énigme [...] qui travaille la logique de l’exemple’.³²⁹ Riffing on an epigraph by Denis Diderot, using the language of borders and limits, Derrida says that ‘passer les frontières de la vérité’ is considered a ‘défaut général’.³³⁰ What does this mean? Crossing ‘cette

³²⁶ Royle, p. 138.

³²⁷ Leslie Hill, *After Blanchot: Literature, Criticism, Philosophy* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 5.

³²⁸ Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p. 215.

³²⁹ Derrida, *Parages*, p. 256.

³³⁰ Derrida, *Apories*, p. 15.

étrange frontière’ and “‘se laisser emporter au-delà des limites de la vérité’”, for Derrida, seems to refer to a deriving of meaning from something beyond truth, allowing oneself to reason beyond the limits of what we know to be true.³³¹ The act of venturing out produces a ‘general defect’ from a singular one: hazarding something beyond truth allows ‘pour qu’un tel *défaut* déborde les cas singuliers, étendant ainsi sa contagion jusqu’à devenir “général”, il doit donc être possible, voire inévitable, de passer cette étrange frontière et “de se laisser emporter au-delà des limites de la vérité’”.³³² ‘Letting oneself be carried beyond the limits of truth’ is therefore a kind of iteration: it *reproduces* its conclusions in places where they are not strictly speaking justified. This iterability spreads out its ‘contagion’ beyond the limits of truth, and this is why it is termed a ‘defect’. I read this ‘defect’ as a description of inductive reasoning. Iterability is needed to facilitate us to reason beyond the limits of truth—limits which are not only barriers but inevitably also openings. Carried by iterability, and simultaneously carrying it out, we permit ourselves to venture beyond demonstrative truths in order to contaminate (or anoint) our singular case studies with that same iterability, and therefore to allow general rules to be inductively derived. As Derrida goes on to joke, it is a ‘general defect’ not just because it is a defect *of the general* but because it is so ubiquitous in human reasoning.

Versions of exemplarity have been criticised for promoting a dangerous strategic ‘fluidity’, the non-recognition of differences. Exemplary standards can glorify homogenisation and standardisation: for instance, Marie-Eve Morin writes of a scenario in which ‘man is the “exemplar” of the human’, so ‘it is by imitating it that one becomes truly human’.³³³ Similarly, Irene Harvey in *Labyrinths of Exemplarity: At the Limits of Deconstruction* contends that exemplarity is exclusionary (the flipside of fluidity, but based on a similar logic, since it fails to recognise difference in much the same way—see Chapter 1). Exemplarity can be used to exclude or marginalise by enforcing its standards. For Harvey, the notion that ‘meaning is structured by exemplarity’ becomes a Western-philosophical obsession with ‘the part/whole consideration’, but this forecloses the violence of exemplarity in which individual examples are demoted to mere ‘particulars’ while the transcendent structure they exemplify is elevated.³³⁴ Harvey goes so far as to label exemplarity ‘the defining act of patriarchy’ because it subordinates terms to the ‘X’ of which they are a copy, representative, or example.³³⁵ Harvey rightly acknowledges that a)

³³¹ Ibid., p. 15.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Morin, p. 166.

³³⁴ Irene Harvey, *Labyrinths of Exemplarity: At the Limits of Deconstruction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 211.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 212.

exemplarity is governed by the ‘matrix of general/particular’, otherwise known as ‘the problem of the one and the many, the problem of induction versus deduction, the quest for foundations, and so forth’;³³⁶ b) exemplarity can be a type of inductive reasoning;³³⁷ and c) that there is a complex, perhaps ‘oscillat[ing]’ interrelationality between exemplifier and exemplified’.³³⁸ For Harvey, moving away from the ‘singular/general’ matrix towards one made up of ‘exemplifier’ and ‘exemplified’ brings out the stakes more clearly, as for her they not only ‘coestablish each other’s identity’ but do so in a hierarchical way.³³⁹

This narrowly hierarchical version of exemplarity is not the one adopted here. Firstly, *contra* Harvey, examples are not subordinated to exemplarity as a single transcendent term. Just as Derrida and Blanchot divide up their writings by theme and topic, and in doing so allow the conceptual consequences of their own works to emerge, the approach remains slightly oblique, diagonal, indirect, circling. As the iterated observations are integrated, the *reliability* of our experiment—our experiment, our example—increases. Derrida did not write just one book, because inductively each one proves the hypothesis a little more, shows us the way a little more. Second, *contra* Morin, if some examples are *more* exemplary than others (as detailed later in this chapter), this does not mean that other examples are downgraded or subordinated within a fixed or hegemonic hierarchy of value. Other differentiation is possible. One of the major benefits of approaching the limit structure by means of examples is that the approach is non-linear: every approach is good, every approach contributes a little more to the overall picture. Examples can never be fully discarded once they’ve been broached. A counterexample is ‘but also’ rather than a ‘but’ that annuls what went before (‘not ... but’) (see Chapter 4, ‘Substitution’). *All* the examples of a thing are exemplary of it.

As a reminder, Chapter 1, ‘Experiment’, broached the errant empiricism of the scientific method, in which the experience or experiment (both captured in the word ‘expérience’) evokes ‘une traversée avec le corps, [...] un espace qui n’est pas donné d’avance mais qui s’ouvre à mesure qu’on s’avance’.³⁴⁰ In ‘La Mythologie blanche’—though the details are not essential here—Derrida proposes that we form a hypothesis (‘Tenons provisoirement cette loi pour une hypothèse’).³⁴¹ Next, we should test it against various examples, to see whether it holds its own

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 211.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 259.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 141.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 134.

³⁴⁰ Derrida, *Points de suspension*, p. 221.

³⁴¹ Derrida, *Marges*, p. 273.

against the reality and whether it can in turn shed light on that reality, ‘en essayant de la vérifier à travers des “exemples”’.³⁴² The scientific vocabulary of ‘hypothesis’ appeals to the experiment. Much like exemplarity, experiments are a way to bring the empirical and theoretical into contact with each other. Exemplarity follows an experimental logic, too, whereby the more positive experimental outcomes one finds, the more firmly one believes in the hypothesis tested. This banal claim about probability is promoted on a popular-science website, which proclaims that ‘The more experiments completed by the scientist the stronger the principle is for the hypothesis’.³⁴³ Experimental repetition, or in other words, increasing one’s sample size, is important in validating or discrediting scientific hypotheses. As Adrian Currie and Arnon Levy write in ‘Why Experiments Matter’, ‘When the potential to be replicated is realized, experiments have strong confirmatory powers. A well-isolated, controlled but unrepeated experiment is less powerful than one which has been repeated. [...] Confirmation requires bodies of data’.³⁴⁴ There is a power to repetition and accumulation in this context. But what power is this and where does it come from?

In *Probability Theory: The Logic of Science*, E. T. Jaynes asserts that this power comes from induction. In Bayesian analysis, the probability of a hypothesis is determined using contextual data and this probability is updated iteratively as more data is gathered. Probability becomes akin to confidence in the hypothesis in question. Modern Bayesian analysis is, according to Jaynes, just another expression of ‘the inductive reasoning that philosophers like Hume and Popper held to be impossible’.³⁴⁵ ‘All scientific knowledge has been obtained by induction’,³⁴⁶ along the lines of the following procedure:

If predictions made by a theory are borne out by future observation, then we become more confident of the hypotheses that led to them; and if the predictions never fail in vast numbers of tests we come eventually to call those hypotheses ‘physical laws’. On the other hand, if the predictions prove to be wrong, then induction has served its real purpose: we have learned that our hypotheses are wrong or incomplete, and from the nature of the error we have a clue as to how they might be improved.³⁴⁷

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Kimberley McGee, ‘Why Should We Make Multiple Trials of an Experiment?’, *Sciencing*, 25 June 2018, <https://sciencing.com/why-should-we-make-multiple-trials-of-an-experiment-12757977.html>.

³⁴⁴ Adrian Currie and Arnon Levy, ‘Why Experiments Matter’, *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 62.9-10 (2019).

³⁴⁵ E. T. Jaynes, *Probability Theory: The Logic of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 311.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 310.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 311.

For Derrida, one of the ‘définitions de ce qu’on appelle la déconstruction’ would be ‘la prise en compte de ce contexte [toute l’histoire-réelle-du-monde] sans bord, l’attention la plus vive et la plus large possible au contexte et donc un mouvement incessant de recontextualisation’.³⁴⁸ This attention to context is designed to underscore that we cannot accept the distinctiveness or the authority of a ‘given’ context, that we should be suspicious of the borders around contexts and aware of how they overspill. But I think this leads into a second implication regarding the virtue of expansiveness. In order to properly understand a context, we have to go as far ‘out’ as possible (‘la plus large possible’) as well as delving as far ‘in’ as we can (‘la plus vive’). In an interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta—and, again, the details here are less important than their implications—Derrida is asked whether his own texts carry a ‘double registre de production et de non-production, sans qu’on puisse privilégier l’un des deux termes par l’autre’.³⁴⁹ Derrida is inclined to agree, saying that he has tried to show in his work that writing carries this double logic within itself ‘structurellement’.³⁵⁰ He adds that he has attempted to do this *more and more*, following a logic of growing accumulation: ‘Je dirais que j’ai essayé de le faire *de plus en plus*, selon une règle de complexité, de généralisation ou d’accumulation croissantes’.³⁵¹ Clearly, he is aware that the hypothesis gets more powerful, albeit according to an always-incomplete inductive logic, with every example, expanding but also deepening, accumulating as well as homing in.

Brian Earp and David Trafimow argue that there is a general increase in confidence towards a hypothesis that has been successfully, repeatedly, indicated by experiments (and the same in reverse, i.e. confidence decreases if an experiment fails to yield confirmatory results time after time):

[S]uppose that Researcher A has published an experiment, Researcher B has replicated it, but the replication failed. If Researcher A claims that Researcher B made a mistake in performing the replication, or just got unlucky, there is no way to disprove Researcher A’s argument absolutely. But suppose that Researchers C, D, E, and F also attempt replications, and also fail. It becomes increasingly difficult to support the contention that Researchers B-F all ‘did it wrong’ or were unlucky, and that we should continue to accept Researcher A’s version of the experiment. Even if a million researchers attempted replications, and all of them failed, it is theoretically possible that Researcher A’s version is the unflawed one and all the others are flawed. But most researchers would conclude (and in our view, would be right to conclude) that it is more likely that it is Researcher A who got it wrong and not the million researchers who failed to replicate the observation.

³⁴⁸ Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p. 252.

³⁴⁹ Derrida, *Positions*, p. 92.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Thus, we are not arguing that replications, whether successful or not, are definitive. Rather, our argument is that replications (of sufficient quality) are informative.³⁵²

In the same breath, Earp and Trafimow insist that thinking of theories in terms of strict falsification or verification by experiment is an oversimplification, because the experiments themselves must vary, and so do the ‘auxiliary assumptions’ that support scientific conclusions. This at-an-angle, inductive approach requires iterability. One cannot make a claim directly but must rather allow the claim to emerge through examples. It cannot be done in just one go, and it cannot be done completely *at all*. This is because of the fact (and it will come as no surprise) that ‘reproducibility requires variation; a reproducibility experiment requires both sameness and difference’.³⁵³ Each example functions slightly differently, and the upshot of this is that replications can never conclusively ‘prove’ a hypothesis by induction: progress is asymptotic at best. As Eric Tsang and Kai-Man Kwan point out, ‘even in the “hardest” science (i.e., physics) complete closure is not possible’.³⁵⁴ Experimental progress is therefore a means of fulfilling Blanchot’s stated desire to ‘découvrir l’obscur sans le mettre à découvert’.³⁵⁵ This ‘halting problem’-type rationale (also discussed in Chapter 1) sheds light on the following comment by Clark about the poetic: ‘it is never inconceivable that, at any time, a new poem may arrive whose effect is precisely to discredit any general poetics already in existence’.³⁵⁶

Returning now to post-structuralist exemplarity, it is now clear why Rodolphe Gasché’s analysis of the Derridian disseminating structure is correct to emphasise that what he calls ‘infrastructures’ (in my terminology here, this refers to ‘examples’) of this economy are ‘not *strictu sensu* transcendentals of conditions or possibilities; since the unity of these originary syntheses is not unitary, their explicatory power is not absolute’.³⁵⁷ This quasi-transcendence (see Chapter 1) is because of the problem of exemplarity and induction: it never leads to a theologically tight, top-down explanation. Each example in the structural matrix can come to be primary, since they are substitutable for one another, but since this is true of every example, none is truly primary:

³⁵² Brian D. Earp and David Trafimow, ‘Replication, Falsification, and the Crisis of Confidence in Social Psychology’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6.621 (May 2015), p. 8.

³⁵³ Odd Erik Gundersen, ‘The Fundamental Principles of Reproducibility’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 379.2197 (May 2021), <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsta.2020.0210#d1e1281>.

³⁵⁴ Eric W. K. Tsang and Kai-Man Kwan, ‘Replication and Theory Development in Organizational Science: A Critical Realist Perspective’, *The Academy of Management Review*, 24.4 (1999), 759-80 (p. 763).

³⁵⁵ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 73.

³⁵⁶ Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration*, p. 260.

³⁵⁷ Gasché, p. 224. Claims to usefulness are instead quasi-transcendental, ‘strategic, contextual, and historical’.

Each infrastructure [...] can ultimately come to represent the whole chain of infrastructures, or what Derrida calls text in an infrastructural sense [...]. Although each singular infrastructure is one among others, each one also describes the chain itself, the being-chain of an infrastructural chain [...]. Owing to this possibility of each infrastructure to inscribe within itself the being-chain of the chain, each infrastructure becomes the nucleus of a system; but since each infrastructure can and must assume this role, no system is ultimately possible on the level of the infrastructures. What can be grasped, however, in the play of substitution of the infrastructures is the *general system*.³⁵⁸

Compression

Poetry itself is exemplary—a special case, unusually good at its task of illustrating this phenomenon—because it is the most representative, the most average, not unusual at all, elliptical in its genericness. The notion of *accumulation* via nodes of compression, bunchings in space/time, helps us to picture how this aporetic, double-sided exemplarity applies to poetry. The accumulation of examples produces generality while the bunching produces the status of a good, unusually good, example.

As explained in the Introduction, the notion of compression is slightly different to approaches in which the extreme limit of the limit experience is considered to be where that experience reaches its climax. Hill writes that, for Blanchot, ‘literature is what arises when the relation between limitlessness and the limit is pursued to the point of its limitlessness’.³⁵⁹ This is already a so-called paradoxical formulation (the ‘point’ here implying a *limit* as well as extreme limitlessness). But what is this ‘point’? How would we know if we were there? Hill asserts that Blanchot ‘pushes the paradox of the limitlessness of the limit to the *extreme point* of its necessary impossibility’, creating, once that point is reached in Blanchot’s text, ‘a textual space which no longer allows one to discriminate with finality between what is inside and what is outside, what is general and what is singular’.³⁶⁰ *But—this difficulty is always there.* There is never *not* some complication around the finality of discrimination. So, this concept of an ‘extreme point’ is not, when it comes down to it, particularly helpful. It doesn’t do enough to explain how this phenomenon, this double-edged liminality, could become more acute at times and less so at others. For me, it is not a question of spatial *extent* so much as a question of increases and decreases in the accumulation and density of those limit experiences.

³⁵⁸ Gasché, p. 224.

³⁵⁹ Hill, *Blanchot*, p. 95.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

From the scientific perspective, experimental reasoning involves a form of ‘highly important detective work’³⁶¹ using carefully chosen case studies. It is not necessary or possible to take the whole world or system into an experiment design.³⁶² We have to represent a general problem within a slimmer, more approachable scope relative to the capacities of the experimenter:

When a biologist attempts to investigate some general problem, let us say, of genetics, it is very important that he should choose some particular species of plants or animals that lends itself well to an experimental study of his problem. When a chemist intends to investigate some general problem about, let us say, the velocity of chemical reactions, it is very important that he should choose some particular substances on which experiments relevant to his problem can be conveniently made.³⁶³

How do we choose what to experiment on, which examples to use, to further our understanding of a hypothesis? As we have just seen, there is some ‘virtue’ in accumulation, in scale, in size of sample. The same logic, I suggest, might inform one’s choice of example. Currie and Levy state that ‘in some experimental contexts a single “result” is suitable; we have in mind successful randomized control trials (RCT). But note that a single RCT in fact consists of a large number of repeated experiments, where results are summaries or aggregates. So we think an RCT is best seen as a series of (repeated) experiments’.³⁶⁴ When choosing an example to demonstrate a general issue, although no examples are primary or absolutely privileged over others, the *best* examples can be seen as the ones that take in *as many aspects as possible of the world under study* whilst retaining an approachable scale for the experimenter.

This framing elucidates how it is that some experiments or examples are privileged over others but not in a hierarchical or guaranteed way. Large numbers of experiments smooth over the anomalies in one’s selection of examples, one’s experiment design; and the *efficacy* with which an experiment does this smoothing-out—the very thing which leads us towards a confident result—corresponds to that experiment’s level of concentration or compression. To reintroduce our literary context, the central hypothesis to be tested out via examples in the next two chapters could be phrased as: *poetry is a privileged site for the limit experience because it contains unusually many examples of the limit structure densely packed within it*. This produces a situation

³⁶¹ Jayne, p. 311.

³⁶² As Tsang and Kwan assert, ‘The best we can do is control for conditions that are plausibly regarded to be relevant’ (p. 763), which is to say that we can only design our experiments as best we can, within our situational constraints and taking into account as many potentially influencing factors as possible.

³⁶³ George Pólya, *Mathematics and Plausible Reasoning, Volume I: Induction and Analogy in Mathematics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. viii.

³⁶⁴ Currie and Levy.

in which poetry becomes a (just *one*) really good example, compressed into a small space, while it also has wide applicability, reaching across multiple domains of limit experiences.

Compression is important because it ‘separates’ (without separating) poetic writing from other examples, be they texts or structures. This helps us to appreciate that, on the one hand, the limit experience can be there all the time and in everything *and* that, on the other hand, theorists, writers and poems seem driven to cultivate, access, or embrace it. They do so by showing up that which is already there *by means of experimentation across multiple examples*. The intervals within (represented in this thesis by forward-slash marks) and between (i.e. the connection between pairs) the axes of liminality in the poetic mode are closely knitted together, acute rather than diffuse, with tighter distances between them, and with a higher density of interrelations. The poetic mode and all its techniques produce a compressed and condensed version of ordinary reality, specifically the fault lines and limit experiences that make up our meaningful structures.

Poetry is the site of multiple, proliferating limit structures and experiences that a) are themselves connected by intervals and b) themselves exemplify the properties of the literary limit experiences as discussed in Chapter 2. Their exemplarity has a double register, in which each example supports the hypothesis by simply ‘being itself’ and performing the hypothesis immanently, as well as by explicitly exemplifying the claim and thereby contributing to a description of it transcendentally at a meta-level. Indeed, it is worth remembering that the structure of exemplarity is also performative: it does not just list qualities (‘singular/general’, ‘inside/outside’, ‘im/possible’, ‘material/ideal’, ‘present/absent’ etc.—the whole list from Chapter 2 and more), it also embodies those qualities. Exemplarity, including in the space/time of the literary work, is event and/or archive: it is the doing of the experiment as well as the record-keeping of the experiment. As Attridge puts it, writing ‘transgresses the boundaries that separate happening and object, speech and writing, *parole* and *langue*, original and copy, time and space’ and, following Derrida, ‘action and archive’.³⁶⁵ So, all these figures describe what the structure of literature’s exemplarity is itself like, what it is itself doing and enacting as well as what it is describing. For instance, exemplarity uses unique examples put in terms that make them part of a wider project (‘singular/general’) and works from inside and outside a given example (‘self/other’), understanding the example ‘on its own terms’ as well as relating it to interpretative threads. The very structure of the experimental process here is *itself* performative/constative,

³⁶⁵ Attridge, *Acts of Literature*, n. 3.

ideal/material, singular/general, passive/active; is/is-not; un/decidable; im/possible; inside/outside, and so on.

Caveats

- 1) Reflecting back on the limit experiences in Chapters 1 and 2, we are reminded that all those limit experiences are interconnected and ever-present in all meaningful structures.³⁶⁶ It is therefore compatible to claim that poetry encompasses and embodies *all* of these limit experiences, and that it is better to look at them iteratively, to accumulate a picture drawn from examples, rather than simply taking each in isolation. But haven't we just said that the limit structure infects all meaningful structures, in life as well as in books? Yes. So, why is *poetry* privileged in some way? Just as life and literature are intertwined as well as distinct from one another, the limit structure of poetry takes in real life as well as literary life; the numerous limit experiences within poetry are not just literary-coded but are often thematically much broader (as the following chapters show). Poetry is an instantiation of literature, and both are categories that emerge from the intensification of limit experiences drawn from situations that crop up in life. Different genres of example *all* exemplify the limit structure.³⁶⁷ In *privileging* poetry, then, we are privileging literature *over* life—in a very specific sense—but only because that literature *includes* and *is the same as life, only more dense*.

- 2) This experimental, exemplary procedure is no guarantee of anything: a hypothesis may be strengthened over time and space, over iterated examples, but it could just as easily be weakened. All this experimental procedure does is test the hypothesis across multiple examples and see what happens. What is more, inductive learning and deductive learning (top-down, from transcendent rules to local cases) rely on one another, so this procedure is not purely empirical or inductive: there is still always the chance of making errors or drawing wrong conclusions. My account of poetry as a 'privileged site' of the limit experience relies on a transcendent conclusion, drawn from examples but also now detached from them, attracting its own claims of authority: I am now in the position of making the claim that 'this account is true', just as I *also* perform my own experiments

³⁶⁶ 1) here is also a response to Observation 1) in Chapter 2.

³⁶⁷ See 'Balance' from Chapter 1. There is a sort of balanced liminality between these examples: each example vies with others through its difference but is joined with them as examples of the same phenomenon.

and demonstrate it (that which I already believe is true) through examples in the chapters that follow. No unimpeachable conclusion regarding whether those experiments have successfully proven their hypothesis will be reached, but the experiments might make convincing contact with their object of study all the same.

- 3) Nor is the virtue of accumulation proposed here any sort of absolute measure: it is based only on *scalar* qualities, the relative (not absolute) density of the experiment's experiments. Since an experiment that takes in the whole world first and draws conclusions later, though this would provide the biggest sample size of all, is beyond our scope and scale, we perform experiments: we look for patches of density or a particular bunching in the vast space/time of relationality. Poetry allows us to see these accumulations 'at a glance' without performing detailed individual analyses of limits, which heralds or permits a shift of emphasis. The scale is pitched against human calibrations such as our attention spans and the length of our lives. We could zoom out or in and find other patterns and patches of interest at a different scale. There is therefore a sort of imperfectly fractal quality to these shifting scales. The scale at which we apprehend a poem is also dependent on the scale of the poetic effects contained therein. Some poetic devices are incredibly economical at performing liminality (and therefore performing exemplarity). If the axes of liminality are themselves pared down and economical, the experimenter can see more of them in that 'glance'. This has the same effect on overall visibility as compression does. This is why some figures (such as Derrida's 'structuralité de la structure'³⁶⁸ or Luhmann's second-order observation) are particularly good examples; I would argue that poetry fits into this category too.
- 4) A further caveat is that what I have referred to as the broader web of limit experiences, the structure or matrix that I set in opposition to 'individual' limit experiences just above, is also in essence merely a matter of emphasis and scale. This macro-structure makes sense only when paired with the micro-structures of the limit experience; furthermore, all the broader figures (matrix, structure, *différance*, text, liminality, *neutre*, metaphoricity, and so on) could also be performed by *individual* examples because *all* are singular and general at once, and the meta- or macro- ones can't be transcendent but only quasi-transcendental, and all of the examples (because they have been picked out as part of a wider pattern) are also examples of the whole. So, while this thesis argues that there is a

³⁶⁸ Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 409.

macro-structure in poetry, and that it appears in a *more* compressed form in poetry than in prose or philosophical works, this is only a relative pronouncement. It is all a matter of scale, emphasis, and experimental visibility.

- 5) The same is true of my choice of poets in the chapters to follow. In addition to the other strategic considerations mentioned in note 25, the poets I have selected are exemplary because they demonstrate a heightened spatio/temporal compression and accumulation of this type of structure—a claim which is relative to the scale of my experience and life as a reader of French poetry. The structure evoked here is something that occurs in all poetry, all literature, all meaningful structures.
- 6) The descriptors used here, such as ‘more exemplary’ or ‘privileged site’, are intended to avoid any *absolute* value judgement or claims about which modes of writing are *objectively* better and worse. Contingent value can be applied only on a contextual basis (with the design of a given experiment). Here, that is whether there are more or less pairs, and whether or not those pairs are compressed for best experimental visibility.
- 7) My explanation here could come full circle, going *via* poetry analysis to explain why some things feel ‘poetic’ even though they are not ‘poetry’. Venturing out into new territory to propose that we call this compressed liminality ‘the poetic’ would be the logical conclusion, since if ‘this’ is the poetic it would explain why prose texts, sculptures, emotional states etc. may be called ‘poetic’ even when they otherwise bear little relation to poetry as a mode of writing.³⁶⁹ Thanks to exemplarity, poetry’s bunching becomes a meta-bunching in the ceaseless web of relation: that may well be what creates a ‘poetic’ effect, using poetic form as well as language, content, historical context, the play of readerly and writerly expectations, and so on. Arguably, the web of endlessly doubled limit experiences would then be responsible for the effects which we associate with the affect of ‘the poetic’ (which are not my main concern—though affect is touched upon in Chapter 5, ‘*Angoisse*’ and ‘*Jouissance*’): dizzying, disorientating, awe-inspiring, mysterious, beautiful, orgasmic. As a definition, this would not be definitive as such, since it doesn’t have edges; rather, it remains a relative quality. However, for clarity and

³⁶⁹ This is a response to Chapter 2’s Observation 3, though I do not respond to the other alternative use, mentioned there, of the term ‘poetics’ to mean an author’s general approach to, account of, or philosophy of literature.

to err on the side of caution, this thesis sticks to using ‘poetic’ and ‘poetry’ for aspects which relate to poetic form and techniques or to poetry as a mode.

According to Juliana de Nooy, Derrida does not feel it is possible to separate out poetic language and its particularities. The ‘overflow’ between literature and non-literature, citation and original, *mise en abîme* and ‘enclosing narrative’, etc. means he always ‘contests the validity of the distinction’, the reliability of definitively drawing the line between poetry and non-poetry.³⁷⁰ De Nooy says that this ‘overflow’ quality, the ever-present possibility of ordinary language slipping into literary language, derives from the possibilities of citationality which are found in all texts, ‘the constitutive possibility of citation’.³⁷¹ Because this possibility is always there with a text, ‘this distinction [between ordinary and poetic discourse] is always-already blurred’, rendering every text open to the possibility of becoming literature.³⁷² De Nooy understands Derrida’s concepts of the poetic and the literary to be sort of contextual descriptors which texts can be cited in and out of at will: ‘what is poetic here may be prosaic there, transplanted into another discourse, or merely recited until it becomes tired, mundane’ while ‘repetition out of context ensures the possibility that any utterance may become poetic’.³⁷³ But context-based descriptors *alone* do not work, because they cannot explain *why* certain discourses and certain contexts are described as literary or poetic in feel, and they rely on fixed notions of contexts (what counts as ‘in’ and ‘out’ of a poetic or literary context) that undercut the very complication that the argument relies on. Something else must make poetry poetic, to the extent that it contaminates the context it is in, whether that context is poetic or not. If poetry is to have distinctive properties, those properties, I suggest, are connected to its density and compression.

There is certainly strong precedent for an understanding of poetry as being especially compressed. Perhaps the traditional conception of poetry as the quintessence of things is glimpsing something true about poetry, albeit using a purity- and hierarchy-based frame. Compression is often listed among the essential characteristics of poetry.³⁷⁴ At the end of poet

³⁷⁰ Juliana de Nooy, *Derrida, Kristeva and the Dividing Line: An Articulation of Two Theories of Difference* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998), p. 185.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³⁷² *Ibid.* De Nooy goes on to complain that this approach is not entirely helpful: ‘while showing that literature cannot be isolated or defined as such may be the predictable thing for Derrida to do, this argument does not engage with the fact that we continue to use the term literature’ (p. 190).

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³⁷⁴ Samuel R. Levin, ‘The Analysis of Compression in Poetry’, *Foundations of Language*, 7.1 (February 1971), 38-55. Levin helpfully attempts to move away from behavioural-response approaches to defining the poetic. In contrast to my approach, he focuses on identifying ‘deletions’ that have produced the impression of compression in comparison to ordinary language. This method was then picked up by others such as Richard Kuhns and Eugene R. Kintgen.

Jacques Roubaud's paper 'L'Hypothèse du compact' (note the scientific language of hypothesis), Roubaud presents the idea that 'La poésie a avec la langue un contrat de compactification'.³⁷⁵ 'Dans un poème', says Roubaud, 'cela qui provient d'une mémoire de poésie, par composition de langue, est en état de compression, de condensation, de compactification aussi extrême que possible'.³⁷⁶ Poetry's language produces a state of compression, condensation, and compactification that is 'as extreme as possible'. For one critic, 'La référence au *compact* évoque en effet un espace fermé', but as demonstrated this need not be the case conceptually.³⁷⁷

Freud's notion of condensation in dream images is another form of compression that has been associated with poetry. In his chapter 'The Dream-Work', Freud claims that the condensation of repressed representations in a dream image reduces dream-thoughts down to 'the tersest and most unified expression in the dream' whilst retaining the necessary connection between all the parts.³⁷⁸ Pictorial imagery is good for this, says Freud, since the concrete is 'richer in associations' than abstract terms; and ambiguous language is useful, too, because it 'permits of the expression of more than one of the dream-thoughts'.³⁷⁹ Poetry and poetic language are also important methods of condensation for Freud, because of their dense and interconnected patterns, such as rhyme. Indeed, Roman Jakobson explicitly (and famously) maps condensation onto paradigmatic selection, then onto metaphor, and in turn finally onto poetic modes of literary expression.³⁸⁰

Poetic form

Poetic form has long been speculatively associated with mnemonic value, which embodies compression. Devices such as rhythm, refrain, and rhyme are said to enable the orator to recall the poem from memory. Derrida—in his 'Che cos'è la poesia?', discussed in Chapter 2—

³⁷⁵ Jacques Roubaud, 'L'Hypothèse du compact', *Revue de Littérature Générale*, 1 (1995), 289-99 (p. 297).

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

³⁷⁷ Véronique Ontémont, 'La Muse oulipienne' in *Jacques Roubaud: L'Amour du nombre* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004), para. 28.

³⁷⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Chapter 6, Part II: The Dream-Work' in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. by A. A. Brill (New York: Macmillan, 1900), <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Dreams/dreams6b.htm>.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Roman Jakobson, 'The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles' in *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*, ed. by René Dirven and Ralf Pörings (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 41-48. Selection, metaphor and poetry were contrasted with combination, metonymy, and novelistic modes respectively. For Jakobson, these two poles bookend a spectrum of methods of conceptualisation. In my account, by contrast, substitution and metonymy are incorporated as part of the limit experiences which are compressed in poetry, so Jakobson's poetry/prose distinction is actually somewhat subsumed or partially engulfed by poetry.

considers how poetry's distinctive condensation, incantation, recitation, and memorisation affect its reception. Derrida's treatment or definition of poetry there is 'deceptively traditional—even classical [...] poetry is characterized in terms of its powers of condensation'.³⁸¹ For Blanchot, too, poetry grounds us in the remembered rhythms of a shared, repetitious existence, bringing those rhythms together in a mnemonic form. This temporal unfolding, here exemplified by the mnemonic value of poetry, is a *structural* phenomenon ('la puissance vide'):

Une vieille tradition scolaire classe les poèmes selon leur valeur mnémotechnique. Cette naïveté n'est pas sans profondeur. Il n'est pas mauvais de convaincre les enfants que la poésie fonde la mémoire en lui donnant à saisir, en dehors des mots stables, la puissance vide de quelque chose qui se déroule.³⁸²

As mentioned in Chapter 2, 'Non/sense', Allen's *Ellipsis: Of Poetry and the Experience of Language after Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Blanchot* relies upon the 'non/sense' definition of poetry as being that which exceeds purely ordinary, communicative, or 'transparent' language; instead, 'what is to be found in fiction or literature is an experience of another kind of language that appears *as itself*'.³⁸³ This distinction can apply to *any genre*, as Allen recognises: this general analysis of 'poetic' language derived from Blanchot and Heidegger 'moves us away from the particularities of genre analysis—poetry as opposed to prose, for example—and toward the broader question of a language that does not act as an instrument of expression or communication'.³⁸⁴ Nonetheless, he finds it appropriate to focus on poetry as a case study. Why? The presence of this type of language is particularly 'thick'; it is 'concentrated to a particular degree in a poem' and 'there is something particularly dense about [a poem's] language' (note again the lack of interest in poetic *form*, even here).³⁸⁵ For me, poetry is not defined by its separation from ordinary language, but is rather defined, to the extent it can be defined, by this density, this concentration, which makes it a space (like the limitrophic structure) where interrelated terms can be compressed and chained together.

Poetic form *can* make an important contribution to this capacity. For poet Michael Rosen, a poem may be identified by its 'rhythm, patterning of language, rhyme, repetition, figurative language, pithiness, compression, rhetoric, or following patterns of previous poems'.³⁸⁶ These are formal or structural features. I propose that these formal properties seem to belong to poetry most of all

³⁸¹ Phillips, p. 231.

³⁸² Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, p. 158.

³⁸³ Allen, p. 2.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Michael Rosen (@MichaelRosenYes), *Twitter*, 10 August 2020.

because, although they are found in other types of literary writing, their various repetitions are most acutely compressed in poems. That would make poetry, including poetic form, one of the best resources that we have in cultivating an understanding of the limit experience. Poetry is literary, so it already encompasses many limit experiences, as Chapter 2 sought to show. Furthermore, it is structural; and it is elliptical, so it is able to do this work in a highly compressed manner. What follows in Chapters 4 and 5 is a close reading of various poems, showing the legitimacy of poetic analysis in modern French thought and demonstrating where limit experiences are occurring within the poems in a formal, compressed way, across many axes, both palimpsestically and metonymically. Before we move on, however, and as a conclusion to this chapter, it may be useful to understand the background to why and how Blanchot, Derrida, and subsequent thinkers of literature and the limit experience have sidelined formal poetics.

Heidegger

To achieve this understanding, it is valuable to retrace the steps of the Heideggerian philosophical tradition that contributed to Blanchot's and Derrida's suspicion of formal poetics, to understand which of the inheritances from that school should be retained and which can be superseded by new answers and new thoughts.

Let us begin with some of these inheritances. Heidegger strongly promotes the philosophical importance of poetry via the notion that poetry is an important site of access to experience. The importance of poetry for thinkers of the limit experience is partly an inheritance from Heidegger. Heidegger's emphasis on poetry derives from his understanding of ontology. Whereas for Aristotle, an impression is true if it corresponds correctly to reality, for Heidegger, this correspondence can only be judged if we are already situated in a background truth of being itself. In order to understand our existence, we must be reminded of 'what, unexperienced and unthought, underlies our familiar and therefore outworn nature of truth in the sense of correctness'.³⁸⁷ Ultimately, all meaning and all 'intelligibility [...] must hark back to our sense of what we *are*, which is, necessarily, on pain of regress, something we can never explicitly *know*'.³⁸⁸ In Heidegger's thought, securing a purely informational or rational ground for knowledge is a naïve and doomed endeavour. Secondly, and derivatively, whereas for Aristotle art was considered a lower mode of truth than philosophy, Heidegger, by contrast, emphasises the

³⁸⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 50.

³⁸⁸ Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus, *Mind over Machine* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 81.

philosophical importance of poetry as a way of accessing the ontological truth of being. Whereas for Aristotle, a finished piece of art is inferior and distant from truth because it is not fully orientated towards revelation, for Heidegger, art is placed on an equal footing with philosophy and language in its relation to truth, revaluing process over product.³⁸⁹ Heidegger establishes the notion, indispensable for our purposes, that poetic language can speak to truth as much as philosophy itself does.³⁹⁰ More specifically, poetic language opens the possibility of awareness of being and becomes a clearing in which we experience the unfolding of being.

Heidegger's inheritance is felt throughout the theory of the limit experience and poetry. As David Halliburton puts it, 'Heidegger leaves the field of philosophy early on' and he 'never really enters the field of literary criticism. Rather, he undertakes poetic thinking'.³⁹¹ Among the arts, why is poetry privileged by Heidegger? As Heidegger puts it,

If all art is in essence poetry, then the arts of architecture, painting, sculpture and music but be traced back to poesy. That is pure arbitrariness. It certainly is, as long as we mean that those arts are varieties of the art of the language, if it is permissible to characterize poesy by that easily misinterpretable title. But poesy is only one mode of the lightning projection of truth, i.e., of poetic composition in this wider sense. Nevertheless, the linguistic work, the poem in the narrower sense, has a privileged position in the domain of the arts.³⁹²

Language takes on a particular significance for Heidegger, whose 'hermeneutics [...] acknowledges the fact that language is "how we think."' Later on, language is called "the house of Being",³⁹³ because it can call forth experience. Much like Blanchot's two slopes of language (Chapter 2), Heidegger claims that there is a division between ordinary language and ontological language. In 'Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry', Heidegger explains that 'Language gives all things a hearing, the confused and the vulgar no less than the pure and untouched'.³⁹⁴ Ordinary language is the currency of understanding, which becomes too well-worn and ossified in everyday discourse and is therefore not suitable for the subtle task of unveiling being. Poetry comes to the rescue. As Ben Rogers states, 'The problem with language, then, is that it has a

³⁸⁹ See Miguel de Beistegui, *Thinking with Heidegger: Displacements* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 124.

³⁹⁰ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 71.

³⁹¹ David Halliburton, *Poetic Thinking: An Approach to Heidegger* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1981), p. vii.

³⁹² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 70-71.

³⁹³ Stephen Burik, *The End of Comparative Philosophy and the Task of Comparative Thinking: Heidegger, Derrida, and Daoism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), p. 26.

³⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, 'Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry' in Paul de Man, *The Paul de Man Notebooks*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 171-82 (p. 174).

double task [...] Poetry comes as an answer to the difficulty, standing as a sort of golden mean between language too familiar and language too removed'.³⁹⁵ Like Blanchot and Derrida, Heidegger does not expect the division between common language and poetic language to be clear-cut: 'Language itself is poetry in the essential sense'.³⁹⁶ But poetic language offers an originary, polysemic language of which ordinary language can only whisper: 'Proper poetry is never merely a higher mode (*melos*) of everyday language. It is rather the reverse: everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer'.³⁹⁷

Identifying a play of concealment and revelation in poetic language is another place where Heidegger has informed the thinking of poetry and the limit experience in a positive way.³⁹⁸ As discussed in 'Night/day' from Chapter 2, there is a movement of dis/appearing in the Orphic writing of the limit experience. For Heidegger, what appears in language also disappears with it, as an event: the conditions of meaning are those which withdraw in appearing. Concealment does not become only negation, but *also* affirmation. This is effectively what Heidegger indicates in 'The Origin of the Work of Art': 'a being can be *concealed*, too, only within the sphere of what is lighted. Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presence in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a concealedness. The clearing in which beings stand is in itself at the same time concealment'.³⁹⁹ In the work of art, the context and content of the world are 'carried over and appropriated to each other in the movement of disclosure as well as withdrawal'.⁴⁰⁰ Poetic language reveals them, so poetry is their condition, but they are also poetry's condition. So, being is never made fully present in a poem, because it relies on entities to appear: 'Being *qua* disclosure is precisely that which does not appear in that which is disclosed (entities). Presence or disclosure thus has, paradoxically, a structure of withdrawal. In what is *disclosed disclosure* itself is erased' (otherwise it would just be another entity).⁴⁰¹ As a by-product of this process, each poem renews the encounter with being—in an exemplary fashion. Heidegger's notion of being in poetry is internally divided, not secured metaphysically but re-emergent in each case and therefore welcoming of artefacts of non-being (or the 'ontic') as well as of being (the 'ontological'). There is no revelation except through these

³⁹⁵ Ben Rogers, 'Poetic Uncovering in Heidegger', *Aporia*, 12.2 (2002), p. 4.

³⁹⁶ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 72.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

³⁹⁸ This non-dichotomous angle is found in much of Heidegger's thinking about poetry and experience (including in his treatment of the cultural and worldly as set alongside the material and earthy).

³⁹⁹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 52.

⁴⁰⁰ Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot*, p. 35.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

manifestations, so *aletheia* and *Dichtung* are different every time, and we cannot see disclosure itself in any metaphysical plenitude.

Furthermore, and coming now to the crux of the matter, Heidegger is suspicious of foundational thinking, including its dichotomies such as before vs. after and subject vs. object. As alluded to just a moment ago, for Heidegger, there is an interlocking, pre-reflective relationship between human beings and the world; so, at the level of being, there is no hierarchical subject vs. object relation. For Heidegger, ‘self and world are the basic determination of the Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world’.⁴⁰² Rather than starting off from Cartesian premises, Heidegger insists that we understand our embeddedness in the world and ‘let beings be’, such that ‘poetic acts’ are understood in turn as ‘the original openings up of the world, the acts which let new sorts of beings be’.⁴⁰³ Poetic language is conceived of as the site for this way of experiencing the things in the poem, the space and setting it provides, and the essential background of being. This logic filters down to and becomes a demand or request made not just of poetry and then of philosophers—who are asked to follow poetry in this orientation towards being—but also of poetry criticism and the poetic techniques associated with it.

How this emphasis on ‘letting beings be’ manifests in Heidegger’s thought is as a scepticism towards representational and theoretical modes of understanding. In turning to look at Heidegger’s anti-theoretical stance, we are also developing the claim that Heidegger’s notable influence has led to an unhelpful blind spot with respect to contemporary understanding of poetry and experience. In Heidegger’s view, the background reality, without which nothing could represent or be represented, is what provides the basis for representation. ‘Being’ is ‘that which determines beings as beings, that in terms of which beings have always been understood no matter how they are discussed’.⁴⁰⁴ This background is revealed in poetic language. As Clark summarises, ‘language is not merely an entity upon the stage of the world, *it is that stage*, that “space” in which alone things become apparent. The “nature” of language is thus that of affecting a particular crossing or interlacing of the *ontic* (pertaining to entities) and the *ontological* (pertaining to being)’.⁴⁰⁵ Art, language, and poetry are therefore not primarily representational in the way that they operate: they are not subjects, objects, or processes of representation. Their operation takes place at a pre-reflective, pre-representational level and therefore exceeds

⁴⁰² Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 297.

⁴⁰³ Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 46.

⁴⁰⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰⁵ Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot*, p. 29.

representational modes; poetic language speaks its truth *before* it signifies anything, and the event of its speaking can only be experienced holistically in its happening: ‘With the self-showing of the work, truth would actually take place’.⁴⁰⁶

For Blanchot and Derrida, as outlined in Chapter 2, language does not escape all representational thinking, but Heidegger’s inheritance here has nonetheless exerted an influence.⁴⁰⁷ Next in Heidegger’s analysis, there is a slippage between the notion that art’s operation exceeds the representational and the additional claim that art itself cannot be discussed representationally. Heidegger’s claim that poetic language is not primarily representational leads to the belief that literary criticism should not be theoretical in nature either and that theoretical or interpretative approaches to literature and poetry are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the Cartesian, metaphysical approach to art that Heidegger repudiates. Rorty claims that ‘One way to describe what Heidegger does in his later work is to see him as defending the poets against the philosophers’.⁴⁰⁸ For Heidegger, with his sights trained on being, any commentary that attempts to theoretically grasp or comprehend an artwork is deficient and suspect. The poetic clearing for being is not a concept that can be represented but needs instead to speak itself within its own realm and process of revelation. As Clark aptly frames it, all theories presuppose the availability of a ‘pre-theoretical relation to being’ which cannot be ‘fully conceptualized’.⁴⁰⁹ Therefore, ‘To ask for “the meaning” of the work is a kind of category mistake’.⁴¹⁰ And for Stephen Burik,

Heidegger wishes to retain a sense of openness and unfinishedness that to him is evident in thoughtful poetry. Because where there is really no final and definite meaning, we should not impose one artificially, as is often done with poems where we are supposed to find ‘the’ meaning in them [...] It is much better to leave what is as it is.⁴¹¹

In this line of thought, there is nothing coded into poetry, either thematically or formally, that can be decoded. The poem does not represent, so it cannot be interpreted in terms of outside references, nor can one perform a reading ‘of’ or ‘on’ it. Art is irreducible and eludes interpretation, explanation, and even description. It can only be dwelled within. The suspect practices of literary theory in this context include the critical practice of reading for aesthetic

⁴⁰⁶ de Beistegui, p. 127.

⁴⁰⁷ Even if we were to accept Heidegger’s claim that representational elements come chronologically after the non-representational stratum, they would still be present (see ‘Balance’ and ‘Structure’). Thinking of poetry in terms of exemplarity allows us to straddle the line between representation and presentation.

⁴⁰⁸ Rorty, *Essays*, p. 34; see also Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 366.

⁴⁰⁹ Timothy Clark, *Martin Heidegger* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 24.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴¹¹ Burik, p. 28.

effects; theories of readerly reception or authorial intention; and instrumentalising notions of art which claim that it is being used as a tool to service an ideology, school, or even a particular style.

The next and final stage of this Heideggerian lineage is the suspicion of formal features in a poem. As hinted already, there is a movement from characteristics of being (not representational or theoretical, not representable or theorisable) to characteristics of poetry, language, and philosophy as houses of being (not representational or theoretical, not representable or theorisable... *and therefore not formal or formalisable*). This latter claim lands quite differently when applied to poetry as a genre of writing with formal properties conventionally at its core, as opposed to when applied directly to being or to revelation. This inheritance seems to have been adopted and carried forward in the thinking of poetry and experience, as is visible from the lack of focus on poetry's formal features throughout the discourse on poetry and the limit experience.

For Heidegger, poetic analysis reduces poetry to its ontic possibilities—such as its analysable formal features—and fails to capture the ontological brilliance of poetic saying.⁴¹² James Garrett's study of Heidegger's anti-theoreticism identifies three separate grievances: the first is 'the tendency of language to become entirely average [i.e. a surfeit of ordinary language], the second [is] the over-extension of the theoretical attitude [i.e. interpreting where one should rightly be dwelling] and the third [is] formal indication'.⁴¹³ What is 'formal indication'? Garrett describes it as 'the theorisation of the practical' as opposed to the intellectual; it is 'the capacity to indicate in a superficial manner', claiming or implying knowledge that one does not possess.⁴¹⁴ This includes 'the formalisation of the relation of visual intuition', that is, claiming that one's sight of things, their 'visual representation', gives access to beings and their being.⁴¹⁵ As Garrett explains, 'the possibilities of seeing and speaking' could potentially but erroneously be 'taken up in the theoretical attitude' by being hastily 'formalised and then located' using 'a model', thereby 'destroying experience'.⁴¹⁶ It is not difficult to see how Heidegger's anti-theoretical stance culminates in a multi-layered suspicion of the formal features of poetry and their 'use' in critical analyses of the experience of a poem. Form is too easily and superficially theorised without engaging being.

⁴¹² See David Nowell Smith, *Sounding/Silence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 2-4.

⁴¹³ James Nicholas Garrett, 'The Early Heidegger's Aristotle: The Logic of Possibility' (doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, May 2013), p. 211.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

Heidegger's own readings of poetic works do not follow the grooves of hermeneutic interpretation, revealing other ways of seeing the text, other truths in it. One method involves meditating on each phrase in order to dwell in the poem without translating the movement of the poem into a critical or metaphysical idiom.⁴¹⁷ Readings of this kind do not yield anything or produce specific results, but simply display the 'standing-there' of poetry.⁴¹⁸ As Clark notes, Heidegger urges critics to stay away from terms such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, portrayal, and so on, which suggest representation, symbolism, and superficial formalisation.⁴¹⁹ David Nowell Smith records this omission of formal or rhetorical analysis in Heidegger's work on poetry.⁴²⁰ This leads Heidegger to elide the differences between poetry and other modes of experiencing art: 'poetry' is taken 'in so broad a sense and at the same time in such intimate unity of being with language and word, that we must leave open whether art, in all its modes from architecture to poesy, exhausts the nature of poetry'.⁴²¹ As Halliburton acknowledges, 'poetry is only one way of being poetic in the broad sense', while poetry occupies a 'more original' position for Heidegger since it is the art with the closest proximity to poetic language and its disclosive potential.⁴²² Heidegger's influence may help to explain why, in so many of the literary-critical perspectives outlined in Chapter 2, poetry becomes a privileged shorthand for literature and art: since, for Heidegger, 'All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*'.⁴²³

Heidegger's influence raises awareness of the fact that many poetry critics unthinkingly assume everything in the poem is a representational symbol for something else. I agree that this must be avoided, as it is too referential, it reduces the poem to a set of features to be interpreted, and it does not consider performativity or the holistic experience of the poem. I try to avoid this pitfall by identifying the contribution made by poetry's properties to the experiential space of the poem, *retaining* an account of their representational and formalisable qualities, but also moving away from solely interpreting signification or authorial intent. Heidegger as precursor granted poetry criticism a) an understanding of the importance of poetic language and poetry, giving them a central role within the arts and philosophy; b) the expectation of accessing an ontological

⁴¹⁷ For an example of this experiential criticism in practice, see Reiner Schürmann, 'Situating René Char: Hölderlin, Heidegger, Char and the "There Is"', *boundary 2*, 4.2 (Winter 1976), 512-34.

⁴¹⁸ See Scott Abbott, "'Des Dastehns großer Anfangsbuchstab": Standing and Being in Rilke's Fifth Elegy', *The German Quarterly*, 60.3 (1987), 432-46 (pp. 434-46).

⁴¹⁹ Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot*, p. 42.

⁴²⁰ Nowell Smith, *Sounding/Silence*.

⁴²¹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 72.

⁴²² Halliburton, pp. 50-51.

⁴²³ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 70.

experience or event dynamically in the movement of a poem; and c) a hesitation around dichotomous and hierarchy-based framings of that experience. All of this is hugely positive. On the flip side, in an attempt to divest itself of representational discourse, Heidegger's legacy has led to a tendency—visible throughout Chapter 2—towards rejecting not only poetic form but also much of what conventional poetry criticism has to offer. This seems like an unnecessary loss. Once theorists made the move towards accepting poetry's more representational or 'ontic' aspects, this prejudice against poetic form and detail should have been dropped.

Blanchot

As we saw in Chapter 2, Blanchot does not pay much heed to poetry as a separate formal category of writing. Blanchot seems to adopt the Heideggerian reasoning that poetry cannot be paraphrased or explained, only experienced; indeed, this is his criticism of Charles Mauron's book *Mallarmé l'obscur*. Blanchot argues that 'ce que le poème signifie coïncide exactement avec ce qu'il est', that 'la signification poétique est ce qui ne peut être séparé des mots', and that poems cannot be summarised or described by close readings 'même lorsqu'on s'en représente les relations complexes'.⁴²⁴ In Blanchot's essay 'Poésie et langage', he expounds a poetic language that is not used 'comme valeur d'échange pratique' and which engages its own physicality and the senses as a means of connecting to the material side of language.⁴²⁵ It is 'une autre forme de langage', which does not try to do anything specific ('qui ne tend pas à une action'), which is not bound by a meaning ('qui n'est pas déterminée par un sens'), and which is not as focused on ideas or reference as it is a collaboration of physical and sensory effects ('et qui, plutôt que le substitut commode d'une idée ou d'un objet, est une somme d'effets physiques et de possibilités sensibles').⁴²⁶ It engages and shows up language's 'réalité matérielle', surpassing ordinary language.⁴²⁷ However, rather than redirecting attention away from paraphrase and towards the formal aspects of how a poem works, Blanchot continues to follow Heidegger in focusing on the abstract functions of poetry and poetic language, examples of which are found throughout Chapter 2. Poetry gains a special cachet, but it is a poetry divested of its formal features and of its play of re/presentational meanings. This is strange, because it violates the interplay in and between 'material/ideal', 'constative/performative', 'non/sense', 'night/day', and so on, and yet these dualities are key aspects of Blanchot's understanding of the poetic.

⁴²⁴ Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, pp. 128-29.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

For Blanchot, again following the pattern illuminated in Chapter 2, the interest and power of poetry lies partly in the sheer fact that the im/possible im/possibility of poetry exists: ‘Apprendre, voir dans une évidence que la poésie est possible, alors qu’elle est inconcevable et terrible à supporter, c’est ce que l’œuvre, au plus fort de son effet, nous désigne comme sa vérité propre’.⁴²⁸ To see that poetry remains possible despite its so-called paradoxical, absurd, unbearable nature—that is the truth of poetry. Blanchot’s lack of textual specificity rings out when he talks about ‘le langage poétique’, which ‘embrasse toute l’étendue de l’expression: il va de la parole au silence [...] il est langage pur parce qu’il peut être vide des mots’.⁴²⁹ Blanchot claims that poetic language has the ability to encapsulate various aspects of communication—both magical and ordinary, silent and speaking, open and closed, optimistic and downtrodden. The liminal structural logic is visible, but poetry in its distinctiveness is not. In a similar way, Blanchot discusses a number of axes of liminality—‘non/sense’, ‘symbol/symbolised’, ‘representation/unrepresentable’, ‘material/ideal’, ‘cultural/natural’, ‘presence/absence’—in this passage from *L’Écriture du désastre*. Blanchot’s parallelistic structure alerts us to the proliferation of analogous pairs of intertwined and mutually constitutive opposites:

[L]e langage porte aussi le *symbole* où symbolisant et symbolisé peuvent être partie l’un de l’autre (cela dit dans un vocabulaire toujours approximatif), où l’irreprésentable est *présent* dans la représentation qu’il déborde, en tout cas lié par un certain rapport ‘motivé’ de culture (on pensera aussitôt: naturel), réintroduisant entre signe et ‘chose’ une présence-absence instable que l’art—et l’art comme littérature—maintient ou régénère.⁴³⁰

Art and literature are what maintain or create anew these unstable pairs in this dense configuration, holding these structures together in a heightened, exemplary fashion. Contrary to Heidegger’s dismissive stance, Blanchot explicitly notes here that the unrepresentable is present *in the representation* that it exceeds. Blanchot nods to anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan, who brings together music, visual arts, poetry and writing by suggesting that the first writing was made up of ‘des séries de “petites entailles” disposées de distance à distance (également); ce qui donne à penser qu’est à l’œuvre par là la poussée répétitive, c’est-à-dire le rythme’.⁴³¹ It seems obvious that repetition and rhythm could be important characteristics for writing—and yet Blanchot is careful to put these repetitive and rhythmic formal procedures in the camp of ‘art’ rather than ‘literature’.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., pp. 160-61.

⁴³⁰ Blanchot, *Écriture du désastre*, p. 172.

⁴³¹ Ibid., pp. 171-72.

Christophe Bident explains that the *récit* opens itself up to the poetic, while specifying that ‘s’ouvrir au poème’ in this context, for Blanchot, means ‘s’ouvrir à l’espace du poème’.⁴³² When Blanchot helpfully asserts (chiming with what we learnt in Chapter 2) that ‘La littérature est le langage qui se fait ambiguïté’, the ambiguities that emerge at the level of form do not seem to hold his interest.⁴³³ Poet Jacques Dupin (whose poems are studied in Chapter 4) says of Blanchot’s interest in poetry that it revolves around largely thematic concerns: ‘Le souci premier de Maurice Blanchot n’est pas la poésie. On peut dire cela. Même s’il a écrit de nombreux essais, admirables, sur les œuvres de poètes qui comptent. Mais plus largement la question de la poésie est partie essentielle de sa réflexion sur la parole et sur l’écriture’.⁴³⁴ Blanchot is fascinated by poetry in its broadest sense but somewhat uninterested in the minutiae of what constitutes it as a mode. Perhaps in the same way as Heidegger’s refutation of metaphysics was seen as iconoclastic, Blanchot’s dismissal of formal poetics is considered regicidal: ‘une exécution de la rhétorique et de la poétique, une décapitation du roi’.⁴³⁵

As Dupin’s words herald, in Blanchot’s discussions of poets such as Celan and Hölderlin, there are many examples of his vague and wonderful approach to poetic analysis; but there is an absence of in-depth, formal poetic analysis in Blanchot’s critical work. Blanchot is openly wary of the traditional study of rhetoric and the formal analysis of, say, verse technique and metrical schemes. In his eyes, it is a fruitless endeavour, so confined in its resonances, dealing with at best only one ‘slope’ of literature, and at worst, no slopes at all, that rhetorical figures fall out of the picture of writing entirely, and therefore mean little if anything. The poetic effect (‘l’effet poétique’), Blanchot argues, is not a result of specific literary methods, details or devices:

[N]ous sommes prêts à réduire à la valeur de moyens les ressources que l’analyse met en rapport avec la réalisation de l’effet poétique. Mais c’est justement ce que la poésie ne peut admettre. *Il n’y a pas de moyens, pas plus qu’il n’y a de détails dans un poème.* Chaque œuvre est la poésie.⁴³⁶

Though there are resources in a poem, there are no details, nor any methods or techniques. It is inadmissible to reduce poetry to details or instrumental techniques; in fact, these have little to do with poetry, in Blanchot’s view. To look at language in this way is to miss the point of poetry altogether. Instead, poetry must be considered as an act of possibility, as Blanchot goes on to

⁴³² Christophe Bident, *Maurice Blanchot: Partenaire invisible* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1998), p. 429.

⁴³³ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 328.

⁴³⁴ Jacques Dupin, *M’introduire dans ton histoire* (Paris: P.O.L., 2007), p. 123. Dupin and Blanchot were contemporaries and mutual admirers. See Blanchot’s ‘Traces’ in *Amitié*, pp. 246-49.

⁴³⁵ Dupin, *M’introduire*, p. 123.

⁴³⁶ Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, p. 159. My emphasis.

explain: ‘Il y a dans chaque poème un acte qui nous renvoie à la poésie entrevue dans son essence, essence qui, elle-même, [...] n’existe que dans ce poème’.⁴³⁷ Blanchot prefers to talk about poetry’s possibility in terms of liminality, paradox, and oxymoron: here, on the one hand, ‘la poésie’ exists as a general noun, implying a group united by a shared ‘essence’; but on the other, that very essence is yoked to the radical singularity of a particular poem. Poetry is—in case we were in any doubt—an experience of the limit between.

Indeed, Gerald Bruns affirms that ‘Poetry in this sense is a limit-concept rather than a genre-distinction’.⁴³⁸ Poetry in its generic and formal specificity is elided in this type of analysis. This is thrown into sharp relief when Blanchot implies that the language of prose is not so different from the language of poetry, since ‘un récit écrit dans la prose la plus simple suppose déjà dans la nature du langage un changement important’.⁴³⁹ This equalising of the status of prose and poetry, despite the constant undercurrent of ideas about the poetic, is in keeping with Blanchot’s own interest in philosophical essays and prose narratives. Prose does the lion’s share of the work both in Blanchot’s own writerly practice and in terms of where he tends to locate the literary and its limit experiences (despite his intellectual engagement and interaction with many poets).

Our last example is the short passage ‘Ébauche d’un regret’, a coda which follows Blanchot’s commentary on des Forêts’ *Poèmes de Samuel Wood*.⁴⁴⁰ In it, Blanchot seems to express some regret at his lack of attention to formal and prosodic features of the verse in question, whilst simultaneously defending his decision to exclude such features from his analysis. He begins, ‘J’ai écrit ce commentaire (ce qui semble se donner pour un commentaire), et tandis que je l’écrivais, entraîné par le mouvement qui est le don du poème, je fermais les yeux sur cette faute qui est de transformer le poème (les poèmes) en une prose approximative’.⁴⁴¹ Entranced by the *movement of the space given by the poem*, in alignment with his usual approach, Blanchot finds that he has turned the poetry into a sort of prose text, treating it the same way. He regrets the methodological omission (‘Il n’est pas d’altération plus grave’) and says it is necessary to pay more heed to the ‘voices’ of the poems. However, in Blanchot’s mind the risk of this non-thematic approach then becomes clear: discussing rhythm or versification may draw us back into an old-fashioned yearning, that of an autotelic, Mallarméan contact with the ideal realm of poetry (see Chapter 2, ‘Night/day’). This *could* give the poem a ‘gloire sombre, parfois solaire—le sublime dans la

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot*, p. xvi.

⁴³⁹ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 79.

⁴⁴⁰ Blanchot, *Une voix venue d’ailleurs*, p. 18.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

simplicité'.⁴⁴² However, in venturing this—'voici que, par ces épithètes'—Blanchot realises that it has in fact had a deleterious effect: it 'étouffe les voix' that it was supposed to be preserving.⁴⁴³ I read the 'voici' here as a sort of 'I told you so', making the point that formal analysis is not straightforwardly critically sound: here, it is difficult to prevent it falling too far into the second slope, where it becomes just a mute aesthetic closure, not engaged with experience or life at all. Nonetheless, by Blanchot's own analysis, these slopes are interdependent, and poetry liminally straddles both/either/neither of them; so this risky Mallarméan feeling does not seem like a total impediment to formal analysis—in fact, quite the opposite—and it is certainly no *less* risky than prose, which is apt to lean too far into the first slope.

Blanchot's assertion that 'il n'y a de détails dans un poème' is clearly hyperbolic, and from this hyperbole we can infer that Blanchot perceived real dangers ahead if the role of the critic were to be subordinated to irrelevances such as formal literary criticism.⁴⁴⁴ As with Derrida below, the formal play of poetry gets caricatured as a sort of compositional order of which we should not speak. Perhaps what one can take from Blanchot's opposition is that one should avoid confining one's appraisal of a poem to just one set of its properties. Analysis should not forget poetry's fascinating ambiguity.

Derrida

By way of background, Barthes's notion of a 'structuralist poetics' (which is nothing to do with poetry as such) seeks to bring out the underlying systems of literary effects and make them visible to the analyst. This mode of analysis has much in common with my project, specifically its interest in a 'science' of 'forms'.⁴⁴⁵ For Barthes, the 'conditions of content' are at issue, rather than the content itself. Content can be substituted endlessly, though not indiscriminately; and that very structural polyvalency is the most interesting part, that 'sens vide qui les supporte tous [les sens]', shaped by a dynamic 'structuration sans la structure'.⁴⁴⁶ Somewhat like Heidegger's, Barthes's project is an overcorrection of a style of interpretative criticism that focused on deriving the 'true' thematic meaning of individual works, uncovering a unity hidden within them. Barthes's alternative places emphasis on the general over the singular. Looking at the systematicity of a system is valuable because to reduce a generality to a singularity ignores the

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, p. 159.

⁴⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 57.

⁴⁴⁶ Barthes, *Critique et vérité*, p. 57; Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 11.

aporia of repetition that liminally haunts every singularity (as first examined in Chapter 1). However, post-structuralist literary critics have wished to reduce Barthes's overcorrection, finding a middle way between interpretative and formalist critical models. A post-structuralist gaze may look for a model of the literary that could understand the general *and/or* the singular, *both* the conditions of meaning *and* what those conditions produce, the framework *and* the individual instance.

Derrida's early essay 'Force et signification' takes aim at structuralism for being one-sided.⁴⁴⁷ Derrida makes specific strategic charges against structuralism's one-sidedness, charges which bleed into general complaints about the practice of formally analysing literary works. In particular, 'giddy with triumph over structuralism',⁴⁴⁸ he attempts to redress the undue emphasis laid by the structuralists upon the *form* of a work over its *force* or energetics, its 'énergie vivante'.⁴⁴⁹ (This recalls the question of reductionism mentioned in Chapter 1.) Derrida compares the literary work as understood by structuralist critics to a panoramagram, because it gives the impression of having dimensions in space but no time. In fact, it reduces time to a dimension of space: 'le temps lui-même est toujours réduit. A une dimension dans le meilleur des cas. Il n'est que le milieu dans lequel une forme ou une courbe peuvent se déployer'.⁴⁵⁰ Concurrently, by dint of its diminished engagement with temporality, the structuralist view of a literary work implies that any outcome of the work has been decided in advance by its structure, caricaturing the work as static, teleological, and totalising.

Jean Rousset, in his *Forme et signification: Essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel*, exemplifies this for Derrida, since Rousset understands force only as form, not as force. Rousset, Derrida argues, interprets and deciphers Corneille's plays 'téléologiquement déchiffrés à partir de ce qui est considéré comme son point d'arrivée, sa structure achevée' and in a geometric fashion 'il semble penser que devant une œuvre littéraire, on doit toujours trouver une ligne, si complexe soit-elle, qui rende compte de l'unité, de la totalité de son mouvement et de ses points de passage'.⁴⁵¹ As Maclachlan explains, Derrida argues that structuralists view the book as 'a simultaneous, signifying totality', a perspective which 'suppresses the book's temporal unfolding' whilst it also 'schematizes that totality as a set of formal relations'.⁴⁵² The dynamic

⁴⁴⁷ Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, pp. 9-49.

⁴⁴⁸ David Mikics, *Who Was Jacques Derrida? An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 116.

⁴⁴⁹ Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30, p. 33.

⁴⁵² Maclachlan, *Marking Time*, p. 20.

processes of time and meaning are ossified into a ‘squelette’ and ‘rethought as form’, ‘repensé dans la forme’.⁴⁵³ Time and force are ignored in favour of schematics and univocity. For instance, when Rousset’s model of Corneille’s tragicomedy *Le Cid* needs expanding, he just adds more lines and tacks on an extra dimension of space. Rousset’s *Cid* is at first a 2D play of shapes, which looks like a crossed ring: accord, separation, symmetry, circular return. When a new, enriched meaning emerges from the play as it unfolds, the critic—rather than understanding this as a sign of the play’s dynamic mobility, ‘le qualitatif et l’intensif’, the ‘travail des forces’ and the ‘tension’ within it—determinedly represents this as a new dimension of his ‘panorographie’: ‘La dimension de la hauteur va compléter notre outillage analogique’.⁴⁵⁴ It is not difficult to appreciate how eliding the unfolding relationality of time and denying the possibility of an ‘inside/outside’ relation at the border of a work are both contrary to the deconstructive project (see Chapter 1). For Derrida, this spatial model limits the scope and the usefulness of critical reflection, coming at the cost of a ‘ferveur retombée’.⁴⁵⁵

When Derrida insists that ‘la critique littéraire est structuraliste à tout âge, par essence et destinée’ and additionally declares that it will *never* be possible for structuralist criticism to improve on this point, he is condemning formal literary criticism as a field.⁴⁵⁶ There is irony in his tone—using ‘la critique littéraire’ as a stand-in for structuralism, Derrida closes off its possibilities, evaporates the future, assumes a teleology, and posits a structural unity in exactly the way that he himself challenges. But *other* aspects of formal literary, rhetorical, and poetic analysis become *casualties* of Derrida’s dismissal of the above aspects of structuralist literary theory. To substantiate this, let us put these two important charges—the denial of temporality and the assumption of the work’s totality, including a unity between meaning and form—to one side for a moment and let us turn to look at some of the other characteristics of the structuralists’ approach to literature that Derrida critiques in ‘Force et signification’.

The ‘passion structuraliste’ is said to be a ‘schéma géométrico-mécanique’, not only mechanical and geometric but also ‘méthodique’, ‘mathématico-spatiale’, ‘diaphan[e]’, involving ‘un schématisme proliférant’.⁴⁵⁷ Sarah Wood extends Derrida’s implications in this essay to derive the idea that, when we let ourselves become fascinated by ‘letters: consonance, chiming, the play of the letter and vocalic repetition’, this is understood as an evasion of the responsibility of

⁴⁵³ Derrida, *L’Écriture et la différence*, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 35, 44, 34, 46.

evaluating the text's impact and meaning in the world.⁴⁵⁸ Derrida suggests that thinking in terms of structure cannot capture, say, the beauty of a text: 'Nous serions convaincus si le beau, qui est valeur et force, pouvait être soumis à des règles et à des schèmes. Faut-il encore démontrer que cela n'a pas de sens? Donc si *le Cid* est beau, c'est par ce qui en lui passe le schème et l'entendement'.⁴⁵⁹ If *Le Cid* is said to be beautiful, it is thanks to that within it which goes beyond schemas and understanding. This is a version of Heidegger's anti-theoretical stance, in which the value of literature lies in the places where it surpasses theoretical or geometrical intellectualisations. Derrida asserts that 'on ne parle pas du *Cid* lui-même, s'il est beau, par boucles, spirales et vrilles'.⁴⁶⁰ Likely this too is a strategic exaggeration, but here Derrida holds that formalising a work of art squashes the life, the force, out of it and fails to capture its beauty by focusing only on its form. This may remind us of Blanchot's 'étouffe les voix', his implication being that formal poetic analysis stifles a poem's vitality.⁴⁶¹ And yet, what is not beautiful about rings, spirals, and helices? These are phenomena which, when found in nature, are often thought to be very beautiful indeed.

Continuing his argument, Derrida talks dismissively of the study of rhetorical figures as part of a 'poétique structurale' and a 'formalisme structuraliste' which is overreliant, he argues, on 'figures et mouvements'. He takes the word 'figure' 'au sens géométrique aussi bien que rhétorique' since 'dans le style de Rousset, les figures de rhétorique sont toujours les figures d'une géométrie'.⁴⁶² This elision, this bias against formalist literary criticism is peripheral to the main charges that Derrida levels against structuralism in 'Force et signification', and it constitutes yet another blow to the reputation of formal analysis in this intellectual tradition. There is a ready willingness to dismiss formal textual and poetic analysis as structuralist, and then apply to them all the strategic criticisms that serve to pop the confident bubble of the structuralists; but a critical approach being formal is not the same as it being 'ultra-structuraliste' or strictly geometric. There are ways for poetic structural analysis to be performed that are not one-sided. In fact, those ways are called for by the structure, in time and in space, of a literary text.

Whenever Derrida caveats his strategic opposition to form as opposed to force, he himself begins to make the argument in favour of a different kind of literary formalism. These arguments emerge

⁴⁵⁸ Sarah Wood, *Derrida's Writing and Difference: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 36.

⁴⁵⁹ Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 32.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs*, p. 18.

⁴⁶² Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, pp. 14, 46, 29.

from Derrida's own thought. Below I detail six axes of liminality that emerge through and undergird formal literary criticism:

- 1) *Force/form*. Force and form are of course interrelated, just as 'ideal/material' are: one cannot have pure dynamism or pure energetics without a material form for energy to pass through (see Chapter 5's discussion of embodiment). Derrida writes this quite plainly in this very essay:

Nous n'opposons pas ici, par un simple mouvement de balancier, d'équilibration ou de renversement, la durée à l'espace, la qualité à la quantité, la force à la forme, la profondeur du sens ou de la valeur à la surface des figures. Bien au contraire. [...] Cette économie ne serait pas une énergétique de la force pure et informe. Les différences considérées seraient à la fois différences de lieux et différences de force.⁴⁶³

Rather than opposing duration to space, quality to quantity, force to form, depth to surface, it is important to affirm their interrelations and take into account *à la fois* the positional *and* the energetic. This makes sense: if the 'force' in writing is the engine of differential time that pushes temporally through a text, giving rise to a vital play of contestation with/in its words, internally dividing and multiplying past and future meanings against and within itself, and letting the text take place across a processual unfolding... then force and form need each other. Anne Carson explains that the form of her works 'arises out of the thing itself. They aren't forms that are from somewhere, they're just in there'.⁴⁶⁴ So, when a literary critic looks at form, the force of that work is also being studied, however unintentionally and minimally. Concerning oneself primarily with form does not imply the exclusion of force—quite the opposite. As Blanchot said: 'l'art qui prétend suivre un versant est déjà de l'autre côté'.⁴⁶⁵

- 2) *Time/space*. Derrida says that '*stricto sensu*, la notion de structure ne porte référence qu'à l'espace, espace morphologique ou géométrique, ordre des formes et des lieux'.⁴⁶⁶ However, time and space are interdependent—as the quotation above tells us ('nous n'opposons pas ici [...] la durée à l'espace'). Indeed, Derrida is quite pleased that Rousset at least seems to 'reconnait[re] la solidarité de l'espace et du temps', even if Rousset does

⁴⁶³ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁶⁴ John D'Agata and Anne Carson, 'A ____ with Anne Carson', *The Iowa Review*, 27.2, (1997), 1-22, www.jstor.org/stable/20154415, p. 12.

⁴⁶⁵ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 321.

⁴⁶⁶ Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 28.

not carry this through sufficiently into his literary criticism.⁴⁶⁷ All forms (and forces for that matter) are spatio/temporal. *Spatial criticism is therefore not exclusive of or a barrier to temporal criticism.* When Derrida complains that, for Rousset, time never appears alone, this is a sleight of hand: when he suggests condescendingly that *for Rousset* ‘[le temps] est toujours d’intelligence avec une ligne ou un plan, toujours déroulé dans l’espace’, *this is true of all time.*⁴⁶⁸ Time is always in league with spatial forms. And Derrida knows this: it is why the structuralist promise will tend to fail (as he goes on to explain), because its spatially orientated criticism is plagued by the ongoing relationality of time and space.

- 3) *Totality/openness.* Totality and openness are interrelated across a limit (Chapter 1). Derrida acknowledges this even as he rails against structuralism’s *ipseic* vision of closure and unity. He reveals: ‘S’il y a des structures, elles sont possibles à partir de cette structure fondamentale par laquelle la totalité s’ouvre et se déborde pour prendre sens dans l’anticipation d’un telos’.⁴⁶⁹ That is to say, structures require totalities but totalities require openness, contamination, overflow, access to an outside and a beyond. The *telos* referenced here is part of the totality; indeed, it acts as its point of closure, claiming to tell where it is going and when it should stop. But it is also the totality’s *admission of a future*, of a time that differs from and is deferred by the totality’s own unity. The form’s ‘anticipation’ establishes time in the work, despite the risk of stifling closure it also brings. Derrida continues: ‘Cette ouverture est certes ce qui libère le temps et la genèse (se confond même avec eux), mais c’est aussi ce qui risque, en l’informant, d’enfermer le devenir’.⁴⁷⁰ Derrida then rounds this off with the lopsided claim that this ‘opening’, i.e. the structure’s telos, is what risks ‘De faire taire la force sous la forme’.⁴⁷¹ That is fine, but, as the work’s opening as well as its closure, the telos *also* risks stifling form under force. The balance between totality and openness as they relate to form and force is strategically dislocated by Derrida in this essay.
- 4) *Im/purity.* This is a spatialised version of ‘totality/openness’. Derrida claims that structuralist literary criticism attempts to make of the object of study ‘la littérature pure,

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

objet de la critique littéraire pure'.⁴⁷² Derrida laments that, under this 'ultrastructuralist' regime, structure becomes the literary object: 'la structure devient l'objet lui-même, la chose littéraire elle-même'.⁴⁷³ He accepts that 'la configuration relationnelle' has always existed, for critics, 'du côté de l'objet littéraire', but is concerned that 'la structure' has now become 'le *terme* exclusif [...] de la description critique [...] la seule preoccupation du critique. Seule ou à peu près', rather than a way of identifying assemblages and patterns.⁴⁷⁴ And yet, a criticism that looks at spatial forms does not need to puritanically exclude non-structural elements; indeed, it cannot help but be contaminated by them.

- 5) *Criticism/creativity*. Following the same thread, there is no need for a false distinction between criticism and creation (see Chapter 2, 'Performative/constative' and 'Self/other'). Derrida polemically sets up such an opposition when he states that 'La forme fascine quand on n'a plus la force de comprendre la force en son dedans. C'est-à-dire de créer'.⁴⁷⁵ This is similar to Heidegger's rejection of mimetic criticism, which failed to see that being in a poem and experiencing it representationally are mutually supporting positions. In the words of one reader, summarising Derrida, the structuralists' 'neglect[ful]' attention to form 'demonstrates, as it turns out, the structuralists' own lack of force—and their status as mere critics rather than creators'.⁴⁷⁶ Yet it is inevitable that any commentator will produce creatively, transforming their source material as well as describing it.
- 6) *Work/criticism*. Part of Derrida's grievance with this totalising, teleological faux simultaneity is that it is bad criticism. Criticism is supposed to track its text, but the 'ultrastructuralist' version attempts to impose upon and flatten its object of study. Because of 1), experiencing texts as a liminal interplay between form and force is to be expected—unless we are strategically and permanently running away from aspects of the text we are studying, following an endless path of either/neither to allow us to avoid dealing with one aspect of the text. This is perhaps what Derrida resents structuralism for doing or attempting. I would suggest that a critic who permanently runs from either the force or the form of a text would not be recognised as a critic, because the level of contact with the reality of the text in question would be so impoverished. And, realistically, the

⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁷⁶ Mikics, p. 116.

structuralists *do* engage with their literary subject matter. Otherwise, Rousset's book would be illegible; it would be the critique of a 'pure language', unrelatable to Corneille's plays or anything else; Rousset's geometry would not be recognisable as the geometry of *Le Cid*. While Derrida may think it is illegible, he reads it. While I risk lapsing into a 'no true Scotsman' fallacy here ('if your criticism is bad, you're not a critic'), I do think the point stands. Form and force cannot be ripped apart without serious damage to one's intelligibility as a critic, whose very job is to be in spatio/temporal proximity to key aspects of the work.

While there is clearly a legitimate difference between creativity, force, drive on the one hand and more organisational, structural, procedural efforts on the other, Derrida's own critical work on texts examines both. There *is* a way forward for formal criticism that takes inspiration from mathematical and topological schemas and concerns itself with a text's shapes, forms, dimensions, and patterns. These patterns can cover form *and/or* force, space *and/or* time, and so on. My point in this exegesis is not to take issue with Derrida's arguments about and against the structuralists. To broadly condemn formalist, schematising, spatialising criticism in general is not coherent or plausible, even (especially) from the vantage point of Derrida's own philosophy, so this was a strategic rather than an absolute goal. Pushing back against critics who are not 'deconstructive enough' can be strategically clarifying. And, from his vantage point in the 1960s, Derrida promotes a preferred way forward for the future of literary criticism: criticism that is risky, equivocal, contestatory, that dislocates form and meaning.

However, I do wish to illuminate that, in employing this particular strategy in this important essay, there is a historical casualty, the same casualty which suffers at the hands of Heidegger and Blanchot: rhetorical, literary, and poetic form, structure, and detail. Derrida, Blanchot and others overlook the extent to which formal, rhetorical, even geometric literary criticism can be rehabilitated. As Derrida himself shows, 'formal' does not, cannot, mean 'exclusively formal'; thus, we are able to go back through what formal criticism has to offer and see what survives if we incorporate an awareness of a text's force *and* its form, along with its other axes of liminality.

Later in his career, Derrida even begins to describe his work as topographical; and in 'Genre' from Chapter 2, we saw him declare his account of genres to be 'economical', 'elliptical' and 'formal'. Nonetheless, Attridge proposes that 'in view of a frequent misunderstanding, it may be worth stressing that for Derrida the "literariness" of texts conventionally classed as non-literature is not a matter of their employment of metaphor or rhetoric' and indeed that 'discovering

figurative language in philosophical texts has very little to [sic] with the practice of deconstruction', because, for Derrida, metaphor for instance 'is a thoroughly (if not simply) philosophical figure' and should be included, alongside other forms of 'rhetoric—the study and classification of purely formal features of discourse', 'within the domain of philosophy'.⁴⁷⁷ This is to say that, for Attridge's Derrida, poetic and formal features are not interesting deconstructively and do not have a place in the study of literature. What Attridge is describing is this recurrent bias whereby rhetorical and formal features are seen as capable of contributing to 'one side' only—here, the side of philosophy, rather than the side of literature, where more interesting things take place.

For my part, I attempt to rehabilitate poetic form within this broad tradition and suggest what Blanchot and Derrida might have had to say about it, if they had seen fit to include it. Poetic techniques *can* have a bearing. Poetic form provides a space for experimentation as well as experience. Poetry embraces literature's liminal qualities: each poetic device dealt with in the next two chapters is an example of the limit structure. And poetry is densely woven, meaning that there is even more 'text' in a poem than in prose. As Chapters 4 and 5 show, existing poetry criticism already comments extensively on formal characteristics, poetic devices, structure, versification, imagery, word choice, and thematic concerns. What is offered here is a new, holistic approach to their *contribution* to the poem's effects.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ Attridge, *Acts of Literature*, p. 7.

⁴⁷⁸ Caveat: this contribution can be positive or negative. There is nothing inherently *good* about limit experiences, as Chapter 5's discussion of *angoisse* implies, and no real reason why showing up this liminal structure in an exemplary fashion should be better or more emotionally pleasing than not showing it. Sometimes experiencing the aporetic structure is gratifying, useful, instructive; sometimes it is unhelpful, dizzying, uncomfortable.

Chapter 4: Substitution and Fold

Fold

In Heidegger's framing, 'The boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding'.⁴⁷⁹ Helping to bridge the gap between the theoretical figures and poetic form, this chapter introduces the fold and textile as figures of the limit experience, before turning to case studies and close readings of the work of poet Jacques Dupin to evidence my claim that there is a folded structure deeply implicated in poetic form. From 'Doublings' onwards, this chapter explores how certain poetic devices—most especially enjambment, typography, substitution, repetition, and chiasmus—participate in the writing of the limit experience.

Two examples of the fold should suffice. The first recalls the aporetic movement of self-observation discussed in 'Transcendence' from Chapter 1. Alert to Derrida's insights, we could even say that philosophical reflection 'n'est qu'un effet du pli comme texte'.⁴⁸⁰ When a system attempts to observe itself, placing itself inside and/or outside, a fold emerges: the observing system lifts up and away in order to view the system, whilst still being part of it. The fold is supplementary; the system is extended *and* left intact by the folding operation. The system is one *and* not one, since, in the mirror,

ce qui est reflété se dédouble *en soi-même* et non seulement comme addition à soi de son image. Le reflet, l'image, le double dédouble ce qu'il redouble. [...] Ce qui peut se regarder n'est pas un.⁴⁸¹

The self-observer is 'simultaneously subject and object, interior and exterior'.⁴⁸² Another way of putting this is to say that the folded part is the same and not the same as the remainder of the system. As Luhmann contends, the fold occurs in time as well as in space, because the system before and after the self-observation operation is and is not the same: 'The operation of self-observation requires a reentry [...]. But a reentry is a paradoxical operation. The distinction between "before" and "after" the reentry is *the same and not the same*'.⁴⁸³ Self-observation

⁴⁷⁹ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 356.

⁴⁸⁰ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 302.

⁴⁸¹ Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 55.

⁴⁸² David Nowell Smith, *On Voice in Poetry: The Work of Animation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 56.

⁴⁸³ Luhmann, p. 772. My emphasis.

becomes ‘a minimal repeatability [...] this hiatus, this *fold* of repetition’.⁴⁸⁴ In this sense, the fold is an experiment/experience, too (see Chapter 1, ‘Experiment’). It is the site of the encounter where surface meets depth and inside meets outside. The fold doubles back on itself imperfectly, the re/entry matching and not matching up with the entry. And the fold is similar to the experience of the aporia in that it travels through ‘both/and’, ‘either/or’ and ‘neither/nor’ in a movement of withdrawal and approach. The topological features of the limit are therefore also true of the fold.

The second example of the topological fold makes the most of its connection to paper and pleats. This figure not only draws a limit line, it then folds along that line. And this ‘fold [...] can create difference out of and all across any surface’.⁴⁸⁵ In a fold, be it the complex shapes of origami or a simple crease in a piece of A4, the folded pieces do not align or swallow one another in a perfect self-correspondence: the folded structure of relation ‘empêche [...] cette représentation réfléchissante de *se replier* ou de se reproduire de façon intérieure et adéquate à elle-même, de se dominer ou comprendre elle-même, tautologiquement’.⁴⁸⁶ Even when folding in half, the second leaf is pressed against the first, expertly lined up, but it is never made fully and finally identical to it. Again, as Derrida says, there is no perfect mirroring or ‘simple *mise en abyme*’, no chance for the reflection to ‘se replier ou de se reproduire de façon intérieure et adéquate à elle-même, de se dominer ou comprendre elle-même, tautologiquement’.⁴⁸⁷ The fold relies on both wings, though one ‘half’ may be much smaller, nothing but a corner of a page folded over (see Chapter 1, ‘Balance’). In origami, mountain folds (A) and valley folds (V) imperfectly double each other without being perfect inverses. Angelika Seppi points out that the ‘outside must be conceived as insisting within all the folds and foldings which together make up this or that inside’.⁴⁸⁸ As in origami, once a valley fold is pressed in, the shape of the whole structure is affected, and the indented paper cannot simply be flipped over to produce a mountain fold. Whenever we fold, we create pleats in space and time that cannot be resolved into pure fluidity or identity. There is a fold between even the simplest of repetitions, meaning that the *du-pli-cate* is also a *du-pli-city*, crinkling every self-identity.

⁴⁸⁴ Leonard Lawlor, *This Is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 62.

⁴⁸⁵ Cole Swensen, ‘The Fold’ in *Noise that Stays Noise* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), pp. 90-95 (p. 95).

⁴⁸⁶ Derrida, *Parages*, p. 151.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-51.

⁴⁸⁸ Angelika Seppi, ‘Simply Complicated: Thinking in Folds’ in *On Folding: Towards a New Field of Interdisciplinary Research*, ed. by Michael Friedman and Wolfgang Schäffner (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016), p. 26.

Let us connect the fold now to poetry. Heidegger links the two by describing the twofold (*Zwiefalt*) between being and beings as a fold in the ontico/ontological difference. For Heidegger, this pleating of ‘presence’ with ‘what is present’ gives way to a radiant oneness (*Einfalt*) in art and poetry. There, as discussed in Chapter 3, we can look directly at the movement of being as it emerges and withdraws:

In the late work of the painter [Cézanne] the twofoldness of what is present and of presence has become one, ‘realized,’ and overcome at the same time, transformed into a mystery-filled identity.⁴⁸⁹

Poetry’s fold makes it philosophically valuable to Heidegger, albeit in a different way to the one laid out in this thesis, not least because I wish to retain a more explicit notion of two-ness than Heidegger does here. The philosopher nonetheless acknowledges that the fold is not a simple join but a mobile figure that withdraws and connects, distinguishes and relates. In *Le Pli*, Gilles Deleuze comments on Heidegger’s fold in a way that renders visible the structural and topological connection to the limit experience:

Quand Heidegger invoque le *Zwiefalt* comme le différenciant de la différence, il veut dire avant tout que la différenciation ne renvoie pas à un indifférencié préalable, mais à une Différence qui ne cesse de se déplier et replier de chacun des deux côtés, et qui ne déplie l’un qu’en repliant l’autre, dans une coextensivité du dévoilement et du voilement de l’Être, de la présence et du retrait de l’étant. La ‘duplicité’ du pli se reproduit nécessairement des deux côtés qu’il distingue, mais qu’il rapporte l’un à l’autre en les distinguant: scission dont chaque terme relance l’autre, tension dont chaque pli est tendu dans l’autre.⁴⁹⁰

This coextensive folding and unfolding implicates both sides rather than simply one or a middle ground, and involves the ‘se rapprocher/s’écarter’ of a severing tension that also knits its terms together. Indeed, as David Farrell Krell points out, ‘the word *Einfalt*, “onefold”, “unfold”, is odd, inasmuch as the onefold still has a fold, a single fold, that makes of the one thing folded a twofold by granting it two “leaves” or “wings”’.⁴⁹¹

Another character whose presence lingers throughout the poetry/fold axis is poet Stéphane Mallarmé, partly because of his own *éventail* poems, written on (and about) fans. In Derrida’s

⁴⁸⁹ This late poem by Heidegger is translated from the original German in Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 152.

⁴⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), p. 42.

⁴⁹¹ David Farrell Krell, *Phantoms of the Other: Four Generations of Derrida’s Geschlecht* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), p. 213.

reading of Mallarmé in ‘La Double Séance’, he invokes Heidegger’s fold, questioning the simplicity of the onefold.⁴⁹² The figure of the fold comes into a discussion of the ‘pli indéfini’ between appearing and merely appearing to appear.⁴⁹³ The folding, unfolding and refolding of Mallarmé’s fold then becomes a broader structure akin to the Derridian notion of text. For Mallarmé’s project, too, as a consequence of this interwoven relationality, these folds across matter, time, fabric, lace, paper and books act as networks of communication. In the words of Plotnitsky, ‘Mallarmé’s text becomes an enactment of writing in Derrida’s sense and of its undecidable calculus, practised at every level of Mallarmé’s textual machinery’.⁴⁹⁴ This enactment across multiple levels of the text is because the fold multi-*pli*-es itself into a manifold, akin to how the limit experience became multiplied in ‘Limitrophie’ and ‘Structure’ from Chapter 1: ‘Le pli (se) multiplie mais (n’est) pas (un)’.⁴⁹⁵ There are many axes of doubled reciprocity between and within these textual folds. The manifold is ‘la multiplication sans fins des plis, replis, repliement, pliage, éploiement, déploiement’ that pervades the text.⁴⁹⁶ Every fold affects the others around it (‘se plie à figurer l’autre’) and folds back on itself, too.⁴⁹⁷ Interplays and in betweens are the name of the game here, across multiple axes.

In the thinking of poetry via the figure of the fold, Mallarmé’s *crise de vers* becomes the algebraic and topological play of folds without ultimate foundation, a literary operation which, following Plotnitsky, we can say ‘enacts the ultimately irreducible undecidability of the demarcation of the inside and the outside of literature, or indeed of anything’.⁴⁹⁸ In addition to fabric, wings, veils and curtains, the fan is an exemplary figure for Derrida’s writing on Mallarmé: it is geometrically compressed, resembling the distinctive texture of poetic form, and retains its many folds no matter whether it is snapped open or closed.⁴⁹⁹ The fan is a sort of rudimentary poetry, giving us the basics of its form, rather like the folds of a book. This connection between pleats and poems encourages us, I hope, to view poetry as a configuration of sounds, figures, themes, devices, marks, phrases and words, blanks, pages, transitions and movements.

⁴⁹² Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 192.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 239-40.

⁴⁹⁴ Arkady Plotnitsky, ‘Algebras, Geometries and Topologies of the Fold: Deleuze, Derrida and Quasi-Mathematical Thinking (with Leibniz and Mallarmé)’ in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, ed. by Paul Patton and John Protevi (New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 98-119 (p. 110).

⁴⁹⁵ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 259.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ Plotnitsky, ‘Algebras’, p. 115.

⁴⁹⁹ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 242.

Textile

As mentioned, and as with all the figures from Chapter 1, the fold is not something that simply happens *between* elements, nor is it a middle-zone to which we can easily point. If we again imagine a card folded in half, where is the fold located? It cannot be isolated to the line of the bend down the middle. The fold involves both wings of paper on either side, since it changes their position, and without them the fold in the centre would not be visible. The raw material—the paper—retains something of its old character. It is still paper, folded or not. But what would it mean for it to be unfolded? Can something that is *not* folded mean anything, or be a text? The expression *ne pas faire pli* (literally, to not make a fold) means to be of no consequence.⁵⁰⁰ The without-fold, the *sans pli*, is—like the English *simply*—a highly restricted vision of absolute flatness, ‘l’effacement pur et simple du pli’ (‘Fluidity’).⁵⁰¹ Even an unfolding requires a folding movement of a sort.

A piece of paper before it is folded in half is already folded. This is easier to conceptualise when thinking about fabric rather than paper. Fabric is knitted or woven, made by a process of small folds or stitches. Zooming in, we observe that the material is composed of folds. The cumulative effect of these stitches gives the fabric density and form. The comparison between these stitches and the philosophical fold is not a superficial one. Each stitch creates a point of disjunction—a new addition, a lurching out of the existing textile—as well as a connection, a continuation of the same. Likewise, stitches can be used to tack two fabrics together. As Derrida puts it, the fabric undergoes a change ‘à la pointe d’un instrument de couture qui à la fois troue et coud, enfile’.⁵⁰² To reiterate Deleuze’s view of Heidegger’s fold, it involves a severing (‘scission dont chaque terme relance l’autre’) and a holding taut (‘tension dont chaque pli est tendu dans l’autre’).⁵⁰³ These little folds are moments of *brisure*: articulation, connection and joining, as well as rupture and piercing, given the separation that comes with the penetration of the needle. One loop folds and unfolds into others, as we saw in ‘Structure’ from Chapter 1. The fold is part of an endless form where each fold generates a new folds, *plica explica*: ‘tout pli vient d’un pli’.⁵⁰⁴ This sewing movement creates a structure, a fabric, a *tissu*. It produces a textile which—depending on how one looks at it—is at once discontinuous, continuous, and yet also neither.

⁵⁰⁰ Chris Oakley, ‘Introduction’, in Robin Cooper and others, *Thresholds between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), p. 5.

⁵⁰¹ Krell, *Phantoms*, p. 213; Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 302.

⁵⁰² Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 271.

⁵⁰³ Deleuze, *Le Pli*, p. 42.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

There are of course explicit comparisons in Derrida's writing between the *textile* and *tissu* and the *texte*.⁵⁰⁵ Texts and textiles are composed of multiple folds rather than following a more logical topology: 'il faudrait alors *plier* à d'étranges mouvements ce qu'on ne pourrait même plus appeler simplement la logique du discours'.⁵⁰⁶ Correspondingly, Derrida argues that some distance from the hegemony of our native language is created by a fold in the tissue of language itself. The contours of the fabric of language become gathered in a pleat, 'rassemblée dans sa dissémination même', forming a 'pli dans la dissémination'.⁵⁰⁷ And Mallarmé's corpus, according to Derrida, is enfolded within 'les plis d'un tissu'.⁵⁰⁸ As Seppi states, textual terms such as *simplicity*, *complexity*, *implication*, *explication*, *application*, *replication* all etymologically derive from the Latin *plicare* (to fold), *plectere* (to plait), following the Greek *plékein* (to plait, or to weave).⁵⁰⁹ Etymologically, too, the French word *texture* (originally *tisture*) contains the notion of relation or liaison between woven threads. Even these etymological wordplay puns are themselves stitched together—simply, multiply, imply, and so on—in a way that is reminiscent of poetic texts.⁵¹⁰

In all this, it is important to keep in mind that the coincidence between these terms, text and textile, is not exact. Nor is one of them more original than the other. Instead, the terms are folded into one another. So, there is text in the figure of the textile, but their linkage is also a limit, contingent on a spatio/temporal relation that cannot be guaranteed but must always be renewed in an experimental fashion: 'Tu rêves de prendre ainsi à une tresse ou à un tissage, à un maillage ou à une chaîne, mais sans être sûr du textile à venir'.⁵¹¹ We proceed in the comparison without knowing for sure if what we find will ultimately still be worthy of the name of 'text', 'de texte dans la textile'.⁵¹² To prefigure a line of my argument, we might consider these metaphors—text, textile, and so on—to be metaphors for one another.

⁵⁰⁵ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 271. See also Jacques Derrida, 'Un ver à soie: Points de vue piqués sur l'autre voile' in Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, *Voiles* (Paris: Galilée, 1998), pp. 23-85, where he plays on the fold of 'textile' and 'texte'.

⁵⁰⁶ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 118.

⁵⁰⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre, ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p. 42, p. 49.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵⁰⁹ Seppi, p. 2.

⁵¹⁰ See Krell, *Phantoms*, p. 213. He loses the emphasis on poetry, though, by continuing that such devices are 'reminiscent [...] indeed of every literary text and perhaps every "commentary" and every "placement" of such texts'. It is true that paragraphs, too, can be woven like textiles, a play of folding and stitching.

⁵¹¹ Derrida, *Voiles*, p. 27.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

Keeping up the textile metaphors, Derrida writes: ‘Tout commence alors—loi de la dissémination—par une doublure [...] pli d’une doublure selon laquelle il [le voile] est, hors de soi, en soi, à la fois son propre dehors et son propre dedans’.⁵¹³ Just as one side of the veil is to the other, and just as the word ‘doublure’ is to the word ‘double’, we learn that the coat’s lining is its imperfect double. The seam of the coat lining is a fold between and within the fabric(s). As mentioned earlier, there is the presence/absence of at least a miniscule hiatus or duplicity in doubling. The suffix ‘-ble’ of *double* derives from the word ‘plex’, meaning ‘fold’ or ‘pli’.⁵¹⁴ As Hobson claims, the word *double*, thanks to its association with folding, ‘says how many times, and, etymologically at least, in what way how many times. It is because repetition—or replication—is itself complex, that this “strange folding” of repetition comes about’.⁵¹⁵ Just as with the limit experience, where limits were doubled and split in the same moment, the doubling of a fold is also a kind of splitting. It gives us two pieces, doubling the number, but it also divides the first piece in half. The word *dédoublement* means splitting, while *doublement* relates to doubling. As cited above, ‘le double dédouble ce qu’il redouble’.⁵¹⁶ A fold is, then, a *dé/doublement*.

Doublings

The doubled topology described by the fold of repetition *ap-pli-es* to poetic words and motifs that are repeated, but also to parallelisms and repeated lines in verse, and to ambiguities which rely on the doubling and splitting of meaning across two simultaneous possibilities. It also applies, though perhaps less obviously, to the themes of substitution, typography, enjambment, imagery and chiasmus that will be discussed in this chapter. As Heidegger intuited, doubling serves to disturb hermeneutic and representational language, because it makes the language itself speak, in a play of relations that has no essential need for depth nor a metaphysical guarantor.⁵¹⁷ Pleats and limit experiences can come about just in a poem’s doublings. Schimanski is therefore right in stating that the repertoire of ‘border figures’ in ‘border poetics’ include not only questions of whether the border is ‘a cut or a link’, along with ‘figures for the border (line, threshold, coast, seam, the Berlin Wall, the customs official)’, but also ‘a set of border *effects*, for example infoldings, doublings, splittings, and disseminations’.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹³ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 14, p. 259.

⁵¹⁴ Hobson, p. 69.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 55.

⁵¹⁷ Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot*, p. 46.

⁵¹⁸ Schimanski, ‘Crossing and Reading’, p. 59.

Infolding, unfolding, *tissage* and weaving are a recurrent leitmotif in modern French poetry, including in the poetry of Jacques Dupin. Dominique Viart remarks that ‘Bien des lectures de l’œuvre de Jacques Dupin sont impressionnées par le jeu de redoublement qui met l’écriture en scène’.⁵¹⁹ In his poetry, Dupin puts to work a variety of poetic devices and techniques alongside images and metapoetic passages that reflect a fascination with the fold and with doubling. Such techniques create limit experiences in the space/time of the poem. Mary Ann Caws fittingly describes Dupin’s poetry as a tense, taut fabric canvas, ‘insofar as all relations in this poetry can be said to be examples of tension, voltage or stress’ which ‘forms the canvas stretched out of the poem and of its self-examining’.⁵²⁰ Although Caws emphasises rupture and destruction over interlinking, she goes on to say that Dupin’s work has a ‘texture’, in which ‘the two currents of break and trace are joined’.⁵²¹ The limit experience of the fold demands a local, formal analysis here. This chapter conducts a close reading of examples from Dupin’s poetry. All the same, we should remain aware that these ‘individual’ folds emerge from and support larger structural notions of texture and rhythm that run throughout.

In a flurry of poems from *Le Grésil*, the doubling repetitions come thick and fast. In one poem, the word ‘lumière’ is repeated at the end of one line and the beginning of the next, in a chiasmic ordering: ‘[le] trait | incise dans la lumière | la lumière, la douleur’.⁵²² This poetic device of chiasmic repetition exploits enjambment to create a fold between two instances of the same word. The two instances of ‘lumière’, so close together, serve to highlight their similarity with an echo effect; but this technique also underscores their difference from each other. It enacts the incision made by the ‘trait’ which cuts into that light, splitting the light into two (‘lumière | lumière’) as well as doubling it. In the following poem, which takes place in a darker setting, the repetition occurs instead at the end of two subsequent lines:

peu de mots, dans la nuit
du poirier sauvage, dans la lettre

de l’ami qui appelle, très loin
avant de dormir, très loin

à la fourche d’une autre nuit⁵²³

⁵¹⁹ Dominique Viart, ‘Avons-Nous Commencé d’écrire ? Penser l’art et l’écriture selon Jacques Dupin’, *Littérature*, 104 (1996), 3-19 (p. 3), www.jstor.org/stable/41704677.

⁵²⁰ Mary Ann Caws, ‘Jacques Dupin: The Word Engraved’, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 1 (1979), 95-116 (p. 97).

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

⁵²² Jacques Dupin, *Ballast: Contumace, Échancré, Le Grésil* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 235.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

The repetition of ‘nuit’, ‘très loin’, ‘très loin’ and back to ‘nuit’ again creates another chiasmic pattern, at the ends of the lines this time, folding the end of this passage back to its beginning along an imperfect axis of symmetry. The first two lines echo their ending clauses: ‘dans la nuit’, ‘dans la lettre’. These doublings fold the poem’s lines together, 1 to 2, 1 to 5, 3 to 4. If we pleated along each of these joins, it might look like a funny sort of fan. Meanwhile, what those words are insisting on semantically is actually an impression of distance: a far-away night, conveyed by a sparsely written letter. A *mise-en-abîme* is created, where those few words sit inside the night they describe, which sits inside the letter, which in turn dwells within the bedroom of the correspondent, a friend, who sits inside his own night, another night far away. Layers of connection emerge, with each link in the chain both joining and distancing each term, knitting them together as well as rending them apart.

In *Échancré*, Dupin writes of ‘la ligne infinie, cassée, renouée, infinie [...] elle écrit le trait, le pli, la faille, la cassure et le nœud’.⁵²⁴ His language doubles and knots together, in an enactment of this infinite liminal structure, made up of breaks, folds and joins. He also describes poetry as ‘la danse des axes et des plis que la phrase a dénudés, a recouverts, ou réactivés jusqu’à la rupture’.⁵²⁵ Writing is positioned as the site of the limit experience: axes of folds are revealed and concealed in an unfolding movement that is as much rupture as it is connection. As a way of thinking this interlaced relationship of sameness and difference, Dupin also speaks of ‘la contiguïté, toujours, de même et de l’autre, dans la coupure et la suture, dans le flux et le reflux’.⁵²⁶ Glenn Williams Fetzer identifies this insistence on contiguities in Dupin’s work—‘the quality of disparate elements that touch each other’—but he suggests that it forms an ‘inviolable chain [by which] the poet divulges his predilection for permanence’.⁵²⁷ These ever-shifting images do not, to my mind, give such grand reassurances about permanence, because the interval that brings them together is simultaneously the interval that rends them from one another.

For Swensen, ‘the fold is the basis of difference [...] it can make two of one’.⁵²⁸ This chimes with the ‘deux sont | un’ evoked by the poetic speaker here:

L’un tombe l’autre
non

⁵²⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p. 215.

⁵²⁶ Jacques Dupin, *Matière du souffle* (Paris: Fourbis, 1994), p. 11.

⁵²⁷ Glenn Williams Fetzer, *Palimpsests of the Real in Recent French Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 20.

⁵²⁸ Swensen, p. 95.

les deux sont
un

l'unique
est multitude
ou
liseron⁵²⁹

The division of the 'either/or' ('L'un tombe l'autre | non') is exaggerated by the white space; however, performatively there is a contradiction, as the 'one' that 'falls' down to the next poetic line is in fact the 'other'. Their places are switched: 'les deux sont | un', and the one is also two: 'l'unique | est multitude' (see Chapter 2, 'Meaning' and 'Singular/general'). Peter Poiana writes that Dupin's poetry 'can only function in terms of the rule of indistinction, reversibility and doubling [...] recaptur[ing] the atmosphere of conflict and instability' perceived by pre-Socratic philosophies.⁵³⁰ Poiana's analysis turns on the section of *Contumace* entitled 'La double jarre'. With its 'langue bifide',⁵³¹ it is pervaded by doublings, repetitions, and ambiguities:

The two appearances of the word 'arôme' [...] offer two contrasting perspectives on the way in which the poet conceives his struggle against the pervasive forces that obstruct his poetic powers. [...] [T]he word 'arôme', split between two psychic values, dramatizes in miniature as it were the loss of countenance that afflicts the subject of representation [...] as he now submits to the doubling effect of the lunar copy ('décalque lunaire').⁵³²

This stylistic device is akin to antanaclasis, in which the same word is repeated, but each time with a different sense—though here the effect is subtle rather than punning. We find an example of this in the following lines:

une rose contre la porte

une rose perfide et nue, autre

et la même que la porte⁵³³

Unusually, the spaces here are double line breaks rather than single. Dupin's double spacing implicitly calls to the single enjambment, which often occurs in the same poem. The difference

⁵²⁹ Jacques Dupin, *De nul lieu et du Japon: Poèmes* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1981), p. 14.

⁵³⁰ Peter Poiana, 'Jacques Dupin's Lacunary Poetics: Enunciative Depropriation in "La Double Jarre"', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 15.2 (2015), 40-60 (p. 53).

⁵³¹ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 84.

⁵³² Poiana, p. 54.

⁵³³ Dupin, *Ballast*, pp. 246-47.

between them is not one of quantity—'this gap is bigger than the usual one'—but rather implicitly of doubling, 'this gap is *twice* the normal one'. Or perhaps it is the smaller breaks that are half the size of usual.

The image of the rose is repeated anaphorically. The second reference seems more figurative than the first, given that it is 'perfide et nue', but symbolic and literal roses palimpsestically co-exist here. More interesting, though, is the doubling of the word 'contre'. Without being explicitly repeated, its meaning is doubled. Initially, it is understood to mean that the rose is leaning up against the door, or even growing up it; but with the introduction of the floral connotations of betrayal, it begins to mean 'against' in the sense of 'opposed' and 'treacherous'. The final clause, 'autre || et la même que la porte', now takes on a doubly doubled meaning: the rose is set against ('autre [...] que') the door in the two ways described, but it is also the same as the door, in two ways again. Firstly, the rose is the same as the door because, although it leans against it, it relies on it for its shape (if we imagine roses climbing around a doorframe) and is supported by it. Secondly, the rose is the same as the door because it insinuates itself there: part of treachery is pretending to be a friend when one is actually a foe.

Continuing the discussion of poetic doubling, I cite in full a poem from Dupin's collection *Gravir* entitled 'Le cœur par défaut':

Une fleur de givre entre deux rafales
Ne l'arrête pas.

Ô cendre éprise sous la langue,
Brèche dans l'horizon!

Entre ce roc bondé d'étoiles et son sosie le gouffre,
L'édifice du souffle est une seconde prison.

À la place du cœur
Tu ne heurteras, mon amour, que le luisant d'un soc
Et la nuit grandissante...⁵³⁴

The couplets that form the first three stanzas initiate a sensation of diplopia. In each couplet, there is a strange non-coincidence between the lines, preventing them from being closed off as twin units of meaning. The motif of the 'in between' ('entre deux') is *itself* repeated from a poem earlier in the collection, creating another uneasy relation of almost-pairs.⁵³⁵ The final stanza has

⁵³⁴ Jacques Dupin, *Le Corps clairvoyant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 58.

⁵³⁵ Dupin's other reference is to 'entre deux morts'. *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 26.

three lines, which is an obvious shift from the first three couplets, yet also strangely mirrors them on the page: one line per couplet. This experience of an ambiguous semi-relation is affirmed lexically: ‘Brèche’ begins line 4, ‘Entre’ begins line 5, and the intrusion of a ‘doppelganger’ or ‘double’ (‘sosie’) in the middle of line 5 caps it all off. In the French, the shadowy doubling of ‘son sosie’ is picked up phonetically in the sibilance of the following line, as well as semantically in the word ‘seconde’.

The title echoes an ambiguity within the notion of obligation: ‘par défaut’ can carry a negative connotation in French (‘as a last resort’) or a neutral one (‘by default’), and the choice is never determined definitively in this poem. Perhaps both are in play at the same time, however dissonant they are. This uncomfortable splitting and doubling presses into the poem’s first image. The enjambment in the first stanza creates an ambiguity that would not be possible in prose: is this latter line a grammatical continuation of the first line, or an imperative to the second person addressee of this poem (who appears explicitly in line 8)? The lack of punctuation at the end of the first line implies the former; but the lack of obvious referent for the pronoun implies the latter. This set-up performatively places the reader alongside the ‘fleur de givre’ (a frost-pattern), which is caught in the interval between two squalls. A similar effect is found in two lines from ‘Ballast’, ‘les débris d’une vague | sonore chaîne, aux maillons brisés en chaque mot’, where, as de Julio notices ‘lack of punctuation at the end of the second line makes the term *vague* both an adjective and a noun’.⁵³⁶ As a final example, the poem that begins ‘Le froid | le fendre | et sonner comme une pierre’ plays on the double grammatical use of ‘le’—as both masculine article and direct object—with the comparison invigorated by the fricative alliteration.⁵³⁷

The titular word ‘cœur’ foreshadows the romantic addressee who is introduced on the penultimate line as ‘mon amour’, but it also recalls Dupin’s prose poem ‘L’ordre du jour’ from earlier in the collection.⁵³⁸ In that poem (whose title sets up the expectation of a poetic manifesto), the ‘cœur’ is a different type of metaphorical heart: the heart of the problem. It begins, ‘D’élire domicile au cœur de l’entraîne, acquiescement et refus obligeant qui les creuse’.⁵³⁹ Indeed, this line is emblematic of the entire poetic operation. The anacoluthon here leads the reader into an uneasy back-and-forth, but the meaning is distinguishable. Finding a home in the heart of the interval—here, navigating the co-existence of agreement and refusal, perhaps even sense and nonsense—seems like an impossible endeavour, and yet poetry, somehow, renders it im/possible on the page.

⁵³⁶ de Julio, p. 211.

⁵³⁷ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 236.

⁵³⁸ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 40.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

In *Thinking French Translation*, Sándor Hervey and Ian Higgins demonstrate the difficulty of translating one of Dupin’s metapoetic comments because of this very doubling. The sentence, adapted slightly by the authors, reads: ‘L’écriture ne comble pas mais au contraire approfondit toujours davantage le manque et le tourment qui la suscitent’.⁵⁴⁰ Hervey and Higgins remark that ‘for both “comble” and “approfondit”, the context mobilises more than one of their potential meanings. This is because the two verbs are used together’.⁵⁴¹ *Combler* and *approfondir* used in tandem trigger the words’ concrete meanings, which are opposites: to fill up and to deepen a hole. However, ‘combler le manque’ is additionally a well-established expression meaning to satisfy a need. And ‘approfondir le manque’ has a ‘regular figurative sense’, too, meaning to probe or investigate a problem.⁵⁴² The fact that these verbs are used together means that the lack, need or problem is *both/either/neither* worsened *and/or/nor* investigated.

William Empson writes in his influential book *Seven Types of Ambiguity* that ‘The machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry’.⁵⁴³ Dupin often writes with a *double sens*, capitalising on the ambiguities of his language. In the next example, he also makes use of the left-right, top-down reading expectations of French. The poet disorders the text, forcing the reader to enact the repetition to which it refers:

visage lié à la répétition
d’un meurtre⁵⁴⁴

Dupin’s syntax creates multiple possibilities. Developing Caws’s insight about this passage,⁵⁴⁵ we might say that we read ‘visage lié à la répétition d’un meurtre’ *and/or* we read ‘visage lié d’un meurtre à la répétition’. The meaning of the connective ‘de’ shifts. The reader re-reads, becoming cross-eyed. This limit experience, between reading down and then across *and/or* reading first across and then down, is forced upon the reader by the textual breaches between phrases. The poetic form encourages ‘cross-reading’, originally a technique of reading across newspaper columns instead of down each one in sequence.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 153; Sándor Hervey and Ian Higgins, *Thinking French Translation* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 48.

⁵⁴¹ Hervey and Higgins, p. 48.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), p. 3.

⁵⁴⁴ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 253. The phrase ‘La répétition d’un meurtre’ is also itself repeated on p. 254.

⁵⁴⁵ Mary Ann Caws, ‘Passage du poème: Interrogation du seuil’, *Cahiers de l’Association internationale des études françaises*, 30 (1978), 225-43 (p. 233).

⁵⁴⁶ See Hobson, p. 87.

These individual doublings gather together in the folds of the poem. They form its texture and its textile. Dupin makes a metapoetic allusion to this play of folds in ‘La double jarre’:

étant son double
étant l’éclipse de la même

l’une s’écarte de l’autre
et de soi glissement
d’intensités secondes
bifurquées
sur le neutre de la paroi⁵⁴⁷

The slippery doublings, themselves bifurcated or bisecting, are like folds coming up from and in the neutral surface of the wall. Each is secondary (‘secondes’), none is primary. The motif of the wall crops up again in *Ballast*, and elsewhere with ‘Par une brèche dans le mur’.⁵⁴⁸ As Caws points out, ‘the protrusions are remarked in spite of their insertion into a continuous background’, recalling the Derridian *pli* mentioned above.⁵⁴⁹ From these pleats in the text emerge chiasmic (ABBA) and alternating (ABAB) structures that overlay each other in the following lines:

La traversée qui nous scande, la trajectoire qui nous mesure,
[...]
nous, la mesure de la traversée, la scansion de la trajectoire⁵⁵⁰

‘Traversée, trajectoire, traversée, trajectoire’ is interpolated into ‘Scansion, mesure, mesure, scansion’, structuring itself like the weft and weave of a stitched fabric.

Slashes (‘/’)

Caws’s interpretation of a poem titled ‘La lacet’ frames it as a thickened, manifold and convoluted plane: ‘like a deforming mirror at a fair, the paper thickens what was originally paper-sharp, razor-thin, dangerously precise’.⁵⁵¹ The notion of thickening reflects some of Hobson’s comments on citation in Derrida: ‘Such quotation is an insertion of the heterogeneous; it thus cannot be spread flat, like a mosaic, nor absorbed into the host, nor prevented from radiating back to the text from which it came’.⁵⁵² There is a stubborn three-dimensionality to the folds of

⁵⁴⁷ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 76.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 239; Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 350. This poem is examined further below.

⁵⁴⁹ Caws, ‘The Word Engraved’, p. 104.

⁵⁵⁰ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 212.

⁵⁵¹ Caws, ‘The Word Engraved’, p. 109.

⁵⁵² Hobson, p. 85.

citatoriness. Citatoriness prohibits fluidity with the text ('spread flat, like a mosaic') whilst also denying the self-contained orb of a sphere ('abs-orb-ed into the host [...] prevented from radiating back'). Citation creates a textile of pleats, 'seam[s]' and 'stitching[s]':

Such grafts suggest an important trait in the texture of thinking: that the way we think, be it ever so cogent and careful, is one of seamed extension, a stitching forwards and backwards between items of different age and different provenance, and of which items the same could be said, *ad infinitum*.⁵⁵³

As discussed in 'Genre', genres come to being through a process of negotiated mediation and differentiation, and the same is true of texts' relationality to each other. Hence Jorge Luis Borges proposes that a book (or a poem, for that matter) 'is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships'.⁵⁵⁴ Language is 'un tissu de citations'.⁵⁵⁵ In Julia Kristeva's words, 'tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte'.⁵⁵⁶ It is not cheeky to call citation a folded, textured structure. As Derrida puts it, 'Tout "commence" donc par la citation, dans les faux plis d'un certain voile'.⁵⁵⁷ These creases or 'faux plis' are duplicated but also duplicitous, 'faux', because they are folded in an imperfect self-coincidence. The cited text adds to and strengthens the host text's argument, whilst also exceeding it, calling to something outside it and disseminating its claims. The citation is also itself contaminated by the text, which draws out latent and new resonances in the quotation and harnesses it for a new purpose. This is why 'tout commence dans *le pli* de la citation [...] le dedans du texte aura toujours été hors de lui'.⁵⁵⁸ The inside ('dedans') of a piece of writing—its contribution, what it has to say—also comes from outside it, in both temporal directions: before and after. And there is a fold between the two.

With citation now in the back of our minds, let us turn to Dupin's ekphrastic poem 'Malevitch', inspired by the work of Kazimir Malevich.⁵⁵⁹ Malevich was a geometrically inclined abstract painter perhaps most famous for his 1915 work *Black Square*, a black rectangle on a white background. Dupin's striking poem sheds light on the patterns of folding in his own poetry and also, to some extent, in Malevich's art. Typographically, Dupin uses forward slashes to mirror the

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 249.

⁵⁵⁵ Barthes, *Le Bruissement*, p. 65.

⁵⁵⁶ Julia Kristeva, 'Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman' in Julia Kristeva, *Semiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), p. 146.

⁵⁵⁷ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 352.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 384.

⁵⁵⁹ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, pp. 347-56.

book's inner fold, scattering other, smaller folds throughout the text, and creating a density of folds woven throughout its texture. Each slash is a moment of connection and division at once—a limit experience. For example, in the lines 'que le noir coupe le blanc / et que le blanc revienne du bord / ou | de l'absence de limites', the printed slashes are figured as cuts which are also folds: black cuts into white, just like the black slash on the white paper, holding back the white, imposing a division.⁵⁶⁰ But the white resurges from this border line ('le blanc revien[t] du bord'), *débordant*, and showing the limitlessness of the limit ('l'absence de limites'). This absence is not total fluidity, because it is adjoined to the border line itself by a logic of 'both/and and/or either/or'. The two contradictory moves, the cut-like limit and limitlessness, are held together by an 'et', just after the first slash quoted, but also by an 'ou', where we learn that the white comes from the limit or from the absence of such a limit. In Dupin's poetry, polysyndeton seems to mark organisation ('et', 'ou', 'où' and so on) but, when probed, the implicit logical organisation often crumbles into more enigmatic relations. Dupin's slashes mark the movement of this argument, too, between the to-ing and fro-ing of the thought as it un/folds.

In common usage, the slash indicates an exclusive 'or' (one or the other) *and/or* an inclusive 'or' (one and the other), as in 'pink/red'. Such a colour is neither purely red, nor purely pink, but is one *and/or* the other, insofar as they are connected and may shade into one another, creating a mix of both in which they both remain distinguishable and present. The forward slash is picked up by Dupin's poetry as a formal feature of the limit experience. This ordinary usage is, through repetition, compressed and highlighted in this poem. The forward slash is also typically used when citing poetry, to mark a line break, nodding again to citation as a figure of the fold.

For Malevich himself, his artwork *White on White* was in fact a symbol of limitlessness proper, a white square on a white canvas: 'Swim in the free white abyss, infinity is before you'.⁵⁶¹ In the thinking of the limit experience, though, there is no fluidity between white and white; and Malevich's 1916 painting demonstrates this, the white square standing out as a brighter shade than the background. That square is set at a jaunty angle, diagonally across the square of the canvas, mirroring the '/' of Dupin's poem. Indeed, the poem speaks of relations as a conflict 'qui se projette blanc et noir / ou inversement blanc sur blanc', referring to Malevich's bicoloured

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 349.

⁵⁶¹ Kazimir Malevich, cited in *MoMA Highlights*, ed. by Glenn D. Lowry (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2019), www.moma.org/collection/works/80385.

paintings.⁵⁶² There are two limits here. The first is the one between ‘black/white’ and ‘white/white’ (where the terms do not blur into each other, but contrast whilst simultaneously relying on one another for their visibility). This is as true for ‘white/white’ as it is for ‘black/white’. The second limit in play here is the one *between* ‘black/white’ and ‘white/white’, which are also divided by a ‘/’. The punctuation mark is used by Dupin, arguably, in the same way as this thesis uses it—to mark a fold or *brisure*. We might also remember Derrida’s comment, cited in Chapter 1, about the ‘et’ hidden in ‘la barre oblique de l’opposition’.⁵⁶³ Indeed, the opposite of ‘black/white’ would logically be ‘white/black’. ‘White/white’ is only obliquely the opposite of ‘black/white’; it only makes sense as an inversion if one looks at it askew, along the diagonal. Thus, the ‘inversion’ that characterises the relation *between* ‘black/white’ and ‘white/white’ is not an oppositional, binary flipping of one term into its opposite, but is, rather, a fold.

Black and white join red to form Malevich’s most familiar palette. Citing Dupin’s line, ‘au couperet de toute balance les éclats du linge et le sang contradictoire’,⁵⁶⁴ Caws writes that ‘The images themselves are often established in systematic balance of opposites: the red of blood against the gleaming white of linen, announced by the thin blade of a guillotine itself whetted like a razor, working to separate reflection from reflection’.⁵⁶⁵ But these interlocking colours are places of connection and contrast, rather than pure opposition. In a similar vein, the typographical use of forward slashes is not simply a division any more than it is an undifferentiated fluidity between terms. In fact, it introduces something akin to an enjambment within each line. The slash acts as a miniature or attenuated line break that interrupts the texture of the line whilst remaining co-extensive with it. What is more, as well as positioning the poem with respect to citation practices as noted above, the fact that the forward slash is commonly used to mark a line break when citing poetry clues us into the fact that the ruptures instantiated by the forward slashes are similar to those of enjambments. The slashes serve to fragment the verse and to give form to the relations between its connected parts. In Denise Levertov’s words, the line-break’s rhythmic function derives from the fact that it can ‘record the slight (but meaningful) hesitations between word and word that are characteristic of the mind’s dance among perceptions but which are not

⁵⁶² Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 356. Derrida also discusses ‘blanc sur blanc’ with regards to Mallarmé and Jean-Pierre Richard in *Dissémination* (p. 222). See also p. 285: ‘Le blanc se plie, est (marqué d’un) pli. Il ne s’expose jamais à plate couture’.

⁵⁶³ Derrida, ‘Et Cetera...’, p. 25.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁵⁶⁵ Caws, ‘The Word Engraved’, p. 107.

noted by grammatical punctuation'.⁵⁶⁶ Seen this way, poetry with line breaks forms 'une succession nécessaire de ruptures, de dérives, d'embrasements [...]. Rompre et ressaisir, et ainsi renouer'.⁵⁶⁷

Sometimes Dupin uses enjambments and spaces re/presentationally, enacting dispersion and *cassures* that are mentioned in the same lines. In 'Malevitch', it is unclear which line breaks (or folds, or knits) are put in by the typesetter due to page size constraints and which are deliberate. Ambiguity follows: are these breaks supposed to be read as ruptures, or more akin to joins, an invitation to keep reading seamlessly onto the next line as one would when reading prose? Just like we saw earlier (in 'Doublings'), in the second stanza of 'Malevitch', Dupin's enjambments reinforce ambiguities in the grammatical parsing of a phrase, presenting different options in a way that makes it unclear whether they are true simultaneously or not ('que [...] que [...] que').⁵⁶⁸

et l'écriture encore selon le brusque / éclaircissement / des angles les tracés
obliques les récits tronqués les scissions d'espace / la numération du fatal
exclu
s'ingénie à rompre s'introduit en lui
succombe à son incessant flux / de météores⁵⁶⁹

The above quotation displays the numerous styles of breaks in this poem, from line breaks to forward slashes, extended gaps of various sizes, as well as the more ordinary spaces between words and letters. A knitted texture emerges, with *brisures* of differing sizes. The passage cited above explicitly directs us towards these concerns: angles, oblique traces, truncations and scissions in space. And all of these textual breaches are also, of course, connections; 'l'écriture [...] s'ingénie à rompre' shows that the rebellious side of poetry strives to break away, but also ends up introducing, succumbing ('s'introduit en lui | succombe à son incessant flux') to its own endless play of diagonally falling meteors. The temporality here, as well as the spatial folding of the poetry back on itself, is moebius-like: the poem introduces (as though it did not exist before) the very thing to which it will succumb (implying that it was there before). One of the hallmarks of the limit experience's split and doubled temporality is staying still in an iterable present *and/or* also moving through time in a series of different moments. Consequently, each moment is both

⁵⁶⁶ Denise Levertov, 'On the Function of the Line' in *Claims for Poetry*, ed. by Donald Hall (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), p. 266.

⁵⁶⁷ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 165.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

new and old, connected to and riven from the one before it. By the same token, simultaneity is pleated by enjambments: ‘le temps épars / concassé et rejoint’.⁵⁷⁰

‘Malevitch’'s final line hints at the differential movement in time incarnated in the experience of waiting. Limit experiences are associated with waiting, because the flow of time relative to space is held back by the border's limiting nature (‘either/or’), as well as carried forward by it (‘both/and’) in a temporal skipping. For Rosello and Wolfe, the border can be a crossing-place but also ‘what causes a standstill, or a delay: a difference in time and space’, as though time moves on but space does not.⁵⁷¹ Enjambements may fulfil this function in the flow of a poem, since the reading time moves through the blank space but the printed text does not. Here, Dupin explicitly alludes to this space/time disjuncture within the experience of waiting: the subject waits, static, for something that has not yet appeared, and lets the mobile flow of time wash over him as though he could be separate from it. However, there is more to it. The act of waiting also implies anticipation of that future time: the subject becomes permeable to a known and expected event which is coming towards it, from a future which folds into and conditions the present: ‘l’attente / l’attentat de l’impossible espace’.⁵⁷² Dupin’s ‘/’ creates an enjambment or folding effect, as does the splitting of the word ‘de’ into two distinct grammatical uses. Waiting *for* something and being attacked *by* it at once creates a chiasmic movement that recalls the unfolding motion of time itself. The polyptoton of ‘l’attente’ and ‘l’attentat’ accentuates this doubling, which creates an impossible (or, more precisely for my purposes, im/possible) topology: ‘l’impossible espace’.⁵⁷³

Poiana’s article on Dupin’s poetry follows Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in focusing on the instability, denaturing and alienation of the speaking voice. The poetic subject does not have a ‘proper’ voice or source, and is instead ‘diffracted’, caught up in its own self-questioning.⁵⁷⁴ It bears mentioning that the movement of the poetic or lyric subject through a poem can help to gain a purchase on the structures of the limit experience, because it is one axis of mobile relationality that runs through the poem. How might the participation of the limit experience in the lyric subject play out in a poem? One avenue is that the poetic subject encourages us to perceive the folded structure of space and time, because that structure makes the subject fold back on itself imperfectly. In Maryann de Julio’s article ‘Jacques Dupin and a New Kind of Lyricism’, de Julio

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 354.

⁵⁷¹ Rosello and Wolfe, p. 19.

⁵⁷² Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 356.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Poiana, p. 45.

reflects on what she terms Dupin's 'new brand of lyric'.⁵⁷⁵ In this new lyricism, de Julio claims, the poetic voice is evoked using spatial figures: '[Dupin's] project is methodically to reexamine perspective as a spatial entity and subsequently to incorporate it into the text as subjectivity'.⁵⁷⁶ In de Julio's model, there is a relation between text and subjectivity which maps onto inside and outside. Voice sits between outside and inside, as well as between self and world.⁵⁷⁷ Dupin's image of the window from 'Ouvrte en peu de mots' supports this interpretation. De Julio figures it as 'an opening that facilitates reciprocal passage between outside and inside'—a kind of slash or frame.⁵⁷⁸ Similarly, the first two stanzas of 'Ballast', with their image of 'le double horizon', evoke a movement in which 'outside and inside exist alternately and must be read as a moebius-like strip or spiral figure'.⁵⁷⁹ Dupin is certainly fond of this figure: in *Dehors*, he writes, 'C'est la peau du dehors qui se retourne et nous absorbe'.⁵⁸⁰ However, after promising flights towards an 'inside/outside' paradigm, the critic moves swiftly towards fluidity metaphors. In an attempt to emphasise that the 'je' *outside* the text does not have a simple relationship with the *inside* of the text, de Julio claims that 'there is no inside into which to peer' and that 'boundaries between outside and inside are eliminated'.⁵⁸¹ In the same breath, the critic claims that Dupin is engaged in a 'reflective poetics insofar as his text is a mirror image of itself', since looking inside at the text is now just like looking in a mirror.⁵⁸²

I would prefer to conceive of an unfolding mechanism here, in which the subject produces the text from the outside but is also incorporated into its space from the inside, though never fully subsumed. In the Heideggerian framework, 'a human being is always on the way toward itself'.⁵⁸³ Likewise, if Dupin's poetry places the subject 'claudiquant, étincelant, sur le sentier du retour',⁵⁸⁴ back to the poetic speaker, this is a return which never comes totally full circle in an ouroboric orb of *rondeur*, but which instead constantly unfolds anew: 'Je ne suis pas tout à fait de retour. Avec ce geste infini [...]'.⁵⁸⁵ In Swensen's words, in the fold, 'you retrace your steps, but not

⁵⁷⁵ Maryanne de Julio, 'Jacques Dupin and a New Kind of Lyricism', *French Forum*, 14.2 (1989), 209-17 (p. 209).

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 210.

⁵⁷⁹ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 27; de Julio, p. 210.

⁵⁸⁰ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 207.

⁵⁸¹ de Julio, p. 210, p. 213.

⁵⁸² Ibid., p. 215.

⁵⁸³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 273.

⁵⁸⁴ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 391.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 379.

quite; the return doesn't quite undo the going [...]. It's an act of placeholder'.⁵⁸⁶ Later in 'Ballast', Dupin writes:

La division qui nous porte, et nous dérègle,
nous approvisionne, à n'atteindre jamais le point
de rencontre avec qui l'absout,⁵⁸⁷

The 'division', like that of the slash, becomes a fold. The perfect meeting place, where the beginning is cancelled out or absolved by what will draw it to a close, is never fully reached, because there is a fundamental sense of division that unworks us ('nous dérègle') from within. This recalls Derrida's version of the Resurrection in *Voiles*, where neither the first nor the second coming of the messiah are able to create a perfect circle of plenitude. We must make do with 'un voyage sans retour, sans cercle ni tour de monde en tout cas'.⁵⁸⁸

As de Julio's analysis does show, it is ultimately the structural properties of the subject's experience which make it a limit experience in this line of analysis. To take another example, one feature that de Julio observes in 'Ballast', and which is a notable presence throughout Dupin's œuvre, is how the formal composition of his lines creates 'mirror' structures, or—better, to avoid the connotations of perfect duplication (see 'Fluidity')—*fold structures*, in the space/time of the poem or collection:

Dupin's works are composed in such a way that images, letters and numbers are mirror-images of themselves, that is to say, previous textual antecedents are repeated in reverse order with reversed letters reminiscent of images perceived as inverted when reflected in their source. In *Ligne de rupture* and *L'Onglée* [...], for example, Dupin uses the numerical sequence as an explicit component of poetic composition. *La Ligne de rupture* is comprised of 13 numbered texts of seven lines each, whereas *L'Onglée* can be described as seven numbered texts of 13 lines (presented in decreasing numerical order) plus an italicized text (numbered 0) of seven lines.⁵⁸⁹

To put this account in my terms, the limit structure is re-*pli*-cated in a movement that folds one text back across a previous text, never coinciding with it, but overlaying it imperfectly and palimpsestically. The poetic work folds back on itself. The first text gets re-read in the light of the second text. That second reading introduces difference, a non-circular return; but there is also consistency, because the text is still the same in some sense. This replication or folded mirroring

⁵⁸⁶ Swensen, p. 94.

⁵⁸⁷ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 30.

⁵⁸⁸ Derrida, *Voiles*, p. 26.

⁵⁸⁹ de Julio, p. 210.

also occurs within a poem, at the level of line lengths. For Dupin, too, the poetic subject, the poetic present returns to itself each time, but never perfectly. The present moment is always folded into the next moment in a renewing, iterative movement: ‘le génie d’envelopper | trois fois sept fois un présent’.⁵⁹⁰ From a distance, this enveloping, rolling motion looks like a flicker or oscillation: ‘le vacillement d’une bougie’.⁵⁹¹ As Chapter 5 develops further, this rhythm unfolds across the textile of the text, activating its folds and creating them at the same time. Its power resides, as Dupin’s own poetry puts it, ‘dans sa matérialité déchirée, sa réitération ouverte’.⁵⁹²

Angles

The thematic prevalence of folds, crooks, angles and diagonal slashes in ‘Malevitch’ cannot help but jump out, too. Dupin’s use of imagery does not simply populate the poem with content; it is itself a type of formal experimentation. Alongside metaphor and analogy (explored further in Chapter 5), the formal device here is enumeration. A concentration of folds reveals that their interwoven texture forms the fabric of the text. Borrowing heavily from Malevich’s artwork as an act of citation, Dupin roams across the following images: an unhinged cross, the wood rearranged as a gallows, interrupted diagonals (‘les obliques / interrompues’, which seems directly self-referential);⁵⁹³ the doubly V-shaped angle of a woman’s legs during sex or childbirth, one fold along the Y-axis, bent at the knee, and one along the X-axis, between her legs (‘l’angle très ouvert des cuisses’);⁵⁹⁴ the crook of the arm at the elbow; a ‘visage diagonale’;⁵⁹⁵ a diagonally raining hail of stars and meteors that fall in an arcing movement across the night sky (‘la suspicion angulaire / d’astres / et leur redoublement au sommet’).⁵⁹⁶ Or perhaps it is the daytime sky, with the stars barely visible, akin to white on white.

⁵⁹⁰ Dupin, *Japon*, p. 12.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid. Likewise, in Hidetaka Ishida’s discussion of Mallarmé’s expression ‘pli selon pli’ from ‘Remémoration d’amis belges’, the author persuasively expresses how the poetic *subject* becomes folded into the sensible, material dimensions of a text (*tissu*) and animates the text’s own folds by introducing a mobile rhythm. Hidetaka Ishida, ‘Pli selon pli: Une poétique du pli selon Mallarmé’, *Europe: Revue Littéraire Mensuelle*, ‘Stéphane Mallarmé’ (1998), 92-103. By these lights, we might say there is a fold between the rhythmic, material movement of the subject of a poem and its language, creating a pleat on one axis (‘un pli tant sensible que langagier’); in addition, there is a series of folds within the progress of a text, concertinaing elements together: rhythm (‘sur la surface d’un tissu’) (pp. 92-93).

⁵⁹² Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 229.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., p. 353.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 349.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 353.

Derrida's 'La Double Séance' references ballet, and with it the *plié*, a dance step in which the knees bow in a fold.⁵⁹⁷ Such an image cannot help but recall the bent legs in 'Malevitch'. On the topic of limbs, Dupin's Japanese-inspired poem 'La lenteur du genou écartant' mentions a woman's leg:

La lenteur du genou écartant

la soie de la robe crue
 elle épouse l'énigme elle écarte
 la seule énigme⁵⁹⁸

The doubling repetition of 'énigme' first affirms the mystery then half-erases it in the next breath, prefiguring the theme of 'Substitution' in the next section. The reference to 'genou' mobilises a hidden meaning of the repeated 'écartant' and 'écarte'. Literally, in this poem, it means to push aside (both the raw silk dress and the mystery); this usage matches the formulation 'se rapprocher/s'écarte' that constitutes one theme of this thesis. But 'écarte' also means both to open the fold of one's legs or arms. The expression 'à l'écart' crops up multiple times in the collection *Ballast*, too, implying an interval of *brisure*, but also an 'en avant de soi', that folding of the self away from and towards itself. Note also the double temporality of irruption and continuous inscription, formed by words that are always folded into their future selves:

l'irruption, l'inscription commençante
 d'une parole en avant de soi, à l'écart
 de nous, vertigineuse, ressassante...
 —qu'elle se trahisse ou s'expose, qu'elle vacille
 et se redresse,
 qu'elle revienne à la ligne
 sans être venue,
 qu'elle se déchire ou s'accroisse, qu'elle se trace
 ou se retranche

elle vient de se détruire,
 de s'écrire: sur le fractionnement de l'air.⁵⁹⁹

The accumulation of 'que' clauses expresses simultaneous possibilities as doubled contradictions of destruction and preservation. These are the stitches or limit experiences that form the vertiginous textile of poetry.

⁵⁹⁷ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 273.

⁵⁹⁸ Dupin, *Japon*, p. 21.

⁵⁹⁹ Dupin, *Ballast*, pp. 93-94.

All of these images can be topologically mapped onto one another, with the diagonal lines being limits, akin to the forward slashes that pepper their exposition, and the more angled shapes appearing as an unpacked version of the limit that reveals its latent folded structure. As with metaphor in Chapter 5, there can be multiple axes of comparison between these images— anything from their shape, to their connotations, to their colour. In keeping with the red, white and black palette of the artist who is obliquely cited throughout the poem, another diagonal image is that of blood spurting up. It forms an A-shape like the trajectory of the stars: ‘l’obliquité du sang / soudain jeté haut / trait | rompu et repris / qui clame / silencieusement | / son accord’.⁶⁰⁰ This intermittent line mirrors the oxymoronic expression ‘angle éternel inconstant / ouverture’ from the top of the page.⁶⁰¹ This imagery is more explicitly vertical than an elbow crook or an *échancré* neckline, and thus also suggests a pleat poking up from a surface.⁶⁰² The oxymoronic verb-adverb pair ‘clame / silencieusement’ implies that the blood is speaking without words. Dupin is nodding to the power of images to speak via analogy, chiming with other images without depending on verbal expression, hence the noun which follows: ‘accord’.

Substitution

Richard Stamelman’s reading of Dupin focuses on the poet’s relation to presence and adopts a dialectical framing. That said, his reading astutely highlights many formal features within Dupin’s poetry. He notes that there are frequently uncertainties regarding how the syntax is supposed to be parsed; grammatical confusions involving ambiguous parts of speech; and a general sense that ‘there is no kernel, or central, sentence’ and that hierarchies of meaning have been abandoned or scrambled in favour of a strange democracy.⁶⁰³ He also notes a pattern of negation. Dupin affixes adjectives that negate the meaning of the noun. This ‘syntax of contestation and rupture’, for Stamelman, is a ‘lacerating syntax, which creates new and alternative relations by turning against and annulling old ones in an act of linguistic suicide’.⁶⁰⁴ In the same vein, Caws claims that a pulverising action destroys what the poem has built, the trace made possible ‘only by a destruction of the surface against which it is made [...]. Matter and form are thus inescapably undone’.⁶⁰⁵ Dupin’s poetry is considered ‘self-negating’.⁶⁰⁶ But is this

⁶⁰⁰ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 354.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 103.

⁶⁰³ Richard H. Stamelman, *Lost beyond Telling* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 172-74.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 162, p. 173.

⁶⁰⁵ Caws, ‘The Word Engraved’, p. 97.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 104.

apparent suicide a total act of self-negation? This section examines the notion of negation and contestation, and re-reads it as a sort of fold.

Substitution is connected to denial of what came before, but it is a Derridian *dénégation* rather than a total erasure. Following the logic of the limit, negation involves a folding back or *repli sur soi*. It is an action which affirms what it would seek to negate. Blanchot's version of *dénégation*, *faux pas* (which might recall Derrida's 'faux plis'), is Hegelian-Kojévian in origin, but it proceeds 'as though every "no" were also an "on"—or perhaps neither'.⁶⁰⁷ The *pas* of negation can be said to be as a false (*faux*) 'not', not a complete erasure, but an aporetic relation of 'both/and', 'either/or', and 'neither/nor'. There is always a double movement of preservation and negation (as in the doubled meaning of Hegelian sublation), but,

even *not* to read Hegel—to misunderstand him, to refuse him, etc.—falls under the decision of Hegel precisely to the extent that it defines and identifies itself as the refusal *of*, or in opposition to, Hegel, the System. That is, the refusal to read Hegel, like all (mere) negations, has a positive content—it is always the negation *of* something, in this case the negation of Hegel and therefore still belongs to him, Hegel's own negation.⁶⁰⁸

'Since both one and two turned out to be the hands of Hegel', there is a *third hand*—a hand which is neither 'both/and' (inclusion) nor 'either/or' (decision), but is a 'neither/nor': '*neither* one, reading, *nor* the other, not reading'.⁶⁰⁹ The 'neither/nor' is still a *dénégation* but it operates on a different axis: it is 'an other negative'.⁶¹⁰

The movement of negation and affirmation is important here, because it parallels the movement of poetic form in multiple ways. As Paul Auster indicates, in Dupin's poetry,

The poem is no longer a mere record of feelings, a song, or a meditation; rather, it is the field in mental space where a struggle is allowed to take place—between the destruction of the poem and the quest for the poem [...] The struggle is not a simple either/or conflict between this and that.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷ Cosmin Toma, 'Critical First Steps: On *Faux Pas*' in *Understanding Blanchot, Understanding Modernism*, ed. by Christopher Langlois (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 19-36 (p. 20).

⁶⁰⁸ Andrzej Warminski, 'Dreadful Reading: Blanchot on Hegel', *Yale French Studies*, 69 (1985), 267-75 (p. 268).

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.* '[T]hat is, a reading of Hegel that would not fall under the decision of Hegel would have to be one that did not take place—but in a sense of not taking place different from, other than, the opposition to take place/not to take place. In other words, it would be an other not taking place that is not the negation of taking place—an other negative'.

⁶¹¹ Paul Auster, 'The Cruel Geography of Jacques Dupin's Poetry', *Books Abroad*, 47.1 (1973), 76-78 (p. 78).

Poetry comes along, ‘offert comme une brèche dans la négation du mur oscillant | au soleil | comme un fruit’.⁶¹² An interval *in* negation itself, poetry is not merely playing negative dialectics or engaged in a black-and-white oscillation. In Heidegger’s essay ‘Andenken’ on Hölderlin’s poem of the same name, he sees in the movement of the poem a series of connected ‘jerks’ that form a ‘single articulated structure of *aber*—“but” or “however”’, serving to introduce ‘something new and unexpected’.⁶¹³ As an adversative coordination, substitution is the counterexpectational *but* rather than a corrective *but*.⁶¹⁴ A corrective *but* (‘sino’ in Spanish) completely stamps out what goes before it, whereas the counterexpectational *but* (‘pero’ in Spanish) does not require or imply denial, but simply adds counterexpectational information. It is a replacement, but only a partial one, which does not clear the ground first.

So where is this unfolding motion found in poetic form? The poem ‘La répétition’ from *L’Embrasure* presents one example of this contestatory structuring.⁶¹⁵ It uses polysyndeton to chain conjunctions in a way that changes the meaning of what was just read, forcing the reader to re-interpret repeatedly. For instance:

Singulièrement la présence
Et la distance de cela qui nous rive

À sa quelconque effigie frauduleuse

At first, the poem seems to offer presence alone: ‘Singulièrement la présence’. Just after the enjambment, however, comes a disillusioning ‘Et’, already undercutting the notion of singularity. This is swiftly followed by the opposite of presence: ‘la distance’. However, this line also introduces a new togetherness in the form of a first-person plural (‘qui nous rive’). We might, for a second, think we are bound together with another person; perhaps the grammatically unclear antecedent ‘nous rive [l’un à l’autre]’. But this unity, too, is swiftly undone: as the next line reveals, we are bound only to a fraudulent effigy. In a different poem, whose subject is falseness, Dupin’s poetic speaker harnesses the duplicity of substitution to tell of ‘Le chant qui est à soi-même sa faux’.⁶¹⁶ He embraces both the homophony between ‘chant’ and ‘champ’ and the doubling of ‘faux’ (scythe) against its homonym (false).

⁶¹² Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 350.

⁶¹³ John McCumber, ‘Language’ in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, ed. by François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 308.

⁶¹⁴ Luis Vicente, ‘On the Syntax of Adversative Coordination’, *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 28 (2010), 381-415 (p. 385).

⁶¹⁵ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 108.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Elsewhere, the poem ‘Si près de devenir sa dénégation’, which opens *Contumace*, repeats the prefix ‘de’: ‘*de devenir sa dénégation*’.⁶¹⁷ This repeated ‘de’ undercuts the directionality of the verb ‘devenir’, now figured, implicitly, as an incomplete movement, a folding of substitution in which one term can never fully become another without also being preserved. Even ‘dénégation’ is not quite attained, only very nearly (‘Si près’). The lines in each stanza are rather symmetrical and could be folded along their X-axes in an imperfect doubling. ‘[L]e double’ is mentioned on line 3. Extra air is introduced into the poem by large white spaces; ‘dans l’air | à contre-espace’, these gaps judder the poem’s forward motion, paralleling Heidegger’s jerks. Meanwhile, the compressed sibilance (‘scintilla [...] s’efface [...] renonce pas [...] se dissoudre’) links words together by soft, sliding intervals:

il scintilla ne s’efface pas
ne renonce pas

à se dissoudre dans la langue

In this extract, there is a tension between disappearing and dissolving and the residual glimmer of visibility. The contestatory movement of the writing is emphasised by enjambments, where tenacity as the firmness of presence—‘ne renonce pas’ as a parallelistic companion to ‘ne s’efface pas’—is concertinaed back onto itself as the determination to destroy oneself in an act of self-negation or fluidity—‘à se dissoudre dans la langue’. The poem does not give up giving up.

Hobson argues that doubling repetition can have an ironic and parodic effect, ‘operat[ing] by doubling the meaning between [...] pivoting phrases’, creating a fluctuating *flottaison* between interpretative possibilities.⁶¹⁸ This effect, she stresses, is syntactically rather than metaphysically produced: ‘they are ironic effects which derive from syntactic units joining together in unstable ways’.⁶¹⁹ This parodic contestation shows that the second term calls the first into question by virtue of its repetition alone: doubling *easily* becomes substitution. Poiana stresses the ‘systematic doubling’ of words such as ‘écrire’, ‘extrême’, ‘intensité’, ‘mer’, ‘ligne’, ‘nuit’, ‘laps’, ‘incise’ and ‘aucune’ in ‘La double jarre’, many of which occur exactly twice.⁶²⁰ In Poiana’s words, ‘this doubling of terms allows each occurrence to reassess previous ones, questioning their role and position in the text’.⁶²¹ So, as mentioned earlier in ‘Textile’, even the repetition of the same word

⁶¹⁷ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 11.

⁶¹⁸ Hobson, p. 86.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Poiana, p. 53.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

is never a perfect iteration, but emerges from and into a new context, and drags with it the fact that it is the second instance rather than the first. The repetition of words and motifs across a poem or a collection can therefore be a marker of contestation:

brisé par
la répétition du même, les saccades

sauvages ingénues
du même, à l'infini,

du même...⁶²²

The repetition of the word 'même' enacts performatively what the verse describes, punctuating the lines, jolting them ('brisé', 'saccades'), again akin to Heidegger's jerking movement. The placement of the final 'même' at the end of the line might open the iteration up to infinity, as stated in the poem. More than that, the repetition calls into the question the *mêmeté du même*. What is this 'même' which can be repeated over and over again? Are all 'mêmes' the same? A=A?

In 'Le soleil substitué', a prose poem in which metonymic substitutions are constantly taking over from one another, Dupin plants us *at the limit* 'entre deux montagnes, si près de sortir, d'être hors de soi, d'échapper à la morne distinction du dedans et du dehors [...], de vomir et d'être vomis'.⁶²³ The theme of substitution places us in the in between, where distinctions between inside and outside turn into folds via a Blanchotian 'se rapprocher/s'écarter'. Indeed, for Blanchot, poetry is always substituting itself, substituting what it reveals, so that it can say things without ballooning them into an orb of presence:

Le poème n'est jamais présent. Il est toujours en deça ou au-delà. Il nous échappe parce qu'il est plutôt notre absence que notre présence et qu'il commence par faire le vide, et qu'il ôte les choses d'elles-mêmes, et qu'il substitue sans cesse à ce qu'il montre ce qui ne peut être montré, à ce qu'il dit ce qui ne peut se dire.⁶²⁴

Blanchot is referring to the representational qualities of poetry, whose unfolding movement of replacement and substitution seeks to capture something of the thing described, thereby saying what cannot be said. This is a sort of translation (see Chapter 2): 'la traduction', which as in

⁶²² Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 43.

⁶²³ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 224. By contrast with my reading, Fetzer reads the list of substitutions in 'Le soleil substitué' following Bataille. See Fetzer, 'Dupin, Bataille and the Sense of the Sacred', pp. 55-56.

⁶²⁴ Blanchot, *Part du feu*, p. 107.

English also carries the mathematical meaning of *transposition* of a geometric figure, involves both a replication and an erasure, and thus the translation semi-negates itself: ‘la traduction, tout en étant jamais satisfaisante garde une part essentielle d’authenticité dans la mesure où elle imite le mouvement de récusation qu’elle emprunte et, en se dénonçant comme dépositaire infidèle, double son texte d’un autre qui l’entretient et l’efface par une sorte de demi-réfutation permanente’.⁶²⁵

Dupin himself conceives of poetry as a rhythmic pattern of contestation.⁶²⁶ For him, this movement affects the lines of a poem as well as the lines of an artwork. Multiplying the pencil lines of a sketch, for example, calls each line into question, preventing it from attaining closure or certainty, but without erasing it:

Multiplier les lignes, qu’est-ce d’autre que refuser la signification et la certitude à une seule? Nous retrouvons ici la contestation comme principe de création. Tracer une seconde ligne, c’est mettre en question la première sans l’effacer.⁶²⁷

The structure of doubling and substitution in Dupin’s poems follows this same pattern, the same contestatory multiplication (see Chapter 1, ‘Limitrophie’). Such sketches prevent any single perspective from dominating interpretation or forming a closed territory, its shape ‘jamais [...] immobilisée par un cerne’.⁶²⁸ Furthermore, this contestation creates a variegated, woven texture that forms as well as undermines the unity of the text (see Chapter 1, ‘Transcendence’): ‘Dès les premiers coups de crayon l’essentiel est trouvé, mais la trouvaille initiale doit aussitôt être combattue, contestée, dans la succession des lignes qui *tissent* une sorte de réseau pénétrable dont émerge l’image, vivante et libre’.⁶²⁹ When Michael Bishop writes that ‘Le soleil substitué’ responds attentively to ‘ce qui gronde’, an ‘incoheren[t]’ but viscerally rumbling ‘energy’ in human experience, this is surely what he is referring to.⁶³⁰

Returning for a moment to Dupin’s poem ‘Le cœur par défaut’, alongside all the imperfect doublings comes the thread of partial substitution or half-refutation. The titular word

⁶²⁵ Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, p. 52. My emphasis. Shortly before this, Blanchot characterises Bataille’s *expérience intérieure* as a state of dissatisfied questioning and contestation (p. 47).

⁶²⁶ Dupin, *M’introduire*, pp. 125-26.

⁶²⁷ Jacques Dupin, *Textes pour une approche* (Paris: Maeght, 1962), p. 32.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶²⁹ Jacques Dupin, *La Réalité impossible: Alberto Giacometti* (Saint-Paul: Maeght, 1978), p. 39. My emphasis.

⁶³⁰ Michael Bishop, ‘Jacques Dupin: Art and Poetry’, *Contemporary Literature*, 21.4 (1980), 611-31 (pp. 621-22).

‘(sweet)heart’ (‘cœur’) foreshadows the romantic addressee who is introduced in line 8 as ‘my love’ (‘mon amour’).⁶³¹ But the rug is pulled out from under us in the final stanza, when we are told that this heart is not there: ‘À la place du cœur’. Did it never exist, or has it just been whipped away? No way of deciding for sure. In ‘Le chemin frugal’, the lines ‘Blanche écriture tendue | Au-dessus d’un abîme approximatif’ catch the reader in an anxious movement of correction and substitution.⁶³² ‘Blanche écriture’ troubles the reader’s conception of writing as black ink on a white page, which is conventional but also literally true in the printed edition. The image of white writing on a white page recalls Malevich’s painting *White on White*. Our mind’s eye is made to half-erase the writing before us, as the ink (whether it is now ‘black/white’ *and/or* ‘white/white’) bleeds and does not bleed into the whiteness of the page. The words ‘tendue’ and ‘abîme’ conjure the metapoetic image of a precarious tightrope or limit-line. We are unsure whether ‘abîme approximatif’ is a hypallage, or whether the abyss itself is strangely approximate. The enjambment between the two lines performatively hints at that very abyss. The poem ends on an image of substitution:

Si la balle d’un mot te touche,
 Au moment voulu,
 Toi, tu prends corps,
 Surcroît des orages,
 À la place où j’ai disparu.⁶³³

This apostrophe emphasises the split nature of substitution. How can the poetic speaker make this second person address if he has necessarily already been substituted? How can he even know that his addressee has appeared? The possibility of this impossible substitution relies—like the limit experience—on the folding together of separation and togetherness in an im/possible relation.

The terms that are substituted can be mapped onto one another and are connected, be it metonymically or metaphorically. Even the substitute itself can be substituted: ‘Une trace, un corps, le même | ou son substitut rageur’.⁶³⁴ The substitute is the same as *and/or* different to the previous version, so it is not even necessarily recognisable as a substitute. Dupin alludes to such an operation in ‘Malevitch’: ‘quel autre parallèlement à la même dérive ou réflexion sévère / glisserait s’effondrerait’.⁶³⁵ The notion of parallel terms, distinct (‘autre’), but heading or drifting in the same direction (‘parallèlement à la même dérive’), side by side, but

⁶³¹ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 58.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶³⁴ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 264.

⁶³⁵ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 355.

with a slippage or *glissement* between one and the next. The poem alerts us to overlapping squares: the canvas, the square painted upon it, and the frame of the painting. As studied in Chapter 1, the limit ‘problem’ means that a box can never be entirely boxed in; there is always a further frame outside of the frame. The slash becomes performative, repeating the edge-line in the text: ‘le carré qui se dissocie / du tableau’.⁶³⁶ The ‘/’ of the frame is a folding, a pleat between the inside of the square and the outside that distinguishes it but also supports and literally frames it. (This ‘/’ represents or performs the edge of the frame, then, in the sense that they map onto each other and call to each other.) The authority of a frame is always reversible because it is always folded back on itself: ‘son autorité reployée / vacante / d’un rebours absolu l’écriture se dépouille’.⁶³⁷ With the verb ‘reployer’, to refold or fold away, writing strips itself, folds back on itself. This folding back is not entirely absolute and cannot entirely empty out or vacate the text—or, for that matter, the canvas. The frame can go back on itself, retrace its steps, but the delete button deletes only as it *also* retains the previous version, leaving it palimpsestically underneath, and creating a pleat at the turning point.

Still in ‘Malevitch’, the use of colours, again, evokes substitution. A haunted black is, by some ambiguous syntax (‘/’), haunted by white: ‘le noir hanté de son sommeil / le blanc de l’espace enfin’.⁶³⁸ Likewise, ‘la couleur | surgi [...] se fortifie de se détruire’.⁶³⁹ ‘Destroy/fortify’ become(s) a liminal pair. In Dupin’s words, ‘Quelque chose prend la place de quelque chose. Construction et destruction sont inséparables’.⁶⁴⁰ The same seems to be true of knowledge and ignorance (recalling Bataille’s limit experience): ‘qu’on me lie à cet attelage | au savoir | au non-savoir’. The relationship between the contiguous words for knowledge and non-knowledge is not a black/white opposition; here, that is because the terms are diverted by means of their yoking to the poetic speaker, with their relation further offset by the line break. Fetzer describes a ‘fissuring [which] occurs as the moment of slippage between affirmation and negation—in the abrupt discontinuance of one proposed thought and the unexpected substitution of its inverse, a poetic technique encountered elsewhere in Dupin’.⁶⁴¹ This is true. This chapter has sought to show that this technique is one of folding, unfolding and refolding; and it has sought to suggest through

⁶³⁶ Ibid., p. 351. Although Malevich’s works are often displayed without frames, the wall behind them acts as a frame, with a shape cut into it by the canvas.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., p. 350.

⁶⁴⁰ Jacques Dupin, ‘Entretien avec Jacques Dupin’, *Prétexte*, 9, http://pretexteed.free.fr/revue/entretiens/entretiens_fr/entretiens/jacques-dupin.htm.

⁶⁴¹ Glenn W. Fetzer, ‘The Gap in Dupin’s “De Nul Lieu et du Japon”’, *Romance Notes*, 30.1 (1989), 63-67 (p. 65).

examples that this liminal substitution feels like a ‘poetic technique’ (to pick up Fetzner’s usage) *because* it is analogous to the structuring of the limit experience.

The paratactic and agrammatical syntax in ‘Malevitch’, distinctive to poetry, shows the interweaving of these movements: ‘les | couleurs écrasées s’êteignent se retirent / nous hantent [...] comme exclues’.⁶⁴² The accumulation of contrasting actions underscores the fact that erasure is never final: the finality of ‘s’êteignent’ is *also* a withdrawal (‘se retirent’), and the colours’ haunting is *also* their exclusion, implying the presence of a barrier. This play of ‘se rapprocher/s’écarter’ characterises substitution as a textual process of folding and stitching. There is evidence of pluralistic, multiple contradictory responses here that are paced and linked by spacing as by a Derridian *espacement*: ‘incidence polyvoque puisque également je la nie / ou l’ignore ou la tire / de l’échiquier’.⁶⁴³ This list of ways to negate (denying, ignoring, throwing it off the board) accentuates the to-ing and fro-ing nature of negation, set off by the black/white tones of the chessboard, which Dupin’s speaker implicitly terms ‘le noir oscillant’.⁶⁴⁴

Chiasmus

In another poem, ‘Chaque chose étant’, we find two stanzas describing a white wall, reminiscent of Malevich’s *White on White*:

un gecko dans l’encoignure
rapide dragonne le soir
sur le blanc du mur
la rectitude des plis

le papier, le blanc qui serre
la forge, comme on dit
retour, et rature, la dernière,
ou le seul,—éclat de rire⁶⁴⁵

A gecko sits at the angle or corner (‘encoignure’) of the wall, harking to the angled sets of imagery from ‘Malevitch’. The white wall shades into paper. It is a folded paper no less, ‘la rectitude des plis’ caused by the evening light casting ribbons across the wall. This textured white paper, is a folding back on itself in a movement of returning (‘retour’) but also substitution

⁶⁴² Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 349.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 239.

(‘rature’). The movement from masculine to feminine nouns follows a balanced, chiasmatically doubled pattern: ABBA (‘retour, et rature, la dernière, | ou le seul’). The fold created by chiasmus’s ‘ABBA’ maps onto an individual rhyme: these stanzas rhyme every other line in a pleating pattern, with another rhyme looping the two stanzas together (‘plis’ and ‘dit’): ABAC, DCDE. These rhymes serve to intensify the folded structure of the poem, rather than—or in addition to—evoking meaningful connections between the rhymed words. This is by contrast to places elsewhere where rhyme produces a change of meaning, such as the lines ‘pas encore | je n’ai voulu que tu ailles | que tu t’entailles de moi’.⁶⁴⁶ There, the folding of ‘tu ailles’ and ‘tu t’entailles’ produces a comparative effect, in which the addressee’s leaving becomes compared to or equivalent to a wound inflicted on the speaker. (The technique of rhyme is discussed in Chapter 5.)

The chiasm is a figure of the limit experience thanks to its turning motion that pleats space/time; and it is connected to substitution. Spivak connects the chiasm to Derrida’s notion of *sous rature*: the chiasm means ‘to write a word cross it out [X] and then to print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible)’.⁶⁴⁷ In ‘Une matinée ordinaire’, chiasmus supports a poetic scene that connects closely to the double face of the limit or slash mark. A man sits at his desk staring at the *crookedness* (‘guingois’—an image that echoes ‘Malevitch’) of the lines of his books; he then notes ‘le silence entre les lignes’. This play of lines and spaces is reflected, or more precisely embodied, in his own sitting position:

sur la table en bois de pin
avec la barre pour le pied
et de ma vie le chaos

j’écris [...] ⁶⁴⁸

The semantic meaning here, in the juxtaposition of ‘barre’ and ‘chaos’, echoes the structure of line and emptiness, limit and limitlessness. The chiasmus occurs in the ABBA structure of the nouns (A) and the prepositional phrases (B), the first of which refers back to the table, the second

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 232.

⁶⁴⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Translator’s Preface’ in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. xiv. The figure of the chiasm is also associated with Merleau-Ponty, especially in relation to mind/body interactions, which come up in Chapter 5. See Ted Toadvine, ‘The Chiasm’ in *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, ed. by Sebastian Luft and Søren Overgaard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

⁶⁴⁸ Jacques Dupin, *Chansons troglogytes* (Fata Morgana, 1989), pp. 54-55.

of which refers forwards to the deferred principal verb ‘j’écris’: ‘avec la barre *pour le pied* | et de *la vie* le chaos’. The effect is intensified by that split at the middle. Another such line from a poem titled ‘Ravir’ in the same collection also incorporates writing and books, this time ones that are being nibbled at (and thus experienced, if in a different way) by a mischief of rats—there is an interesting echo of *rature* throughout the poem, as though the rats’ destructive yet creative work resembles the writer’s own.⁶⁴⁹ Most importantly for our purposes, the chiasmic line is as follows: ‘ça s’enferme dans la lie / ça s’enlise dans le fer’.⁶⁵⁰ This line refers to the speaker’s or writer’s own speech, which is becoming trapped in dregs and bogged down in iron, images that are clearly ‘reversed’. The ABBA sequence here lies in the roots of these words: *fer*, *lie*, *lie*, *fer*. This chiasmus could thus be taken as an indication that his speech is becoming tangled, but this is a somewhat structured tangle, if so.

Playing on the etymology of multi-*pli*-er, there is a multiplication (or a manifold) of foldings across poetry writing. The relationship of these folds to one another is simply the same logic—the logic of the fold—multiplied out. One cannot precisely map ‘fold’ onto ‘doublure’ onto ‘substitution’ onto ‘repetition’. Instead, there are folds between them. It seems that these folds are metaphors for one another. They are all *substitutes for* or *rhymes of* or *folds between* one another, stitches sewn together in a giant textile, connected and divided all at once. This great textile is a meta-metaphor—a metaphor describing the cumulative effect of this web or weave of metaphors. It is text itself, but it is particularly poetry. Poetry allows us to compress these textual folds into small spaces and short windows. Devices that can very well exist in prose writing take on a compressed quality in poetry, and find themselves emphasised, just as it takes numerous examples expressed together to reinforce a point, by some inductive and experimental logic of exemplarity. Thanks to its formal features, poetry is a realm where these textual folds can proliferate across multiple axes, thereby taking on a special intensity.

By way of a join to the next chapter, Clare Connors mentions that rhyme offers ‘a kind of breathing space’, where words and the air between them can come together.⁶⁵¹ Breath is a common motif in Dupin’s poetry, from ‘le souffle infiniment ouvert’ to the ‘soufflerie de l’intervalle’.⁶⁵² The back-and-forth experience of the limit appears to map well onto the motif of breathing. It is a movement of weaving, texture, and form in the air: ‘le souffle qui se tresse || à

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 62–63.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁵¹ Clare Connors, ‘Derrida and the Friendship of Rhyme’, *The Oxford Literary Review*, 33.2 (2011), 139–49 (p. 144).

⁶⁵² Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 142, p. 231.

l'insignifiance de l'air déchaîné'.⁶⁵³ Further underlining this structural feature, Caws states that the poems of Dupin's collection *Dehors* 'tur[n] inside out, drawing us out or in, [with] the vitality of respiration and the infinitely flexible form of a Moebius strip'.⁶⁵⁴ In a poem from *De nul lieu et du Japon*, breath gives rise to a musical note:

Sur le neutre de la flûte
où ta lèvre attire
et creuse une flamme d'air

le vide est plénitude⁶⁵⁵

Just as the oxymoronic 'emptiness is plenitude' relies on the contrast and union of two elements, so does the image of playing the flute. Air is knitted together, first pulled in, turned, then blown out, in the movement of a stitch that sews the music together.

The overall effect is neutral, but this is of course a contestatory neutrality, not a static, level equilibrium. In fact, breathing in/out is not always easy. It can get difficult, especially when the compression gets too tight, or the breaths too close together, like a scarf knitted too small or a fan closed shut, its folds digging into one another. Even paper can get stuck in the throat: from the gecko poem above, 'le papier, le blanc qui serre | la forge, comme on dit' is one consonant short of getting a lump in its throat ('serre la gorge').⁶⁵⁶ As the gallows and garrot imagery attest, Dupin's breath is often a strangulation or suffocation as well as an expansive filling of the lungs.⁶⁵⁷ This doubled 'élargissement-suffocation' leads us into Chapter 5, in which the im/mobile hesitation of the decision and the double bind is an important limit experience.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵³ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 256.

⁶⁵⁴ Caws, 'The Word Engraved', p. 105.

⁶⁵⁵ Dupin, *Japon*, p. 10.

⁶⁵⁶ Dupin, *Ballast*, p. 239.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11, p. 236.

⁶⁵⁸ Dupin, *Corps clairvoyant*, p. 350.

Chapter 5: Metaphor and *Jouissance*

In this chapter, I continue identifying examples of ways in which limit experiences are in play and at work in poetry. As opposed to the briefer, paratactic examples of Chapter 4, Chapter 5 looks at a specific multiplicity of limit experiences. This manifold of folds comes together to form a densely configured web of connections. The folds that emerge here are also more mobile, vibrational, and complex than those of Chapter 4. Different axes of liminality intersect and interlock in a condensed manner to produce a strongly compressed exemplary effect. To illustrate this dense quality, I focus my attention primarily on just one extended poem by Louis-René des Forêts, titled *Les Mégères de la mer*. I trace the rich seams of the poem's liminality across the following themes, paying especial heed to the contribution of structural and formal considerations: metaphor, waves, in/decision, embodiment, binding, *angoisse*, witchy women, rhyme, and, finally, repetition and *jouissance*.

Metaphor

In the words of poet Eugene Peterson, 'A metaphor is a really remarkable kind of formation, because it both means what it says and what it doesn't say, and so those two things come together'.⁶⁵⁹ The poetic device of metaphor (and its sisters: simile, conceit and analogy) is a place where poetry is folded. The 'fold' is itself a metaphor—as are textile, stitch, limit and so on. In a metaphor, the two terms are not exactly equated with one another in a mirroring or collapsing movement. But for the metaphor to work there must be sameness as well as difference. In a world 'sans différence', Derrida announces in *De la grammatologie*, 'La métaphore serait interdite'.⁶⁶⁰ For Paul Ricœur, in metaphor lies a paradox: 'Dans la métaphore, le "même" opère en dépit du "différent"'.⁶⁶¹ Metaphor seems to trouble the logic of the *ipse* because it claims an identity between 'A' and 'not-A' (to recall the discussion of 'A=A' in Chapter 1, 'Ipse'); as an experience

⁶⁵⁹ Eugene Peterson, 'Answering God', *On Being with Krista Tippett*, 22 December 2016, <https://onbeing.org/programs/eugene-peterson-answering-god>.

⁶⁶⁰ Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 103.

⁶⁶¹ See Paul Ricœur, *La Métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 250. For an account of Derrida's interaction with strands of philosophy that he believes use metaphor for metaphysical ends (such as in Aristotle and Heidegger), including schools which allow metaphor to dominate philosophy as well as the other way round, and his quarrel with Paul Ricœur over these readings, see Bennington and Derrida, pp. 119-33; Giuseppe Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000); and Morny Joy, 'Derrida and Ricoeur: A Case of Mistaken Identity (And Difference)', *The Journal of Religion*, 68.4 (1988), 508-26, www.jstor.org/stable/1202516. For my part, although I concur in a roundabout way with the traditional view that metaphor can grant access to knowledge (see Conclusion), I envisage that metaphorical knowledge-gathering as an inductive, metatextual process.

of the limit between them, metaphor enacts a folding together of sameness and difference, which operate because of and in spite of one another. But a single metaphor is just a snapshot—a stitch, or just one small pleat in the textile of text.

In a conversation between poet Michael Rosen and writer James Geary about the uses of metaphor, the discussion turns to the resemblances brought out by metaphor; Rosen wonders whether the two terms of the comparison retain a ‘binary quality’ separate from one another, whether they are blended together, or whether they oscillate.⁶⁶² Geary replies that they are perceived together in their difference: ‘it’s more like a superposition of images’.⁶⁶³ These liminal structures are not mutually exclusive, of course. Geary makes three further useful points: firstly, he reminds us that personification, anthropomorphism, and simile can all potentially be held under the broad umbrella of metaphor (I would suggest that metaphors are the most tightly condensed, yoked by nothing more than an ‘is’ of identification, while contemporary poet Alice Oswald proposes that simile produces a more ‘beautiful kind of doubled feeling’ than metaphor does, because ‘this beautiful pivotal word “like” or “as” allows the thing to exist in two places at the same time’).⁶⁶⁴ Secondly, Geary claims that metaphor chimes with human thought processes, in the sense that ‘we tend to think of metaphor as a way with words, but it’s actually a way of thought; we *think* in this kind of pattern-making and pattern-recognition manner, and that’s how we are able to effortlessly understand metaphors’.⁶⁶⁵ Thirdly, metaphor brings in new information: ‘the only way we have of learning something new is by comparing it to something we already know, and that’s what metaphor does’.⁶⁶⁶ This is a temporal sort of limit experience, where the new comes in, joining the familiar with the unfamiliar: metaphor can be the hinging point or interval of invention. A strange slippage or a spark of something new is created in the conjunction of the two terms, but this newness is also something that was already there; it relies on our prior understanding of both terms and our existing sympathy with the comparison being made, but it also delivers the comparison to fresh eyes.

⁶⁶² Michael Rosen, ‘Word of Mouth: Metaphors’, *BBC Sounds*, podcast, 7 January 2020, www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000d1z9. See also James Geary, *I Is An Other* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ Catherine Graham, ‘The Whole Art of Everything Is about Forgetting Yourself: A Conversation with Alice Oswald’, *Toronto Review of Books*, 18 October 2017, <https://torontoreviewofbooks.com/2017/10/whole-art-everything-forgetting-conversation-alice-oswald>.

⁶⁶⁵ Michael Rosen, ‘Word of Mouth’.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

My analysis of des Forêts's nearly-300-line poem *Les Mégères de la mer* turns partially on the notion of metaphoricity as a structure of liminality. The examples given here suggest that we can look at a poem as a metaphorical matrix that proliferates the structure of the limit experience across different axes. These liminal dimensions of the poem are both embodied (perceptible at the level of form) and described (at the level of theme and content). In *Les Mégères de la mer*, the setting is initially composed of the swaying of gorse trees at the beach, harsh seaside winds, shingle, spray, and the waves of the sea. The importance of metaphor is signalled from the very first syntactic unit of the poem, which begins:

Aujourd'hui je célébrerai par le chant ta ressemblance
 Du même pas faraud où s'égrenaient mes heures buissonnières
 Et si je l'accorde au branle des ajoncs sur la dune.⁶⁶⁷

The first-person speaker begins the poem by declaring his intention to set up a structure of metaphoricity and a motif of resemblance. As Marc Comina points out, the first line of *Les Mégères* metapoetically indicates des Forêts's departure from prose ('le chant') and signals that he is taking a new approach ('Aujourd'hui').⁶⁶⁸ The poem will intentionally perform operations that attempt to align or 'accorder' different elements from the speaker's past, beginning with the mysterious second-person addressee and the seaside setting. Straight away, this metaphorical structure is doubled, because the breaking waves are themselves also described metaphorically, as flecked horses: 'Chevaux mouchetés qui venaient en grondant se tapir | Dans un torve bouillon de flammèches et de mires' (p. 905, ll. 6-7). In the role of metaphor, over the course of the poem, the seascape is revealed as both an agent and a passive setting.

Des Forêts mobilises the effect of imperfect rhyme: 'torve bouillon' resembles 'tourbillon', and their denotations are also similar, from a threatening gush of water to a whirlpool. The two quoted lines match one another, with the alexandrine in the second line emphasised by the doubling effects of terminal *rime plate*. The emphasis generated around the end of the line could serve to draw a parallel between the ends of the poetic lines and the mobile in/out of the waves that are depicted. Waves are an incessant figure of folding in water, with a wave-crest-pullback-wave-crest structure that pleats over itself in time, repeating anew. Indeed, the resemblance between the wave and the rhythm of the poetic line is picked up later in the stanza with the line: 'A l'unisson des vagues qui tambourinent ma mort' (p. 905, l. 27). This presages a later reference

⁶⁶⁷ Louis-René des Forêts, 'Les Mégères de la mer', in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), pp. 905-14 (p. 905, ll. 1-3). Further references to this edition will be given as page numbers in the text.

⁶⁶⁸ Marc Comina, *Louis-René des Forêts* (Seysell: Champ Villon, 1998), p. 258.

to ‘le rythme animal de la mer’ (p. 909, l. 15). In the former, the sea beats the war drum; in the latter, the sea’s roar partly drowns out the voices of the titular *mégères*. Pursuing the metaphor, these rhyming poetic lines might perform a similar function to that of the sea’s waves—mimicking, soothing, yet also dangerously portending what lies ahead. As the poem goes on, more elements will be added to these metaphorical matrices and they will become more complex.

Embodiment

As Nick Land evocatively suggests, ‘differentiation is contested at the scurf-edge of the flow, where sediments of detritus are tugged problematically between solidity and liquification’.⁶⁶⁹ Water is not pure fluidity, nor is it rigid. It has a form, internal folds, currents, and eddies, perhaps explaining why Bataille dreams of ‘l’instable présence des eaux à l’intérieur des eaux’.⁶⁷⁰ This metaphorical mapping of seashore and limit experience are pursued further in Astrida Neimanis’s ‘feminist subjectivity, watered’, where she draws on French feminism to construct a topology or cartography of water’s embodiment, based around the metaphor of a body of water.⁶⁷¹ Neimanis explores the qualities possessed by bodies of water and their consequences within a metaphorical framework. Her cartographic approach seems to converge with my notion of metaphorical geographies and structures; and a salient aspect of her approach is to elucidate the differences between boundaries, fluidity, and embodiment.

‘Water’s logic of communication’, its aqueous flexibility and mobility, and its ability to interpenetrate with other bodies mean that, as a tool of metaphor, water tends to avoid imposing rigid delineations (such as ipseic limits; see Chapter 1).⁶⁷² Additionally, Neimanis rejects the logic of fluidity (again, see Chapter 1) and warns against its uncritical use:

The body of water is not simply the ‘fluid’ subject, and indeed, we should be wary of the ubiquity of fluid metaphors within contemporary theory, and ask constantly after their motivations and effects. [...] Fluidity is an abstracted quality, but water is a living substance that sustains this earth, to which we have obligations. It belongs to specific places, and transforms in specific ways across various membranes.⁶⁷³

⁶⁶⁹ Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (Routledge: London, 1992), p. 128.

⁶⁷⁰ Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes VII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 301. My emphasis.

⁶⁷¹ Astrida Neimanis, ‘feminist subjectivity, watered’, *Feminist Review*, 103 (2013), 23-41.

⁶⁷² Neimanis, p. 34.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

The notion of fluidity attempts to collapse the liminality of the ‘self/other’ interplay, which may obfuscate the burden of responsibility owed to the other. After all, if the subject is without ‘specific places’ or ‘membranes’, there can be no meaningful distinction drawn between the needs and wishes of the self and the needs and wishes of the other. The value of the watery metaphor depends on the preservation of the limit structure, of the *two* things held together, rather than their being collapsed into one through a logic of fluidity. In this sense, as examined in Chapter 1, extremely rigid boundaries and a total lack of boundedness seem to coincide, because they both collapse and deny relation. The antidote to this is the affirmation of embodiment. As Neimanis stresses, ‘There is no such thing as water in the abstract; all water is embodied. Water always requires some sort of boundedness (as weather front, bayou, barnacle, woman), to give it some kind of intelligibility’.⁶⁷⁴

The metaphor of wateriness is itself embodied as well as descriptive. As Neimanis puts it, her feminist cartographical metaphors are sorts of maps which are *themselves* ‘contingent, but arbitrary; embodied, but never essentialised’.⁶⁷⁵ These embodied maps are rather like the exemplary web of mappings I have been working towards. Just like the structure of the limit experience, these maps are overarching structural metaphors, but in the same breath they are each material incarnations (see ‘Performative/constative’ and ‘Exemplarity’ from Chapters 2 and 3). *Les Mégères de la mer* is embodied through its own ‘inscription’ (see Chapter 2, ‘Ideal/material’). Having announced his poetic project, the speaker seeks to explain its rationale: ‘C’est pour inscrire au lourd chapitre de mes veilles | Ce qu’en moi soulève d’horreur et de dilection complice’ (p. 905, ll. 9-10). Inscription does indeed take on the qualities of a body of water, with the word ‘débit’ holding connotations of flows and streams of consciousness. And the operation that the speaker wishes to perform via this inscription is that of the unity of opposites, bringing together two states of emotional dissonance without collapsing one into the other or rendering them fluid. These states are ‘horreur’ and ‘dilection complice’, terror and complicit devotion. Would it be fair to categorise these as a movement away (repulsion) and a movement towards (attraction), in the manner of the ‘Se rapprocher/s’écarter’ (Chapter 1)?

Furthermore, the speaker wishes to inscribe this doubled experience in unison with the waves, but also in unison with a different version of *himself*: ‘ce double de moi-même qui me suit à la trace | Et toujours me rattrape avec son même cri de douleur’ (p. 905, ll. 18-19). This doubling refers to the speaker’s boyhood self, whose story is told in the poem. In this way, the form of the sea’s

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

waves metaphorically *resemble* and *embody* the memory traces of the younger self. This trace ('à la trace') is renewed in the speaker's mind with every line and every new wave. The verb 'rattraper' again indicates that there is a push/pull dynamic here, a spatio/temporal movement of distance and proximity. Similarity and difference are also at work: 'toujours' and 'même' indicate that the event is similar each time; on the other hand, the younger self is but a 'double', who loses the older self as often as he catches him. This idiosyncratic movement recalls Derrida's explanation of the im/possible temporality of the event: 'Cela a lieu une fois, chaque fois une fois'.⁶⁷⁶ The paradoxical singularity of 'ce même cri de douleur' never seems to lose its potency, even with repeated iterations; it is instead re/newed according to a logic of the limit structure, metaphorically embodied here in the tide.

Contributing to this effect, right from the outset of the poem, is the piling up of relative clauses at the beginning of the poetic lines. Often, these lines are highly rearrangeable, because they are split into syntactic units. Taking the first half of the second stanza as an example, we find an accumulation of prepositions ('Dans', 'Où', 'A moins de', 'Où', 'Au-delà de', 'Hors', 'Jusqu'ou', 'Là où') and present participles ('Épelant', 'Hoquetant', 'Verbeusement nous défiant'). Minimal punctuation secures this rearrangeability. The technique emphasises a number of important qualities of the *vers*. Firstly, adjacent poetic lines are complementary, but they remain individual. This encourages a respect for the watery embodiment of each individual line, flowing in tandem with but separate from its friends.⁶⁷⁷ Secondly, the repetition creates a parallelism that stylistically unifies the lines: individuated yet indissociable, each wave, like the memories in the poem, emerges uniquely and afresh but does so *from* a 'body of water' that disseminates it. Thirdly, far from destroying the flow or 'débit' of the speaker's inscription, the fact that lines are not hammered to the page by restrictive and complicated syntax increases the mobile flow of the poem. The grammatically repetitive structure of the line creates an insistence, along with the consequent deferral of the principal verb. This insistence seems to befit the incessant push/pull of the ocean waves, creating a further doubling. Fourthly, the prepositional and gerundive line beginnings create an un/decidability between the past and present, active and passive. The effect is rather like that of Derrida's word *différance* (see Chapter 2, 'Active/passive'). These formal, syntactic features are embodied, too, inscribed materially onto the page.

⁶⁷⁶ Derrida, 'Penseur de l'évènement'.

⁶⁷⁷ My choice of language here echoes Hermann Hesse's *Narcissus and Goldmund*, trans. by Ursula Molinaro (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 43: 'We are sun and moon, dear friend; we are sea and land. It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognize each other, to learn to see the other and honor him for what he is: each the other's opposite and complement'.

Ligne de partage

Les Mégères attests to what Sylvia Wynter calls ‘the hybridity of humanness—that we are *simultaneously* storytelling *and* biological beings’.⁶⁷⁸ While the older figure recounts the story, both he and the child are clearly embodied, and there is a ‘body/mind’ interplay that participates in the poem. While out playing, he finds himself by a beach where a huddle of witches are gathered near the mouth of a cave. The word ‘mégère’ refers to these crones or hags. The two states of emotional dissonance alluded to just a moment ago, ‘horreur’ and ‘dilection complice’, are his response to the witches’ lair, which frightens yet attracts him. He watches the witches from the shallow waters of the wash. With the doubled perspective of past and present overlaying one another, much of the poem describes the speaker’s emotions and thoughts as he hesitates on the shoreline. He is unsure whether to go forward to meet the witches or backwards into the water. The motif of this un/decidable decision is *embodied* by the shoreline and by his body’s positioning on it. After all, it is known that the body contributes hugely to decision-making: emotions are felt as physical sensations in the body as well as mental impressions; the chemical dance of the gut/brain axis is a clear example of the body affecting the mind; and embodied cognition tells us that our experiences are deeply informed by our physicality.

The shifting edge of the tideline takes on significance as an unstable threshold upon which the protagonist hesitates, torn between the twin impulses of fear and his desire: ‘Tant qu’hésite encore mon pas sur la ligne de partage’ (p. 908, l.1). Seeing the shoreline as a liminal zone is a well-trodden motif, a place of oceanic transformations and territorial renegotiations, since the shore is a boundary that is always changing its terms. For instance, as Rachel Carson observes, ‘today a little more land may belong to the sea, tomorrow a little less. Always the edge of the sea remains an elusive and indefinite boundary’.⁶⁷⁹ Deciding which side of this limit to stay on, when one must choose both/neither/only one, is im/possible. Derrida develops this structural marine metaphor when claiming that the relations between texts are limit experiences: ‘tous les bords, d’un texte à l’autre, sont aussi des rivages, rivages inaccessibles ou rivages inhabitables’.⁶⁸⁰ What one might think of as firm limits or edges of texts are actually shores or coastlines. Even the ‘rivage inaccessible’ is not strictly speaking inaccessible, because by definition a ‘rivage’ is a meeting-place between sea and land, where an interaction happens. The paradox of the limit peeks

⁶⁷⁸ Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, ‘Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?’ in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. by Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 29.

⁶⁷⁹ Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955), p. 1.

⁶⁸⁰ Derrida, *Parages*, p. 15.

out again in the strange juxtaposition of ‘inaccessibles’ and/or ‘inhabitables’, descriptions which refer to incompatible qualities. By holding two mutually exclusive adjectives together like this, Derrida undercuts the literal reading and indicates that they, too, can be read in the mode of a structural metaphor. What unites ‘inaccessible’ and ‘inhabitable’ is the notion of simultaneous access and denial of access—the im/possible aporia.

Derrida uses this topological metaphor again very explicitly when he speaks of ‘parages’ as ‘par exemple *l’indécision* entre le proche et le lointain, l’appareillage dans les brumes, en vue de ce qui arrive ou n’arrive pas au voisinage de la côte, la *cartographie* impossible et nécessaire d’un littoral, une *topologie* incalculable’.⁶⁸¹ (Note also the ‘par exemple’ of exemplarity’s logic.) The neighbourly relation of the shoreline becomes a place of in/decision or un/decidability between indissociable yet heterogeneous elements: ‘in/accessible’; ‘near/far’; ‘forward/back’; ‘happens/does not happen’; ‘impossible/necessary’; ‘se rapprocher/s’écarter’. This double movement of the near and far, towards and away, is mapped metaphorically onto the watery context of a marine crossing, heading to a shore (‘la rive, entendons l’autre’)⁶⁸² which is reached and/or not reached. Derrida explains: ‘*Parages*: à ce seul mot confions ce qui situe, tout près ou de loin, le double mouvement d’approche et d’éloignement, souvent le même pas, singulièrement divisé [...] quand il arrive *et* n’arrive pas, infiniment distant à l’approche de l’autre rive’.⁶⁸³ And finally, Derrida’s choice of the word ‘parages’ already implies both a topology of borders, areas, and spaces and the more specifically marine context indicated by the English translation ‘waters’. As Maclachlan notes, word ‘partage’ is invested with a double meaning that encompasses both division and sharing,⁶⁸⁴ in that sense, just as with the limit figure from Chapter 1, the speaker hesitates precisely because it is ‘sur la ligne de partage’ that his connection with the shore is rendered possible, even while that same ‘ligne de partage’ marks a line of division from the beach. ‘Partage’ is just one central letter away from ‘parage’, and shares its symmetry—this graphic overlapping further embodies and exemplifies the complex matrix of littorality and liminality present here.

Further complicating the protagonist’s decision, another axis of liminality is present in des Forêts’s matrix of marine metaphors. On the one hand, the sea itself is protective, soothing, even salvational: ‘Ô mer! laisse-moi m’ébrouer dans tes charnels replis | Que je ricane au malheur, en

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., p. 17. My emphasis.

⁶⁸² Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Ian Maclachlan, ‘The Idea of the Book’ in *Reading Derrida’s Of Grammatology*, ed. by Sean Gaston and Ian Maclachlan (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 35.

dérive sur ton berceau blanc!’ (p. 907, ll. 30-31). And yet, the speaker reveals that the sea is also dangerous. This further doubling of the emotional polarities of ‘fear/desire’, which seemed just a moment ago to be stably configured in relation to the witches, creates an unstable flipping between two readings. Fear of the shore and fear of the sea are held together, not cancelling one another out or resolving in any direction. As the sea’s ambivalent waters lap around the speaker’s ankles, he describes them using a simile: ‘cette révérence d’une lame douce comme le lait’ (p. 907, l. 25). The word ‘lame’ here acts as a contronym, hinting at both ‘blade’ (an interpretation of ‘lame’ which the poem returns to in stanza 11) and ‘wave’. In the fourth stanza, the older speaker is in the horns of the same dilemma. He poses a rhetorical question: ‘Vais-je dénoncer la pure malignité de la mer?’ (p. 908, l. 8). In his hesitation to decide whether or not to tell the whole truth about the sea, it appears that he has already begun to do so, revealing something of the ‘malignité de la mer’, albeit in an interrogative mode. The hesitation restrains us from believing in the purity (‘pure’) of this wickedness, though—and rightly so, for this interrogative mode is picked up again at the end of the stanza. ‘M’aura-t-elle assez enroulé dans la nasse de ses charmes | Pour que je claironne encore mon allégeance filiale!’, the speaker exclaims (p. 908, ll. 13-14). Grammatically speaking, this is an exclamative with interrogative syntax, hence the initial inversion. The answer to the buried rhetorical question therein, it is implied, is ‘yes’: the speaker is still somewhat under the sea’s charms. Preserving the ambivalence of the sea, the speaker laments that he has been seduced by the sea to such an extent that he must continue to sing its praises (‘claironner encore’), explaining these ambivalent grammatical features.

The protagonist’s opinion is doubled and split, *partagé* between desire for and fear of the sea. Indeed, according to Heraclitus, whose influence lurks throughout, the sea is a locus for the theory of the unity of opposites, because it harbours and embodies contradictory associations: ‘Sea: purest and most polluted water, for fish drinkable and life-sustaining, for men undrinkable and death-bringing’.⁶⁸⁵ Heraclitus’s theory points to the ‘ways things are both the same and not the same over time’, which of course echoes characteristics of the spatio/temporal limit structure.⁶⁸⁶ For Blanchot, the Heraclitean limit experience demands a speech that is balanced between the contraries that it tests or undergoes (note the experimental language), faithful to double meanings (‘une exigence de la parole la plus attentive et la plus recueillie, la plus équilibrée entre les contraires qu’elle éprouve, fidèle au double sens, mais seulement par fidélité à

⁶⁸⁵ Heraclitus, B61, cited in Edward Hussey, ‘Heraclitus’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. by A. A. Long (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 95.

⁶⁸⁶ Daniel W. Graham, ‘Heraclitus’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward Zalta, Autumn 2015, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/heraclitus>.

la simplicité du sens, et nous appelant ainsi à ne jamais nous contenter d'une lecture à sens unique').⁶⁸⁷ Metaphor is an embodiment of this kind of speech.

Angoisse

Ornate, convoluted hyperbata and a sense of difficulty over clarity create a claustrophobic, accumulative effect over time in the poem. Indeed, these very constraints can contribute to un/decidability and the sense that these decisions are not resolved—as with the example of the double bind. The experience and experiment of un/decidability is, for Derrida, the ordeal of every decision: 'Même si une décision semble ne prendre qu'une seconde et n'être précédée par aucune délibération, elle est structurée par cette *expérience de l'indécidable*'.⁶⁸⁸ It is interesting to note the similarities between the aporia and the psychoanalytic double bind theory as hypothesised by Gregory Bateson, the components of which involve 'a communicational matrix in which messages contradict each other' because 'the other party is expressing two orders of messages, and one denies the other' ('both/and' and/or 'either/or') and 'the victim is unable to comment on the contradiction' or 'leave the field of interaction' (and/or 'neither/nor'—this 'neither/nor' cannot fully release the victim of the double bind, especially when the relationship with the other party has a high psychological or physical survival value).⁶⁸⁹ Communication is given at two levels that both assert and negate the assertion.⁶⁹⁰ This will result, Bateson says, in 'a world of disordered messages, where active and appropriate deciphering will be experienced as dangerous, and possibly only known as a nameless, felt, perpetual angst'.⁶⁹¹ What is popularly termed 'analysis paralysis', or indecision, for Hill 'names at one and the same time the possibility and necessity of making critical decisions and the impossibility of finally ever having done with those decisions'.⁶⁹² It is a limit experience, caught at the intersection of the 'either/or', the 'both/and', and the 'neither/nor'.

In structural terms, the double bind figured here as the boy's hesitation on the shoreline is im/mobile: static but also oscillating and vibrational (see Chapter 1, 'Limitrophie'). Looking to Blanchot now for some important theoretical grounding, I would like to introduce his figure of

⁶⁸⁷ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 124.

⁶⁸⁸ Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p. 116.

⁶⁸⁹ Paul Gibney, 'The Double Bind Theory', *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 12.3 (May 2006), 49-50.

⁶⁹⁰ For more on this double binding, see Max Visser, 'Gregory Bateson on Deutero-Learning and Double Bind', *Journal of History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 39.3 (2003), 269-78.

⁶⁹¹ Gibney, p. 50.

⁶⁹² Leslie Hill, *Radical Indecision: Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida and the Future of Criticism* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2010), p. 334.

angoisse, a vibrational, ever-turning-away motion back-and-forth in space/time, associated with a negative affective charge. *Angoisse* is produced by the im/possibility of deciding: ‘là où tout est indécis, l’on ne peut vivre que dans un détournement perpétuel’.⁶⁹³ In ‘De l’angoisse au langage’, Blanchot explores the structure of the limit experience across various manifestations in the life of a writer.⁶⁹⁴ He moves paratactically between examples, implicitly connecting them to the primary theme of the essay: *angoisse*. Interestingly, one such as seems very close to the im/mobility of the double bind: the experience of being ‘hémiplegique’ (semi-paralysed). He imagines that ‘[l’écrivain] est comme un hémiplegique qui trouverait dans le même mal l’obligation et l’interdiction de marcher’.⁶⁹⁵ Because it a *hemiplegia*, the patient is physically stuck between two irreconcilable, unavailable options: having to walk and having to stay still. This psychological ‘stuckness’ in the dilemma is embodied: the healthy muscles just as much as the paralysed ones are ‘la preuve et la cause de l’impossibilité de sa démarche’.⁶⁹⁶ And anxiety fills in the affective dimension, the torturous sensation of being caught between two impossible, incompatible extremes. *Angoisse* is a limit figure ([l’angoisse] est aussi bien le dehors que le dedans’),⁶⁹⁷ and by extension of the limit logic it also becomes a meta-metaphor: ‘à l’angoisse tout appartient, y compris la non-angoisse’.⁶⁹⁸ In fact, Blanchot concludes that ‘le cas de l’écrivain est privilégié pour cette raison qu’il représente d’une manière privilégiée le paradoxe de l’angoisse’.⁶⁹⁹ Additionally, *angoisse* works on the reader, too: ‘l’angoisse rend la lecture interdite’, with its push/pull, ‘m’y attirant avec refus’.⁷⁰⁰

Interestingly, and again recalling Bateson’s structure of the double bind, the structure of anxiety seems to have something in common with Lacanian neurosis as explored in ‘Le Mythe individuel du névrosé’.⁷⁰¹ In Lacan’s analysis of Freud’s Rat Man case, a neurotic constellation is created in the patient’s mind because of an unresolved ‘double dette’: two unpaid debts, one belonging to the Rat Man himself and the other belonging to his father.⁷⁰² The debts exist on two different levels, and neurosis is the consequence of the Rat Man’s inability to bring the two together: ‘La situation présente une sorte d’ambiguïté, de diplopie—l’élément de la dette est placé sur deux

⁶⁹³ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 138.

⁶⁹⁴ Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, pp. 9-23.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁹⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *Le Pas au-delà* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 88.

⁶⁹⁹ Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, p. 12.

⁷⁰⁰ Blanchot, *Pas au-delà*, p. 89.

⁷⁰¹ Jacques Lacan, ‘Le Mythe individuel du névrosé ou poésie et vérité dans la névrose (1953)’, *Ornicar?*, 17-18 (1978), 290-307.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 299.

plans à la fois, et c'est précisément dans l'impossibilité de faire se rejoindre ces deux plans que se joue tout le drame du névrosé'.⁷⁰³ Caught between two irreconcilable levels, the psychic drama is constantly renewing itself, and the Rat Man gets stuck in a loop of 'obsessions et [...] angoisses': 'À essayer de les faire se recouvrir l'un l'autre, il fait une opération tournante, jamais satisfaisante, qui n'arrive pas à boucler son cycle'.⁷⁰⁴ For Blanchot, too, the structural phenomenon of anxiety (much like the structure of neurosis) is not linked essentially to any particular content: 'Le sentiment angoissant n'est lié qu'accidentellement à un objet'.⁷⁰⁵

From a structural perspective, the essay 'De l'angoisse au langage' itself enters into a performative mode from page 13 onwards.⁷⁰⁶ A typical passage in this latter part of the essay reads as follows: 'Je n'ai rien à dire de l'angoisse [...]. Mais l'angoisse fait aussi que je n'ai rien à dire de rien [...]. Pourtant, il ne m'est pas permis d'écrire n'importe quoi'.⁷⁰⁷ Every affirmative statement is undercut by a conjunction such as 'mais', 'pourtant', 'cependant' or 'au contraire', which partly undoes it and partly leaves it intact, a fact highlighted by Blanchot's use of parallelism.⁷⁰⁸ The adversative coordination takes the form of a counterexpectational *but* rather than a corrective *but* of denial. As in the poems from Chapter 4, 'Substitution', contradictions here do not cancel each other out or efface one another, clearing the field; instead they capture the reader in a liminal hesitation, doubled again and again—exemplifying *angoisse* itself.

Derrida, too, speaks of an existential 'angoisse', an anxiety 'qui naît toujours d'une certaine manière d'être impliqué dans le jeu, d'être pris au jeu, d'être comme être d'entrée de jeu dans le jeu'.⁷⁰⁹ And Dino Galetti writes of the aporia: 'it now becomes clearer how difficult, even claustrophobic, the "problem" is for one who demands solution'.⁷¹⁰ This inflection on the aporia leads to the restrictive and claustrophobic sensation of the double bind. Indeed, in reference to the ordeal of writing, Derrida states that 'l'angoisse de l'écriture [est] la responsabilité de cette *angustia*, de ce passage nécessairement resserré de la parole contre lequel se poussent et

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, p. 11.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁰⁹ Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, pp. 410-11. We always have to make choices, and whether this process is awful (I can't choose!) or neutral (I can't choose), whether it is perceived as an unacceptable flaw or a vibrating dance, it seems to me to be topologically similar.

⁷¹⁰ Dino Galetti, 'Rethinking What We Think about Derrida', *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 10.2 (October 2010), p. 13.

s'entr'empêchent les significations possibles'.⁷¹¹ *Angustia* means a narrow and constricted passageway. So, the writer's task involves enduring an 'angoisse' and taking on an '*angustia*'. This pair, 'angoisse' and '*angustia*'—the former derived etymologically from the latter and still connected by their initial rhyme—seem to act as a metaphor for the limit experience of the double bind. Both *angoisse* and *angustia* can be traced back to the verb form *ango*, meaning to bind together; choke; cause pain or distress.⁷¹² Writing undergoes many moments of un/decidability (many of which are enumerated in Chapter 2), leading to 'le moment où il faut décider', which provokes an 'angoisse du choix'.⁷¹³ Derrida goes on: 'Parler me fait peur parce que ne disant jamais assez, je dis aussi toujours trop'.⁷¹⁴ Here, fear, anxiety, and physical restriction are associated with the double bind of speaking ('le chant') as well as writing. As we saw back in Chapter 1, the aporia is not a total impasse, though the word derives from Aristotle's *diaporeô*, meaning 'je suis dans l'embarras, je ne m'en sors pas, je ne peux rien faire'.⁷¹⁵ Instead, the "'logique" de l'aporie' presents itself 'non pour signifier la paralysie ou l'impasse mais cela même qu'il faut endurer pour qu'une décision [soit possible]'.⁷¹⁶ After all, this aporetic condition is everywhere, and yet things in life still move along and meaning emerges im/possibly; indeed, complete paralysis would be the condition without double bind or *angustia*. Instead of an impasse, then, the limit experience is a hemiplegia, a double bind—and when proliferated many times this produces a vibrational, im/mobile fluttering of hesitation that we might call *angoisse*, clearly present in *Les Mégères*, physically manifested in Blanchot's 'battement d'un cœur hésitant', or indeed Derrida's 'tremblement' (as mentioned in Chapter 1).⁷¹⁷

Witches

The network of connected examples took us out of des Forêts's poem for a detour into *angoisse*, but we can now turn to an analysis of the titular *mégères* themselves. It is important to regard

⁷¹¹ Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 18. For an account of this example from 'Force et signification', see Christopher W. Johnson, 'The Passion of Inscription' in *System and Writing in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 12-42.

⁷¹² In terms of precedent, Heidegger seems to give credence to the notion of an 'ontologically authentic mood of anxiety', though it is different. Marko Zlomislic, *Jacques Derrida's Aporetic Ethics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 176; and Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), p. 17. Krell connects this Heideggerian *Angst* to a choking sensation, a 'narrowness and constriction in the throat and lungs'. David Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 68.

⁷¹³ Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 19.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷¹⁵ Catherine Malabou and Jacques Derrida, *La Contre-Allée* (Paris: La Quinzaine Littéraire-Louis Vuitton, 1999), p. 247.

⁷¹⁶ Derrida, *Apories*, p. 44.

⁷¹⁷ Blanchot, *Pas au-delà*, p. 90; Derrida, *Genèse*, p. vii.

these witches themselves as liminal figures, adding a further axis. As will by now be familiar, the witches set off an ambivalent, emotional doubling in the young boy at the heart of the poem: ‘Oh! Je m’en souviens, ici ce fut désir | et peur battant de pair quand je croisai son regard’ (p. 910, ll. 4-5). Again, poetic form effectively doubles this affective overlay. Chopped by the line break, the dyad of ‘désir | et peur’ is not a simple opposition. This is reinforced by the surprisingly neat 2+4 and 2+4 hemistiches formed by ‘ici ce fut désir | et peur battant de pair’, which mimic the familiar alexandrine and thereby bridge the enjambment between the two elements. That choice of formal structure also hints at the symmetry of the push/pull sentiment, with fear and desire counterbalancing one another, maintaining the bind. Note also the descriptor ‘battant’, recalling Blanchot’s hesitant heartbeat. This desire is dizzying, vertiginous, feverish (p. 908, l. 25).

The oxymoronic feeling of simultaneous fear and desire that we saw embedded in the sea and the shore is connected to the mother, too. This reflects a classic psychoanalytical dilemma as outlined by Colin Ross, Lisa Schwarz and others. It goes: if I don’t create an attachment bond with my mother, my caretaker, then I will not survive; but on the other hand, if I do create an attachment bond, I feel like I’m dying. This is worse in cases where the attachment figure is not emotionally or physically available to the child. But it is a universal condition, because attachment, while being required for safety, always counterintuitively involves vulnerability and the potential for hurt and harm. To cite Ross, this problem of ‘attachment to the perpetrator’, as he terms it,

is defined as the paradoxical state in which infants and children are biologically driven to attach despite being hurt or rejected by their caretakers when doing so. [...] Infants must attach in order to survive, thrive and grow, and in a sense, we all have the problem of attachment to the perpetrator, meaning that none of us have absolutely secure attachment. We all love and hate our parents simultaneously, even if subconsciously, and this is simply a natural part of the human condition.⁷¹⁸

We might imagine the child placed in this double bind to be paralysed, hesitating at the juncture between these two incompatible extremes. In fact, psychoanalysts have called this the ‘approach-flight paradox’, in which ‘the infant is placed in an irresolvable and disorganizing approach-flight paradox’, unsure whether to go forward or to flee.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ Colin Ross (2007) cited in Lisa Schwarz and others, *The Comprehensive Resource Model: Effective Therapeutic Techniques for the Healing of Complex Trauma* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 11.

⁷¹⁹ Mary Main, Erik Hesse and Nancy Kaplan, ‘Predictability of Attachment Behaviour and Representational Processes at 1, 6 and 19 Years of Age: The Berkeley Longitudinal Study’ in *Attachment from Infancy to Adulthood: The Major Longitudinal Studies*, ed. by Klaus E. Grossmann, Karin Grossmann and Everett Waters (New York: Guilford, 2006), pp. 245-304 (p. 281).

This bind could map onto the situation of des Forêts's poetic speaker, and it shares the 'se rapprocher/s'écarter' structure as well as the anxious, disorganised affective dimension; but this would rely on there being a connection between the *mégères* and the mother. Indeed, throughout the poem, the figures of 'mégère', 'mère' and 'mer' are wound tightly together in metaphorical matrices. The witches thus metaphorically re/present an idiosyncratic form of motherhood. The first resemblance to examine is that of 'mère'/'mégère'. Bonnefoy writes of 'les mégères, qui signifient le néant, qui font désirer la mort, ont tant de traits maternels qu'il est à peine besoin de les relever'.⁷²⁰ The latter part of this is certainly true. As previously noted, the theme of resemblance is indicated in the first line of the poem. The mysterious second person in that first line, who the speaker is attempting to approximate metaphorically ('ta ressemblance'), is revealed to be a mother figure in line 11. There, the introduction of the 'fils' is highlighted by a dissonant, spitting fricative: 'La face fiévreuse de ton fils sous ton feu suborneur' (p. 905, l. 11). The mother herself is first mentioned explicitly towards the end of the first stanza:

Ô mère [...]
 J'ai vu scintiller mon ombre dans le cercueil de tes yeux
 Et s'y débattre le morveux empiégé comme un rat! (p. 905, ll. 20-22)

The speaker sees his shadow, his younger self, trapped in the mother's eyes like a rat—or like the Rat Man. He describes the child in third person as 'le morveux'. This has a secondary effect of analeptically illuminating one interpretation of a pair of lines above: 'Comme si voué par l'énigme du sourire dans ses yeux enfantins | A revoir en toi la sorcière qui m'engeôla dans les siens!' (p. 905, ll. 12-13). It becomes likely that the 'en toi' refers to the mother figure, and that the sorceress ('la sorcière') is therefore similar to the mother, since both took the child prisoner in their eyes. The enallage would then turn on the shift from third person ('ses yeux') to first person ('qui m'engeôla'), both referring to the speaker's childhood self. The metaphor of entrapment in the mother's eyes recurs later using the same configuration of pronouns: 'Elles m'ont fait comme un loup qui a faim ramper jusqu'à terre | *De même* ton regard qui me hante et d'où je voudrais m'enfuir' (p. 907, ll. 10-11).

Many more slippages from 'mégère' to 'mère' occur, particularly through the motif of the eyes and gaze, which conjure up lines and axes of connection. For instance, slipping from present to past then back again:

Lorsque aujourd'hui j'évoque ces yeux à l'ombre de ta présence

⁷²⁰ Yves Bonnefoy, *La Vérité de parole et autres essais* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1988), p. 232.

Je me demande quel maléfice cachait leur douceur obscure
Et lequel dans les tiens où me chante une voix familière, (p. 910, ll. 7-9)

The preceding lines indicate that ‘ces yeux’ referred to here are the eyes of the witch at the seaside scene. ‘Ta présence’ seems, then, to reference the semi-apostrophised maternal figure, who is present but only by virtue of the shadow that she casts. The speaker then makes a comparison between the eyes of the *mégère* and the eyes of this second-person addressee. The liminal interfolding between the witch and the mother (‘Et lequel dans les tiens [...]’) complements a painfully ambivalent portrait of the mother/son relationship: he sees wickedness and softness paired together in her eyes. Later, the speaker speaks of ‘leur orbe’, unambiguously referring to the gaze of the witches, but this shades subtly into ‘le cercle fermé de *tes* doubles prunelles’, which can be read as a return to the mother (p. 906, l. 6, my emphasis). This enallage is characteristic of the way that the poem’s poetic figures fold into one another.

The relationship between the son and the mother is a liminal one, not just in terms of ambivalent feeling but also in terms of a claustrophobic imprisonment or swallowing of one by the other. Enallage reinforces this, in lines such as ‘Sa grimace acide, je la sens encore *me* serrer les dents’, which also blurs past and present for the protagonist (‘encore’) (p. 906, l. 1, my emphasis). The slippery technique, here involving a change of just one letter, reinforces the vibrating, anxiety-inducing (clenched teeth and all) complexity of these overlapping relations between intertwined terms. The ‘ressemblance’ motif that springs from the first line of *Les Mégères* foreshadows the theme of relation-as-relative. Des Forêts’s use of the word ‘familier’ (‘une voix familière’, cited above) catches both the denotative meaning of ‘well-known’ (just like the English word ‘familiar’) and the echoing connection to the *family*. This fraught familiar/familial relationship is glimpsed in Blanchot’s engagement with Heraclitus in ‘L’Expérience-limite’, a mode of relating that is ‘une sorte de conversation, étrangère et familière, amicale et hostile, entendue, malentendue’.⁷²¹ His description certainly captures something of the dynamic, ambivalent tension that characterises the ‘mère’/‘mégère’ and ‘mother/son’ relationships in the poem.

There is almost certainly a good deal of projection onto the figure of the witches, and the psychological splitting of women by men into dangerous seductresses and angelic mothers (colloquially known as the ‘Madonna-whore’ complex) has long been denounced by feminists. As Jones blisteringly affirms:

⁷²¹ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 125.

the core of radical thinking about the political condition of women, stretching right back to de Beauvoir, is the insight that, under patriarchy, women—that is, actual female persons—do not really exist. What exists is ‘Woman,’ a bullshit projection fashioned out of what patriarchal men think they want (the virgin, the whore, the Madonna, the domestic goddess, the faithful servant), the life-matter they really don’t want (emotion, embodiment, dependence, need, vulnerability, mortality), and the many ways they get violently aggrieved when we won’t comply with their projections (ball-breaker, prick-tease, nag, hysteric, Feminazi bitch, and most resonant of all, *witch*).⁷²²

In the light of the classic Oedipal conception of the ‘oceanic’ mother, who threatens to devour and drown her son, set against the narrative of a boy child who must ‘drag himself [...] out of the warm, “oceanic” immersion in the mother in order to achieve rigorous self-delineation’,⁷²³ this poem’s ‘mother/seductress/witch/sea’ matrix begins to look rooted in exaggerated conceptions of women’s weakness *and* their power. For example,

Elle s’écroule en tailleur sur les roches escalières
Pour fredonner et mimer aux ruches de sa jupe tourière
Je ne sais quelle berceuse ou caresse de rêve. (p. 910, ll. 27-29)

The witch who especially catches the boy’s attention (and he hers) flops down cross-legged. She hums and acts out something which is caught between a lullaby, which signals maternity, and a caress, which signals carnality. The speaker cannot decide whether this woman is virginal (‘la clarté virginale de leurs eaux [des yeux de la mégère]’) or a charming seductress (‘pourvoyeuse d’un charme’) (p. 910, l. 27; l. 33). He finds ‘la lueur jumelle’ in her gaze, a metaphor for ambivalence, echoing the earlier adjective ‘gémérés’ (p. 910, l. 31; p. 908, l. 34). The witch offers him her hand, an ambiguous gesture interpreted either as a motherly act of nurturing or a trap designed to lure him in.

These inflated conceptions of the feared feminine are also rooted in notions of fluidity (engulfment, servitude, ‘overwhelmment’) and rigidity (self-delineation, repulsion, abandonment) that do not particularly pay heed to the limit experience or any of its suggestions.⁷²⁴ It is as though the maternal caretaker is ‘at one and the same time, both overwhelmingly, stiflingly present or near and, in her strange, impenetrable alterity, also frustratingly, uncontrollably absent

⁷²² Jane Clare Jones, ‘Editorial Statement’, *The Radical Notion*, 1.1 (Autumn 2020), p. 1.

⁷²³ Jones, ‘Sovereign Invulnerability’, p. 291.

⁷²⁴ I borrow these terms from James Hollis, *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life* (New York: Gotham Books, 2009), n.p.: ‘In the end, we all fear two things: [...] the fear of overwhelmment and the fear of abandonment’.

or inaccessible; there is either too much or too little of her, never the right balanced amount'.⁷²⁵ However, as with Ross's 'approach-flight paradox' mentioned just above (which addresses the same limit—'mother/child'—but framed in the opposite direction, from child to mother), there is some truth to all this: underneath the narrowly situated and perhaps strategic perspectives of the poem's speaker and author, we find a similar pattern, more subtle, less polarised, and with a different affect: a vision of these maternal, seductive, powerful witches as complex and doubled, liminal and limitrophic beings.

As the analysis of *Les Mégères* bears out, maternity is not simply fluid and engulfing, nor is it rigidly bounded and enclosed. The witch/mother occupies the middle ground in between these two unrealistic extremes. Adrienne Rich observes this in a more affirmative, less anxious mode: 'Most of us first know both love and disappointment, power and tenderness, in the person of a woman'.⁷²⁶ In Margrit Shildrick's *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*, Shildrick explicitly states that the liminal position of the female body in motherhood is best served by a watery metaphor such as 'leaky'.⁷²⁷ And finally, as Donna Haraway points out, women have always had 'trouble counting as individuals in modern western discourses. Their personal, bounded individuality is compromised by their bodies' troubling talent for making other bodies'.⁷²⁸ Following the limit paradigm, one has to have a relationship both of rejection and of connection with the other, and each of these folds into its opposite. For Luce Irigaray, desire and relation are always liminal:

Une double intention m'anime: je veux retourner à moi, en moi, et je veux être avec toi. Dans mon désir de toi, dans l'amour avec toi, mon corps est animé d'un vouloir être avec toi ou à toi, et avec moi ou à moi, et il veut aussi l'existence d'un entre-nous. Il veut aimer et être aimé, sortir de soi et rentrer en soi. Je veux aller vers toi et éprouver le retour en moi. Je cherche une alliance complexe entre mon intériorité et celle d'un tu insubstituable à moi, à jamais hors de moi, mais grâce auquel mon intériorité existe.⁷²⁹

Bonnefoy suspects we have seen the *mégères* before: 'elles avaient parlé dans *Macbeth*'.⁷³⁰ His reference to *Macbeth* is apt, for the *Larousse* dictionary definition of 'mégère'—'femme acariâtre, emportée, méchante'—does not do justice to the mythical proportions which these

⁷²⁵ Adrian Johnston, 'Jacques Lacan', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward Zalta, Fall 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/lacan>.

⁷²⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), p. 11.

⁷²⁷ Margrit Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism and (Bio)ethics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 119.

⁷²⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Woman: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 253, n. 8.

⁷²⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Être deux* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1997), p. 48.

⁷³⁰ Bonnefoy, *Vérité de parole*, p. 228.

female figures assume in the poem. They are also referred to as ‘sorcière[s]’ (p. 905, l. 13). This, in addition to their liminal, witching-hour properties, is one reason why I refer to them in English as witches. The other is precisely to affirm the potential liminality of the witchy figure, not as a figure of caricature, but more in the manner of Mary Daly. For Daly, reclaiming the word ‘hag’ in her study of ‘hag-ography’ (to replace hagiography) and ‘crone-ology’ (to supersede chronology): ‘Our foresisters were the Great Hags whom the institutionally powerful but privately impotent patriarchs found too threatening for coexistence, and whom historians erase. *Hag* is from an Old English word meaning harpy, witch’.⁷³¹ Perhaps the poem’s hags are marginalised within and from society partly because they do not conform to those projected expectations and because they are ‘too threatening for coexistence’—a coexistence which of course can never be entirely undone.

Rhyme

Writing in a dialogue form, Blanchot describes the mobile tissue of the ‘self/other’ relation using the metaphor of the murmuring sea qui ‘*suit son cours*’: ‘Oui, je suis ce murmure, comme toi aussi tu es ce murmure, pourtant l’un toujours séparé de l’autre, de chaque côté de cela qui murmurant ne dit rien, ah rumeur dégradante’.⁷³² With the earlier discussion on ‘Ligne de partage’ in the back of our mind, let us look now at the ‘mère’/‘mer’/‘mégère’ configuration. The repeated refrain of the gaze, which connects mother and witch, also connects them both to the sea. The mother/witch has blue eyes that are described metaphorically as ‘eaux’: ‘Ton regard a été si bleu qu’il a pu me séduire’, he says (p. 911, l. 15). The exclamatives ‘Ô mère’ and ‘ô Mère [...]!’ are echoed in ‘Ô mèr!’ in stanza 3 (p. 905, l. 20; p. 911, l. 28; p. 907, l. 30). The sea is metaphorically described as a ‘berceau’, which has maternal connotations but also prefigures the ‘berceuse’ sung by the *mégère*. Similarly, the witches’ cave metaphorically resembles a ‘sombre voûte utérine’ with the sea lapping at its entrance (p. 911, l. 28). This image conjures up the Biblical commonplace, the ‘water of the womb’.

Cixous’s apposite remarks regarding motherhood and its connection to the sea provide an insight into the kind of rhyming that unites the words ‘mégère’, ‘mer’ and ‘mère’: ‘Et la mère? Elle est musique, elle est là, elle est derrière, qui souffle, la mère qui évidemment pour toute écriture française est la mer. Dans ma langue nous avons la chance de pouvoir dire que la mère est la

⁷³¹ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, reprinted in *The Mary Daly Reader*, ed. by Jennifer Rycenga and Linda Barufaldi (New York: New York University Press, 2017), p. 145.

⁷³² Blanchot, *Pas au-delà*, p. 161.

mer'.⁷³³ The homophony of 'mère' and 'mer' in the French language, Cixous underscores, is what makes the comparison of mother and sea unavoidable, 'évide[nt]'. Both are pronounced mɛ:ʁ, since the terminal *e atone* of 'mère' is not usually sounded. Could a version of the same argument be made for the word 'mégère', since it *rhymes* with 'mer' and 'mère' as well as sharing the initial consonant 'm'? The poetic micro-structure of rhyme seems to replicate the structure of the limit experience, of the interfolding of similarity and difference. At the risk of stating the obvious, rhyme does not occur between two words that sound identical. Likewise, rhyme does not work if there is only one word, unless there is an internal rhyme or some interior doubling going on. Rhyme is also absent when two words are too different in their sounds.⁷³⁴ Using this basic framework, it becomes clear that the aural homophony of 'mer' and 'mère' also relies on them being spelt differently; hence, the visual interplay of 'mer' and 'mère' creates a sort of eye rhyme, albeit not in the traditional usage of the term.⁷³⁵

In the Derridian analysis of rhyme, rhyme has been termed a limit experience because the sonority of rhyme provides a counterpart to the discursive meaning of a given text. This account of rhyme rightly points out that rhyme seems paradoxically to be both related and unrelated to semantic meaning. This creates a foldedness between the two. Derrida's interpretation of rhyme in 'La Double Séance' advances this line of argument. Clark clarifies this part of Derrida's argument as follows:

It is a matter again of the 'strange non-difference' between signifier and signified. [...] Theorists of poetry are familiar with the interplay of formal and semantic aspects of a text in which, for instance, a formal analogy between two terms may suggest a thematic resonance, a resonance which in turn imposes formal constraints on the text in progress. What interests us is the element of this relation itself—an indeterminate 'realm' in which neither yet both 'signifier' and 'signified' can be said to be the motive force.⁷³⁶

Likewise, Connors's creative-critical essay 'Derrida and the Friendship of Rhyme' calls attention to this facet of rhyme in a Derridian framework. There, she claims that 'Rhyme is the possibility that there may be consonance, or dissonance, between what words say and how they are said—and that even when there is consonance, this is not the same as identity'.⁷³⁷ The patterns of rhyme

⁷³³ Hélène Cixous, *Hélène Cixous: Chemins d'une écriture*, ed. by Françoise van Rossum-Guyon and Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 19.

⁷³⁴ Additionally, if there is a predictable rhyme scheme, the poem also sets up a limit experience surrounding the expectation of futurity, in which the rhyme is anticipated before it is read.

⁷³⁵ Conventionally, an eye rhyme is a rhyme between two words which are spelt similarly (and thus rhyme to the eye) but pronounced differently.

⁷³⁶ Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot*, p. 146.

⁷³⁷ Connors, p. 144.

may indeed result in a creative tension between the material and phonetic possibilities of a language and the ideas, themes and meaning that language conveys. For instance, Derrida analyses the rhyme of ‘elle’ and ‘aile’, a rhyme which seems to be both a mere coincidence of the French language and a consonance on the level of meaning which one feels must be more than simply accidental.⁷³⁸ Derrida sums up this interpretation of rhyme in the following way: ‘La rime—loi générale de l’effet textuel—plie l’une à l’autre une identité et une différence’.⁷³⁹

But even when Derrida calls rhyme ‘loi générale de l’effet textuel’, his meaning is still concerned specifically with the relation of word to referent. All I should wish to add to this is the suggestion that the ‘loi générale’ of rhyme can be expanded even further, at least in the broader thinking of limit-experience-as-structural-phenomenon that I am articulating. While rhyme may act as a metaphor for the fold between meaning and inscription, that is, the word chosen for its meaning and the word chosen for its sonorous resonances, something more basic is also at work. The movement of rhyme ‘by itself’ is a limit experience. Leaving reference out of the picture, we might simply look at where the rhyme sits in the play of sounds in ‘mère’ and ‘mégère’. The rhyme lies somewhere in the middle between the two terms. There is a movement of similarity and difference, proximity and distance, a referral backwards and forwards. If one tries to exclude one term from the other, or make both terms exactly the same, the rhyme is lost. This phenomenon occurs even between rhyming words that have no referential meaning, nonsense words.

In *des Forêts*’s text, rhyme shows the doubling and splitting of perspectives. When we hear the speaker describing himself as ‘Bouffon sur son tréteau de songes et de mensonges’, the rhyme between ‘songes’ and ‘mensonges’ can be interpreted at the level of meaning (p. 911, l. 25). (The rhyme might imply that the speaker’s fantasies are not far off lies, for instance.) And yet, this interpretative operation depends on a more basic understanding of the affinity and difference between the two words, which is the basic feature of rhyme. Derrida considers rhyme as a particular case study in ‘La Double Séance’, but rhyme can be detached from the specific critical context in which he analyses it there. Rhyme itself has the same structure as metaphor. Thus, rhyme can be used in the place of metaphor. This elevates rhyme to the status of another *example* of the overall structure of metaphoricity—of the limit structure. Rhyme is a minimalist, compressed and condensed example. To phrase it cryptically, rhyme is a metaphor for metaphor.

⁷³⁸ Derrida, *Dissémination*, p. 270, p. 308.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

And while accidents of rhyme (and metaphor, simile, etc.) punctuate almost all writing and speech, it is true that poetry generally has a higher incidence rate.

Jouissance

Connors reflects that ‘*Rime* is also the old name for a chink’.⁷⁴⁰ This makes her think of the ‘narrower [...] “crack in the wall”’ in ‘*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, its ‘crannied hole or chink’.⁷⁴¹ The claustrophobia of rhyme, then, its narrowness, its minimalism, are evoked here albeit elusively. Next, Connors tells us that ‘rime’ comes from the Latin *rima*, ‘which just means chink—and is still to be found in the physiological term *rima glottidis*, the passage in the glottis between the vocal chords and the arytenoid cartilages. [...] In fact, it is what lets the air in to the vocal chords, allowing them to vibrate’.⁷⁴² We start to form a sense of the interconnections between *angoisse*, rhyme, relation, and vibration. Nowell Smith is the other critic who runs excellently with this theme, specifically on the use of voice, rhythm, and tone as forms of ‘differential vibration’, a phrase he adopts from Derrida.⁷⁴³ His vision of this is fairly expansive: the ‘oscillation of soundwaves’; ‘vibration as affect entering a particular, differentiated form’; ‘the relations between self and others, self and world, word and referent, and between the linguistic terms themselves’; and finally, ‘a movement (at once vibrating and differentiating) through which the parameters of presence and absence are set and re-set’.⁷⁴⁴ Nowell Smith’s recent work on the voice chimes happily with my thinking of *angoisse* as a differential trembling of un/certainty and in/decision. His focus is on the important ‘body/voice’ interplay in writing and poetry, including the vocal cords (which are figured as a kind of cord, band, ligature or bind, further tightening the association with *angoisse*). This entryway brings me to another figure described as a ‘vibration différentielle’ by Derrida: *jouissance*, that overdetermined figure of bliss, pain, ‘petite mort’, and rolling orgasmic waves.⁷⁴⁵

The speaker of *Les Mégères* conveys his younger self’s yearning for death, though we know from his continued existence that death was not realised. In the imperative lament that closes the eighth stanza, ‘Guide-moi, ô Mère [...]!’ (p. 913, l. 28), the supplicative mode allows the speaker to talk about his death wish and his hypothetical death in the cave under the restraining hand of the

⁷⁴⁰ Connors, p. 144.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Nowell Smith, *On Voice in Poetry*, pp. 48-76.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

⁷⁴⁵ Derrida, *Points de suspension*, p. 146.

subjunctive mood: ‘Étouffée soit ma voix’ (p. 913, l. 29). The speaker remembers wishing he could be killed by the witch he encounters: ‘j’aspirais à mourir [...]!’ (p. 911, l. 18). This lyrical, sensual yearning already, perhaps, starts to connect death with sex and *jouissance*. Indeed, if we examine this excerpt more closely, it becomes apparent that death contains echoes of something more complex than utter annihilation:

Que j’aspirais à mourir sous ta main carnassière!
 Non pas de la mort qui rend libre d’un trop vaste souci
 Échéance, havre de grâce, terme du labyrinthe où nous errâmes
 (Car être et n’être plus sont pareille malédiction)
 Mais la bonne justicière qui me restituerait mon dû,
 Cette patrie néante d’où je fus indûment arraché
 Pour parader comme je fais ici en ma vie anthume (p. 911, ll. 18-24)

The speaker is not interested in ideals of death as a final ending leading to a peaceful plenitude.⁷⁴⁶ Instead, the nothingness to which he wishes to return is a time and place *before*: ‘Cette patrie néante d’où je fus indûment arraché’. This yearning recalls the Freudian death drive. As is well known, the death drive is not simply a death wish, but rather stands in relation to the life drive, which supports not only the pleasure principle but also reproduction, creativity, and an orientation towards the future.⁷⁴⁷ In contradistinction to the life drive, Freud hypothesises the existence of ‘a death instinct, the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state’.⁷⁴⁸ The notion of death drive describes the urge to ‘to bring the living being *back* to the inorganic state’.⁷⁴⁹ The word ‘back’ here refers to the state of nothingness assumed to come before life, preceding conception. The death drive is said to explain repetitive and compulsive behaviour which prevents one’s own progress forward.⁷⁵⁰ This death wish is not opposable to or

⁷⁴⁶ This annihilation would be an experience *without* any differential vibration. In Blanchot’s words, ‘À la limite, mourir, mais c’est la vie sans angoisse’—death is truly beyond the veil, beyond the limit at which the ‘neither/nor’ repeatedly escapes as well as remaining attached to the structure of ‘both/and’ and/or ‘either/or’ (Blanchot, *Pas au-delà*, p. 94). Of course, this death is im/possible: it is always doubled with the continued presence of *angoisse* and its ineradicable, turning questioning movement: ‘l’absence de pourquoi de l’angoisse ne conduit cependant pas au repos, ni à je ne sais quelle gloire, mais à un risque si grand que mourir ne paraît plus l’issue pour y échapper’ (Ibid., p. 94). The ‘repos’ and ‘gloire’ imagined here correspond to des Forêts’s ‘toute pure nullité’ and ‘havre de grâce’. Derrida stresses that ‘une jouissance qui serait jouissance d’une plénitude sans vibration, sans différence, me paraît être à la fois le mythe de la métaphysique—et la mort’ (Derrida, *Points de suspension*, p. 146). And, above, Derrida said more or less the same thing about metaphor.

⁷⁴⁷ Sigmund Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. 18* (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), pp. 1-64.

⁷⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘The Two Classes of Instincts’ in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. 19* (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1923), pp. 40-47.

⁷⁴⁹ *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, ed. by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (London: Karnac, 1988), p. 97. My emphasis.

⁷⁵⁰ Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’.

incompatible with life itself. So, could it be that des Forêts's poetic speaker's death wish is—whether he knows it or not—a manifestation of the death drive?

In the penultimate stanza, once the speaker is safely out of reach, the image of the crones nonetheless lingers on, as focalised through the older self. (Note the Derridian echoes of both 'parages' and 'hanter'.) The metaphor of haunting signals a palimpsestic overlaying of past and present, evoked just a few lines earlier, too, with 'Ceci fut le lieu, ceci est le bastion où flottent encore' (p. 913, l. 1, my emphasis). These ghostly figures, he reports, continued to haunt the littoral edges of his soul, the 'parages | De [s]on âme'. This introduces a further axis of liminality: the ghosts are confined to the soul's very thresholds, and must attempt to creep up on it 'A pas menus'. The poem describes a repetitive action ('toujours') undertaken by the witches around him as he sleeps:

Mais toujours vous reveniez hanter les parages
De mon âme dormante guettée par vos hypnoses
A pas menus dans un chicotement de souris
Vaquant sans relâche à votre messe souterraine,
Puis comme claque une balle au plus fort du sommeil
Comme gicle la foudre blanche et violente d'une lame
Cette commotion exquise, et le cri d'un homme touché! (p. 913, ll. 13-19)

The latter three lines evoke a rather different picture. The speaker, now a man in the present tense rather than a boy in the past tense—he has been touched! Suddenly irrupting into the present tense, this humdrum, historical haunting is somehow converted ('Puis') into a burst of exquisite activity, a cry that seems to mingle pain and pleasure. The notion of 'touch' recalls the crone's finger that beckoned him in stanza 7: 'Son doigt m'agraffe à distance, mais je ne puis bondir | Tant m'étouffant peur et jubilation [...]' (p. 911, ll. 10-11). In both cases, this witchy finger again contains a double resonance of both a sexual touch (evoking 'commotion exquise', desire, and 'jubilation') and a frightening threat of harm ('peur', 'violente'). 'Puis' alone serves to mark the transition, without even a supporting verb by way of explanation. Although the *petite mort* of *jouissance* is not mentioned, an allusion to *jouissance* is lurking in this description of the white lightning flash and the violent slashing of a blade, two images which recur also in Dupin's poetry. The reference to 'au plus fort du sommeil' conjures up the image of a man suddenly waking from a dream or nightmare. The parallel simile structures ('comme' [...] 'comme') serve to hold off the final line, until finally the exquisite moment is attained. Or is it? More precisely, what is this exquisite moment?

I argue that this exquisite moment is, far from being some final fulfilment or satisfaction in the ordinary sense, actually a continuation of the play of liminality that is present throughout the poem. My reading of the witches and the sea therefore differs from John Naughton's interpretation in which they become ideal, 'symbolic figures' for purity or the *vide*, or Bonnefoy's characterisation of the witches as 'l'épiphanie du négatif'.⁷⁵¹ We are *not* to believe that the sleeping man is killed by the hags. Such contact would annul the initial motivation for the poem, by closing off and resolving the anxious repetition compulsion that inspires these recurrent dreams and memories. It would also annul the need for the final stanza. In that stanza, as the poem draws to a close, a resolution is still not forthcoming. It is true that his limbs are trembling, shaking with *angoisse*, but the framing ('Comme si [...] Je franchissais le pas') is a return to the hypothetical mood of the rest of the poem:

Et mes membres ont frémi de la reptation ancienne
Comme si halé par votre harpon sous l'embellie du ciel
Jusqu'aux battants grands ouverts de mon investiture
Je franchissais le pas hors les terres reniées de la fraude
Loin de la geste enfantine dont tu m'as fait le chantre
Pour me glisser au lit candide du premier hivernage (p. 913, ll. 29-34)

The only way he can almost make the crossing into the grotto is by means of an 'as though' comparative structure, whose double-sidedness undercuts the imagined (or dreamed) event even as that event is now clearly shown to intrude upon the present day of the poem's speaking. This would enable him to escape the telling of the 'geste enfantine' of which he is now, still, the 'chantre'. With the drama of the encounter with the hags not resolved by the end of the poem, then, the exquisite moment must be interpreted and indeed experienced as a *continuation* of the poem's liminal play. This is *jouissance*.

The word 'commotion' derives from the Latin *commotio*, meaning 'movement' and 'agitation'. The phrase 'commotion exquise' thus hints that motion, texture, and a busy, mobile vibration are present within the exclamatory moment—rather than the stasis of death. This moment occurs once the compression and accumulation of limit experiences, the compulsive vibration of *angoisse*, the decisions, the metaphors and rhymes, the waves and the lines, have all built up sufficiently. The speaker is, I suspect, afflicted with a death drive leading to a sort of repetition compulsion. He goes over and over the same memories, 'Cherchant le même point et combien de fois encore | Mon désir dans l'ombre y continuera ses rêves | Comme s'use un brandon qu'attise

⁷⁵¹ John T. Naughton, *Louis-René des Forêts* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 100-04; Bonnefoy, *Vérité de parole*, p. 228.

la tempête?’ (p. 912, ll. 29-31). Mobilising and weakening the traditional metaphorical association of desire and fire, the speaker’s desire is a dying firebrand that keeps flaring up with each gust of wind. The unusually dense proliferation of circumflexes in the poem (here on ‘même’, ‘rêve’ and ‘tempête’) accentuates this trance-like double movement of punctuating, ‘chaque fois une fois’ repetition. The rhetorical question—‘how many more times?’—is left unanswered by the text. He cannot forget the memory: he lives with ‘une mémoire impenitente’ (p. 913, l. 8). Once more the association between repetition and a condition of living death or ‘life/death’ ring out clearly:⁷⁵² ‘Maintes fois depuis lors j’ai congédié votre image | Naufragé mourant de mes petites survies quotidiennes’ (p. 913, ll. 11-12). The speaker’s coping mechanism, this repeated return to the site of the memory, is the little daily survivals (‘petites survies quotidiennes’) which are also killing him (‘mourant’). Furthermore, in the the older self’s metacommentary, as he trawls over his memories, it is clear that he is only *half* alive: ‘Avec mon cœur gringalet mi-vivant vivotant’ (p. 913, l. 37). The polyptoton of ‘mi-vivant’ and ‘vivotant’ emphasises this doubling and halving of life, the unattained root verb ‘vivre’ dangling faintly in the background, ‘ni mort, ni vivant’.⁷⁵³

To return momentarily to the psychoanalytic theory here, Lacanian critic Néstor Braunstein writes that ‘jouissance is indeed the satisfaction of a drive—the death drive’.⁷⁵⁴ We may not think of *jouissance* as the apotheosis of the death drive in a straightforward sense, because apotheosis implies satisfaction or attainment of a goal, and those imply a stop. Rather, *jouissance* is a *continuation* of the death drive’s operation. The so-called satisfaction of the death drive is found in the ‘driving’ itself. The ever-thwarted ‘driving’ is manifested in repetition and vibration, as well as in a specific kind of un/productive teleology. We do not find the total absence of a goal (the goal is inorganicity and workless unproductivity, after all) but the drive must not aim for its goal, because that would be productive. This results in an ongoing turning-away. In the final lines of *Les Mégères*, the speaker does have an eschatological (or indeed, neonatal) vision, but is not entirely convincing. In the conditional tense, he imagines what would happen if he were to cross the threshold into the witches’ lair:

⁷⁵² Derrida explores this framing in ‘Spéculer—sur “Freud”’ in *La Carte postale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980). He identifies something implicit in Freud’s thinking: the so-called death drive is not simply the binary opposite of the life drive, but it is what allows the opposition of life and death to exist in the first place: ‘Au bout, et cette mort n’est pas opposable, elle n’est pas différente, dans le sens de l’opposition, des deux principes et de leur différance. Elle est inscrite, quoique non inscriptible, dans le procès de cette structure [...]. Si la mort n’est pas opposable, elle est, déjà, la vie la mort’ (p. 305).

⁷⁵³ Dominique Rabaté, *Louis-René des Forêts: La Voix et le volume* (Paris: Corti, 2002), p. 116.

⁷⁵⁴ Néstor Braunstein, ‘Desire and Jouissance in the Teachings of Lacan’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 102-15.

Tout pouvoir remis dans la gloire de ma dérélition
Sous l'arche intemporelle où trône la toute pure nullité
Et plus absent par l'absence même de mes traces (p. 914, ll. 2-4)

The purity of this vision of death might strike us as deliberately naïve, with the inelegant assonance of 'pouvoir' and 'gloire', the heavy-handed, pleonastic repetition of the word 'tout(e)', and the clumsy polyptoton of 'absent' and 'l'absence'. The elevated vision of 'la toute pure nullité' comes via an expression in which the two adjectives, near-synonyms in this context, meaning 'whole' and 'pure', create a performative *dédoublement* which somewhat cancels out their meanings. The grand, even celestial imagery of an archway and a throne are similarly simplistic, offering, in Blanchot's words, 'trop facile repos' ('La Parole vaine', p. 607). There is also a hefty dose of performative contradiction. The word 'même', which up until now in the poem has tended to mean 'same', is now to be read as 'even'. The protagonist's renunciation of '[s]es traces' is carried out using those very traces, which function in this poem across multiple axes such as writing, memory, and footsteps. His traces are there on the page for all to see.

Perhaps this is why Blanchot feels that the speaker of *Les Mégères* is more preoccupied by what did not happen than what did⁷⁵⁵—because, as des Forêts's speaker clarified earlier, the death drive tends towards no real goal, no heavenly ending. And yet, the speaker *is* also hugely preoccupied with what happened. The events recounted in the poem take place in a time before, so the origin of the poem has, from the perspective of the *histoire*, already happened. There is a sense of looking backwards to un/reachable events from the past, the poem's pre-beat or 'anacrusis'.⁷⁵⁶ The speaker's remembrances have some success: the final line of the poem reads, 'Mais pas de mémorial pour qui désavoue son parcours!' (914, ll. 2-6). Here, the speaker memorialises his younger self rather than slipping into the nothingness offered by the dream, salvaging the traces of his childhood self, both written ('mémorial') and literal ('parcours'). The origin provides a double-facing limit to the start of the poem. In Derrida's words, in reference to Husserl: 'comment l'originarité d'un fondement peut-elle être une synthèse *a priori*? Comment tout peut-il commencer par une complication?'.⁷⁵⁷ This relates to what I have hypothesised as the speaker's Freudian desire to go 'back' to the inorganic state preceding birth. This doubled

⁷⁵⁵ See James Petterson, *Postwar Figures of L'Ephémère* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), p. 83.

⁷⁵⁶ I echo the title of Blanchot's essay 'Anacrouse' in *Une voix venue d'ailleurs*. In music, the anacrusis is the unstressed lead-in note or group of notes that comes before the first bar-line. See Chapter 3, 'Night/day'.

⁷⁵⁷ Derrida, *Genèse*, p. 12. This sense of an always-prior limit is exemplary (see Chapter 2, 'Night/day') and in fact affects the whole structure. The structure is (and/or is not) prior to itself. And this precedence is both chronological (comes before) and material (lies, as though archeologically, underneath).

temporal experience is akin to the experience of reading the second rhyme of a pair and realising one must look back up at/go back to the first.

This aporia affects the end of the poem too; and deferring that sense of an ending contributes to the non/productive teleology we see in this poem, keeping us and the speaker moving through it without having our eyes trained beforehand on what is to come. The open and ambiguous ending, in which the memory traces are not wrapped up, encourages re-readings, which again refers us back to the uncertain origin of the poem. Rabaté remarks that the first enunciation of the poem, ‘Aujourd’hui’, encourages a ‘lecture indéfiniment répétée’.⁷⁵⁸ The double emotional resonances of this turning to an end that is present/absent are rendered clearly in another of des Forêts’s poetic projects, ‘Ostinato’. On the one hand, the journey is an adventure, a process of (re)search whose final destination is out of sight and should perhaps stay that way:

Que le chemin semble infini à celui dont le temps est compté, lequel néanmoins le poursuit sans précipitation, et il est vrai que rien ne le presse, car le terme serait-il en vue qu’il lui apparaîtrait toujours infiniment lointain, à jamais inaccessible, peut-être même indésirable pour autant qu’y parvenir signifie briser le mouvement aventureux de la recherche qui l’anime, entrer dans une passivité mortelle. (p. 1126)

This closely mirrors Blanchot’s suggestion that ‘nous savons que compte moins l’œuvre que l’expérience de sa recherche et qu’un artiste est toujours prêt à sacrifier l’accomplissement de son ouvrage à la vérité du mouvement qui y conduit’.⁷⁵⁹ It also echoes Derrida’s thought (cited in Chapter 1) about the experiment: the gesture of departure of the experiment ‘s’affecte de non-savoir comme de son avenir et délibérément *s’aventure*’.⁷⁶⁰ On the other hand, when taking on the task of writing and entering into such a process, the affective dimension can be unpleasant, anxiety-inducing: ‘Quand un projet semble répondre à quelque nécessité impérieuse, il suffit parfois qu’il [le projet] prenne corps pour que naisse aussitôt le sentiment d’une vaine agitation’ (p. 1022, see also pp. 1098-99).

Thus, I propose that it is precisely the abundance of liminality—including the repetitive hauntings of the phantasmagorical crones in the lines just preceding it—that create in the speaker of *Les Mégères* this feeling of ‘commotion exquise’. How might the death drive continue to *jouissance*? *By compressing its repetitions*. Given the nature of the drive, there is no sharp delineation between the *angoisse* of driving and the *jouissance* into which it eventually turns. Instead, there is

⁷⁵⁸ Rabaté, p. 59.

⁷⁵⁹ Blanchot, *Entretien infini*, p. 583.

⁷⁶⁰ Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 232.

an increasing spatio/temporal compression that results in a vibration that feels like an orgasm. *Jouissance* has often been associated with female sexuality,⁷⁶¹ but in this poem it is more the doubled femininity of the witches that *jouissance* responds to and reflects: *jouissance* is plural, mobile, vibrational, folded. On a related note, one might now wish to dispute the division that is ordinarily made between the moment of orgasm itself as climax and the arousal or stimulation that we commonly assume leads up to it. Rather than conceiving of orgasm as a jump and stimulation as a run-up, one could argue that the vibrational experience of orgasm is in fact a continuation of the stimulation that provokes it. Certainly, in keeping with the analysis of *jouissance* advanced here, the physical—and perhaps mental—movements of sexual stimulation can be described as repetitive, circular and/or vibrational, directionless, whilst remaining teleological, though only obliquely.

It becomes apparent that *angoisse* and *jouissance* are two sides of the same coin, inflected with different emotional valences and contexts (the neutral version of which is perhaps just *life*—or poetry). Like Marina Warner’s definition of ‘wonder’, then, we might say that *jouissance* ‘has no opposite; it springs up already doubled in itself, compounded of dread and desire at once [...] [I]t conveys the active motion towards experience and the passive stance of enrapturement’.⁷⁶² With respect to these different affective charges (wonder included, perhaps), Bateson is curious about responses to the double bind that maintain its topology but are not psychologically difficult: ‘if this pathology can be warded off or resisted, the total experience [of the double bind] may promote creativity’,⁷⁶³ he offers. Lisa Schwarz asserts that, while ‘Living while holding states of paradox is extremely stressful physiologically and impossible to navigate cognitively’, through effective therapeutic techniques and emotional holding, it is possible to ‘transform the relational field and consciousness of that field’ and equip oneself to ‘sit with the tension that results from stepping into paradox’.⁷⁶⁴ I suggest that the concentrated experience of ‘living while holding states of paradox’ can become *angoisse*, *le neutre*, or indeed *jouissance*.

Lastly, to add a final doubling to this ambi-valence, we can map *angoisse* onto *jouissance* using a further axis of similarity: the compressing claustrophobia, the *angustia*, of the double bind. As Bennington explains, the pleasure principle *binds* itself to or using the death drive, because the

⁷⁶¹ For instance, see Emma L. E. Rees, ‘Phallogocentrism’ in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 434: ‘*jouissance* (being a secular bliss, a direct and reflexive enjoyment of female sexuality) may be understood to be the feminist opponent of phallogocentrism’.

⁷⁶² Marina Warner in *Wonder Tales: Six French Stories of Enchantment*, ed. by Marina Warner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3.

⁷⁶³ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 278.

⁷⁶⁴ Schwarz, p. 9.

experience of pleasure needs to be co-implicated with non-pleasure in order to limit pleasure and prevent it from shortcircuiting its own experiencing. ‘This band and contraband, this stricture of the pleasure-principle constitutes reality as the very tension of self-binding pleasure [...] desire is here, “productive,” certainly, but only in limiting its “production”’.⁷⁶⁵ Adding the example of binding further expands (and thus compresses, since the poem has not grown in size) the matrix of interconnections in *Les Mégères*: constriction, double bind, *angoisse*, compulsion, repetition, *jouissance*... These structures compress us more and more tightly, whilst simultaneously accumulating examples, expanding the experimental field, and broadening out the scope of our experiences.

With its vibrating web of metaphors, *jouissance*, and *angoisse*, and its proliferation of doubled doubles, *Les Mégères de la mer* provides a valuable arena for reflection on the nature of the limit experience. The poem highlights not only the prevalence of liminal structures, but also the ways that they intersect across different axes and proliferate within the space/time of the poem. It also shows something of the different valences that emerge from these differential vibrations, in addition to their compression and compactness. Each metaphorical link represents a decision, and the oscillating movement occurs simultaneously across the two main axes of (*mother/witch/sea*) / (*wicked/seductive/maternal*) as well as others: mind and body, sea and shore, the intersubjectivity of past and present selves. I have argued that the teleology created by the hesitation between and within these exemplary metaphors—a vibration that propels one’s momentum forward whilst having no sight of a goal—is that of the death drive. It is going nowhere and somewhere at once. The compressed accumulation of this enfolding, vibrating movement leads to a moment of *jouissance*, a climactic ‘moment’ which is also durational and itself infinitely divided. The liminal flip side of *angoisse*, *jouissance* is a meta-metaphor, too. Opening onto the conclusion of my research, I would like to end on Gaston Bachelard’s statement of a discovery credited to Pinheiro dos Santos, and cited in his study of ‘le caractère vraiment primordial de la vibration à la base même de la vie’: ‘*la vie est ondulation*’.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁵ Bennington and Derrida, pp. 141-42.

⁷⁶⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *La Dialectique de la durée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), pp. 135-36. My emphasis.

Conclusion

*I wouldn't be surprised if poetry—poetry in the broadest sense, in the sense of a world filled with metaphor, rhyme, and recurring patterns, shapes, and designs—is how the world works. The world isn't logical, it's a song.*⁷⁶⁷

The overarching hope of this thesis has been to reinvigorate the understanding of poetry as a mode of writing in the context of the limit experience. Firstly, it has proposed that, in order to appreciate the contribution poetry can make to the thinking of the limit experience, we must turn our attention to the formal, structural, and internal aspects of poetry—without forgetting that these are interwoven with affective, temporal, and external aspects too. Secondly, in attempting to revive an interest in poetry's distinctive hallmarks within the post-Heideggerian intellectual tradition, my argument has sought to expand scholarly understanding of *why* poetry has so often become an important figure for the thinking of the limit experience. Using examples, the thesis has shown the experimental exemplarity of poetry by virtue of the sheer intensity of its liminal qualities. It emphasises the quasi-transcendental, experimental form which gives rise to that privileged status, a form conceived not only in terms of height and depth but also in terms of density, diffusion, and movement.⁷⁶⁸ This complex logic has been carefully elucidated across the preceding chapters. The argument concludes that poetry is not only a viable but a privileged example of, and insight into, this liminal mode of experience. The experience of poetry takes the form of a compressed, differential, and vibrating network of limit experiences. Poetry's potential and primacy in this context has long been recognised, but this thesis puts flesh on those bones, producing a literary-theoretical explanation for why poetry of all things should be privileged.

Limitations

By way of concluding remarks, I would like to indicate a few limitations to my study, the 'limits' which this thesis backs onto but does not go beyond. These can be seen as constraints of space and scope, but they are also places where there is more to be studied and said. I originally intended to look at the work of a greater number of poets and to cover a broader range of poetic examples, but in the end settled for illustrating the hypothesis using examples from just two poets across Chapters 4 and 5. I found that the examples that emerged clustered together thematically

⁷⁶⁷ David Byrne, *Bicycle Diaries* (London: Viking, 2009), p. 179.

⁷⁶⁸ To retain this quasi-transcendence, I have tried to call poetry an 'important' or 'privileged' site rather than an 'essential', 'central' or 'key' one.

and formally in unexpected ways. I have thus also excluded many thematic figures that could have been pertinent to the study: the *éclair*; the vertical/the horizontal; splitting, *coupure*, and rupture; in/visibility and the veil; double affirmation, the *yes yes* and the *vel vel*; the archipelago; *oubli*; and hybridity, to name but a few.

Similarly, I was unable to find space to discuss in any real detail the poetic techniques of modes of writing other than poetry itself. This includes the *récit* narrative, philosophical writing, prose-poetic texts, and so on. My support for poetry's privileged status cannot be complete without this comparison. Given the argument tentatively put forward in Chapter 3, which turns my research question on its head to hint that what we perceive as 'poetic' in non/poetic texts may in fact be their degree of liminality and relationality, I suspect that a study of the liminal characteristics of these forms may reveal that their structures exist at varying levels of density which then correspond to the scale/depth (both inexact terms) of their perceived poeticity. Fragmentary writing may serve as a good example of this.⁷⁶⁹ Its intense liminality derives from the density of the fragmentary breaks in the text, the concomitant interruption they cause to the text's meaning, the performative and temporal nature of the breaks, the hiatuses' material existence on the page, and so on. Fragments would be correspondingly less intense—even less *poetic*—in their fragmentation if each fragment of text were long and the fragmentary breaks widely spread apart. While these patterns of rupture and reunion are found in every text, they are likely to be compressed into a fragmentary text more so than one which uses ordinary paragraph breaks. Of course, such an extension could have other beneficial effects, such as a sense of panorama; but as described in Chapter 3, under 'Exemplarity', the compression of results, before the point at which differentiation becomes impaired, seems to produce an exemplary scale that works experimentally for our understanding. In much the same way as for fragmentary writing, my account may imply a renewed defence of so-called 'obscurantist' philosophical prose that takes on some of poetry's formal and rhetorical features.⁷⁷⁰ This writing style brings the limit into the text repeatedly, and therefore is valuable as a tool of experiential performance, of exemplary showing.

⁷⁶⁹ Fragmentary writing has long been associated with deconstructive thought, so much of this work has already been done. See Herman Rapaport, 'Fragments: Blanchot, Char, Rimbaud', *Oxford Literary Review*, 22.1 (July 2000), 94-107; and Stephen Barker, 'Nietzsche/Derrida, Blanchot/Beckett: Fragmentary Progressions of the Unnamable', *Postmodern Culture*, 6.1 (1995), in which Barker touches on how 'the fragment's fragmentation is both limit and ineluctable transgression of the limit' (para. 15).

⁷⁷⁰ I refer to the infamous charge of 'obscurantisme terroriste' made by Foucault via John Searle, cited in Christina Howells, *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 70.

As stated in the Introduction, I have been unable to attend in detail to the thought or poetry of Georges Bataille, whose participation in the development of the notion of limit experience is undeniable. The same is true of the poet Yves Bonnefoy, whose theory of poetry is subtly different from and complementary to the one outlined here. In the spirit of a border to my own study, I offer a rough sketch here of my thoughts regarding his contribution, on which I have much dwelt. As a poet, Bonnefoy does attend to poetry ‘in its own right’. However, much like Bataille, Bonnefoy trains his attention on restricted, idiosyncratic aspects of the limit experience—particularly the rupturing processes of poetry, its ability to rend chimerical concepts, images, and words to reveal the ‘presence’ concealed within or behind them: ‘lutter ainsi [...] contre les abolitions, les clôtures, ce ne peut être qu’aimer, puisque c’est la présence qui s’ouvre’.⁷⁷¹ Whereas I emphasise the fold, Bonnefoy leaves the continued interfolding of inside and outside largely implicit, stressing first the *limit* between the image and presence (which is why rupture is required) and then the *overcoming* of that distance (through rupturing processes). This is likely simply a matter of what Bonnefoy has chosen to emphasise (and there are always choices), given that the back-and-forth between revelation and concealment in his conception of poetry implicitly relies on the continued existence of a twofold ‘inside/outside’ limit. Developing the figures of rupture, instantaneity, and punctuation would have been worthwhile additions to the present work.

Openings

Openings and limitations are not distinct from one another; and the openings onto further conclusions offered here also brush up against more points at which my thesis has had to stop. In fact, the difference between limitations and openings is an emotional valence elicited by my own situated perspective: whether I intended to do them and failed (limitations) or found them surprising and so wished to offer them to the floor (openings). In terms of openings, let us note firstly that the differences of *literary* emphasis described above with respect to Bataille and Bonnefoy represent different aspects of *life*, too. Indeed, commensurate with their theoretical approaches to poetry, they deal with experiences that are part of life but upon which my analysis does not centre. For Bataille, as discussed in the Introduction, these areas of interest occupy the extremes, such as the madness of the subject, obscenity and violence; for Bonnefoy they are moments of slicing rupture, such as death (as opposed to dying). These operations are surely present in poetry’s repertoire of forms; exactly how this works structurally may merit further

⁷⁷¹ Yves Bonnefoy, *Entretiens sur la poésie (1972-1990)* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1990), p. 201.

exploration. My own emphasis and interest have fallen elsewhere. Attending to poetry as a mode of writing in its own right was one of my provisional starting points, and I found that the tissue of the poetic mode lent itself more readily to a different version of life and the limit experience, that is, the interlocking network of limit experiences outlined in this thesis. In this sense, I took inputs in parallel from both the philosophy and the poetry, adapting my understandings of both to find the synthesis that presented itself by means of an abundant supply of examples.

The contact between reality and literature has been a running theme throughout the thesis. More specifically, it has shown that there is an intertwining of life and poetry which facilitates poetry's power to say things about life, not just representationally but also performatively, through its doubling movements and indeed through the entirety of its analogical practice as described in Chapters 3 through 5. I mention this not because this axis is essentially primary, but because it was somewhat unexpected; when I began this study, I was skeptical of the claim made notably by Stamelman that the poetry of Bonnefoy, Dupin, and others 'presents a mimesis, albeit a problematic one, of being'.⁷⁷² I had imagined that 're/presentation' was just one limit experience of many—of greater interest to philosophers, perhaps, than to poets or literary scholars. However (and in keeping with the extended exemplarity of the figure of 're/presentation'), it is by now apparent that the analogical structure detected in poetry is not so different from a sophisticated sort of mimetic structure; and that poetry's contact with life is made through that structure, performatively as well as constatively. Poetry therefore doubles various examples of aporetic structures found in life. As a result, poetry can be said to perform an experimental mimesis of life's aporetics. This mimesis is a consequence of poetry's role as figure of figures and as prime example (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Making statements about the structure and nature of human reality and poetry's ability to speak to it was not what I had originally envisaged, but it has emerged as an abiding undercurrent.

Difference is there, and poetry speaks to and through it. It may have first seemed as though this study takes poetry from its roots in feeling and reduces it to something that can be grammatically analysed, but in truth, the analysis is exemplifying a structure that has just as much to do with feeling, experience, and human life as the narrative, theme, and lyricism of the poems do—just in unexpected ways.

⁷⁷² Stamelman, *Lost beyond Telling*, p. 183.

Speculatively now, I wonder whether humans do *want* contact with reality (though await my caveat below) for much the same reasons that experiments seem to positively *benefit* from repeated exposure to reality. To quote Aristotle's *Poetics*, 'The reason why we enjoy seeing likenesses is that, as we look, we learn and infer what each is, for instance, "that is so and so"'.⁷⁷³ In 'La Mythologie blanche', Derrida cites Aristotle's suggestion that 'la *mimesis*' is 'l'origine naturelle de la poésie et [...] l'origine naturelle de la métaphore'.⁷⁷⁴ By contrast with the hierarchical Platonic model of copying, the Aristotelian approach to poetry, *mimesis*, and metaphor would mean the following: 'La métaphore, effet de *mimesis* et d'*homoiosis*, manifestation de l'analogie, sera donc un moyen de connaissance'.⁷⁷⁵ In this view, there is a kind of emergent *knowledge* that derives from experimental procedures and which is mimetic, metaphorical, and poetic all at once. In this way, for instance, human concepts are derived—tied in to patches of reality by induction, experiment, experience, via an ongoing aporetics. The denialism of the *ipse* clearly falls flat on this count, when assessed by this metric. We might be reminded here of the analysis of structuralism covered in Chapter 3: there, Derrida's critique contained the seeds of its own outside, but strategically avoided acknowledging them in order to make a different point, emphasise a different thing. Indeed, true to form, Derrida himself is suspicious of Aristotle's metaphorical *mimesis* for what he sees as its own unjustified claims (unjustified with respect to the aporetics of reality—i.e. Derrida accuses Aristotle's theory of *mimesis*, somewhat ironically, of being *insufficiently mimetic*).⁷⁷⁶ And finally, coming back to Bataille and Bonnefoy for a moment, we can now see that their theories, being as selective as they are, and at times not acknowledging what they leave out, are perhaps unable to perform this mimetic function in the most exemplary manner either.

All the figures of the limit experience mentioned are legitimate in their own way, and they produce different shifts of emphasis. This ranging quality reflects the branching, interconnected spatio/temporal movement of the structure they are examples of and within. If these shifts produce certain privileged sites, they are not based on hierarchies of superiority or power but on emphasis and other qualities, such as scale, relational orientation with respect to one another,

⁷⁷³ Aristotle, 'Poetics' in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 23*, trans. by W. Hamilton Fyfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 1448b, www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:abo:tlg,0086,034:1448b.

⁷⁷⁴ Derrida, *Marges*, p. 283.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁶ Derrida seems to think that Aristotle's *mimesis* is teleological, natural, and human (as opposed to animal—and it's true that looking only at human life is a strategic exclusion, contingent on a limited human vantage point). Some scholars have also posited that Derrida's attack wrongly imputes to Aristotle's account of *mimesis* a metaphysical Platonism. See Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 375-76.

level of compression or dispersion, contextual relevance and availability—and the breadth or depth of their accommodation to reality.

On that note, I must add one final caveat. This thesis hopefully contributes to the conclusion that in art and in life, through examples, and *especially* in poetry, the aporetic structure can be inhabited and lived out in an un/moored fashion. However, when it comes to confessions around emphasis, it should be recognised that this thesis adopts an affirmative disposition throughout, concentrating on pursuing this reinvigorated approach to poetry as a mode. In doing that, I have followed the Aristotelian bias in which more knowledge is more pleasing, somehow better, than less knowledge. Much as *jouissance* so easily shades into *angoisse*, this bias of mine, this affirmative charge, is an emotional valence, a strategic exclusion, at a thesis-wide scale. From a doubling perspective, then, this document should probably be supplemented by a counter-thesis in which I say much the same things but claim that they are worthless and abyssal, that the accumulation of examples only makes things worse, that inductively approaching a hypothesis is not edifying but perilous and undermining. Perhaps a fold right here at the end will do the trick.

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