

Poetry: From the Heart or From Blood?

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Abstract: Starting from Jacques Derrida's analysis of poetry seen as a hedgehog crossing a highway in risk of being killed, along with his remarks on cruelty in psychoanalysis, I interrogate the place of the heart. I look at the trope of the "book of the heart" as formalized by Augustine. Derrida shapes a book of blood and heartbeats in "circumfessions" following Augustine. If the heart is seen as the seat of emotions, according to Hegel, blood, not the heart, condenses the vitality of life cycles. If poetry appears closer to *cruor*, or gore, blood pouring out of the body after events or accidents that provoke cuts in the life cycle, there is a need to keep a memory of the event, for which the heart plays a crucial role. To exemplify the themes of a heart functioning as memory and text, I look at *Troilus and Cressida*. Chaucer is relayed by Cavalcanti translated by Ezra Pound, whose *Cantos* systematize the image of a "formed trace" in the heart. I conclude with T.S. Eliot's *The Elder Statesman* in which a final twist is given to the parable of the dying heart, of Freudian road kill, and even of hedgehogs.

Keywords: Poetry, the heart, blood, cruelty, memory, Derrida, Chaucer, Pound, Eliot.

The dialogue between philosophy and literature, an ancient dialogue fraught with suspicion, has led to attempts at reciprocal containment or aggression. In fact, the two domains should appear less as enemies than rival neighbors needing and needling each other. If philosophy and literature can function as starring partners, each attempting to stare the other down, poetry has often played the role of a mediator. The roots of German Romanticism offer a case in point as they were marked by bifurcation, the parting of ways between Hegel and Hölderlin. Hegel, the systematic thinker let his former friend explore the night of myth, tragedy, and lyrical poetry on his own. More recently, Jean-Luc Nancy has given his version of the age-old confrontation and goes back to the tradition that returns to Homer, Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle and includes Schlegel, Novalis, Heidegger, Valéry, Celan and Blanchot.¹ Moving away from these mythical references, I will try to begin in medias res by sketching a slightly divergent concept of poetry that takes its point of departure (but not its origin) in two of Derrida's unrelated statements, the first one stating that what defines poetry is a wish to learn by heart, the second asserting that cruelty has remained and will remain an intractable problem for psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and the so-called human sciences.

Derrida's 1988 essay "Che cos'è la poesia?" defines poetry via rote memory by elaborating a whimsical parable. Derrida's allegory portrays poetry as a little hedgehog attempting to cross a highway, a threatened

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¹ Nancy 2018, pp. 1-4.

animal whose precarious survival does not prevent it from making huge demands on its readers. The poem as hedgehog voices a demand: it requires to be memorized and never forgotten. When attempting to answer to the question: “What is poetry?”, Derrida refuses to begin with a definition of the “essence of poetry” as Heidegger and others have done, because for him, poetry distinguishes itself from other literary modes given that specific insistence, that injunction, the expression of a fundamental desire, which might be summed up as: “I want readers to learn me by heart.”

This initial statement might look surprising in a superficial reading, for it could look as if poetry’s essence implied a return to what had been rejected under the name of “logocentrism,” that naive trust in the pristine originarity of the living voice as opposed to the difference, spacing and deferral typical of writing. Indeed, Derrida’s prosopopoeia of poetry deploys itself as a dictated dictation, a dictatorial request never to be forgotten coupled with a didactic effort at raising the stakes of any text. Poetry says clearly that it is a dictated dictation—a *dictée*, that common enough exercise in French schools (and even televised media) in which a given text is read aloud and copied by all. It is possible that Derrida had heard of the tragic death of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, raped and murdered in 1982, one week after her superb book of poems and images, *Dictée*, had been published. *Dictée* begins by foregrounding the French context of the school task, copying a text that has been dictated:

“Aller à la ligne C’était le premier jour point Elle venait de loin point..

Open paragraph It was the first day period She had come from afar period...”²

Derrida’s essay is dated from 1988, and the first answer to the question posed by the title, namely “What is poetry?” or more precisely, “What is that thing called poetry?” elicit a first approach: “I am a dictation, pronounces poetry, learn me by heart, copy me down, guard me and keep me, look out for me, look at me, dictated dictation, right before your eyes: soundtrack, *wake*, trail of light, photograph of the feast in mourning.”³ But poetry soon turns into “the poetic,” for the declension from noun to adjective makes it possible to usher in a specific emotional experience, an operation requiring the “economy of memory” defined by brevity, and an awareness of the key role played by the heart (CP, p. 225). This heart is not an organ that might be analyzed by “cardiography” because what is meant here is the operation of “learning by heart,” an operation linking

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2 Cha 2001, p. 1.

3 Derrida 1991, p. 223.

the brain and its memory cells and the beating heart pumping blood. The two “axioms,” one predicated on economy, the other on memory, converge in an event, which might be crossing the highway, being killed in an accident, or succeeding in the impossible task of translating the text; and this time the Italian idiom corresponding to learning by heart is introduced:

“The poetic, let us say it, would be that which you desire to learn, but from and of the other, thanks to the other and under dictation, by heart; *imparare a memoria*. Isn’t that already, the poem, once a token is given, the advent of an event, at the moment in which the traversing of the road named translation remains as improbable as an accident, one which is all the same intensely dreamed of, required there where what it promises always leaves something to be desired?”⁴

A poem is both an event and a learning program, a learning presupposing an emotional apprenticeship. This comes from the structure of a writing that is unique and singular, and nevertheless immediately requires its repetition. Without such repetition, there is no text; because this repetition is a memorization, the text is embodied, inscribed in the body, lodged within the body’s most intimate organ, the heart. Such a stress on an embodied experience entails that poetry will separate itself from the ideality proper to literature. Poetry would be less literature than rhythm and event, the dictation of an affective gush seizing the subject in a moment of frenzy: “*Literally*: you would like to retain by heart an absolutely unique form, an event whose intangible singularity no longer separates the ideality, the ideal meaning as one says, from the body of the letter.”⁵ All this would remain a wish, a desire, an injunction, even if what is mobilized is nothing less than the literary absolute that the Romantics saw as their main object: “In the desire of this absolute inseparation, the absolute nonabsolute, you breathe the origin of the poetic.”⁶

The heart posited as beating on its own belongs both to the poem and to the reader because their union will be achieved by a certain rhythm: “*Donc: le coeur te bat, naissance du rythme, au-delà des oppositions, du dedans et du dehors, de la representation consciente et de l’archive abandonnee.*”⁷ I underline the expression “le Coeur te bat,” for it suggests both an excessive excitement (“le Coeur *me* bat” meaning “my heart is pounding”) and an impersonal structure (the heart’s rapid

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4 Ibid., 227

5 Ibid., 229

6 Ibid., 231. Obviously “breathe” was meant here

7 Ibid., 230.

beats come to me from the outside). As Mozart's Zerlina tells Don Giovanni: "Mi trema un poco il cuore," a phrase that could be construed in the second person: "Ti trema il cuore..." English cannot exactly render this: "So; your heart beats, gives the downbeat, the birth of rhythm, beyond oppositions, beyond outside and inside, conscious representation and the abandoned archive."⁸

The main point of the parable is to link a letter that has become your body, while each poem has been cast like a hedgehog on a highway; each driver is free to crush it or to spare it, picking it up cautiously, accepting the request. A poem-hedgehog has also another defense: it can roll up in a ball. However, even when it rolls upon itself, the poem is still exposed:

"The poem can roll itself up in a ball, but it is still in order to turn its pointed signs toward the outside. To be sure, it can reflect language or speak poetry, but it can never relate back to itself, it never moves by itself like those machines, bringers of death. Its event always interrupts or derails absolute knowledge, autotelic being in proximity to itself. This "demon of the heart" never gathers itself together, rather loses itself and gets off the track (delirium or mania), it exposes itself to chance, it would rather let itself be torn to pieces by what bears down upon it."⁹

When poetry states such a wish to be "learned by heart," to be copied or interiorized for ever, this wish of learning by heart is more dream than reality:

"Thus the dream of *learning by heart* arises in you. Of letting your heart be traversed by the dictation. In a single trait – and that's impossible, and that's the poetic experience. You did not yet know the heart, you learn it thus. From this experience and from this expression. I call a poem that very thing that teaches the heart, invents the heart, *that which*, finally, the word *heart* seems to mean, and which, in my language, I cannot easily discern from the word itself."¹⁰

The shift from the prosopopeia of poetry speaking to us to a heart that contains the core of one's interiority while opening up to exteriority implies that the *Erinnerung* responsible for the inscription depends upon an organ reachable via networks of traces. Such traces are produced mechanically by mnemotechnics or Freud's *Bahnung* ("facilitation" in the

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8 Ibid., 231.

9 Ibid., 235

10 Ibid., 231

Standard Edition, also “breaching” (by Alan Bass) or “fraying”). We have shifted from “that which wants to be learnt by heart” to the “heart that learns.” To understand how poetry is both an injunction to keep traces in one’s memory and a reliance upon a machine that will keep the memory, we have to explore what the phrase “by heart” contains and tease out the implications of a heart as text.

This exploration has been done superbly by Eric Jager in *The Book of the Heart*, which studies the origins of the phrase and traces it back to patristic origins that reach full expansion with Augustine:

“The book of the heart as it appeared in the writings of early Christian thinkers such as Origen and Ambrose was developed further by Augustine of Hippo, the most influential of all the Church Fathers. Augustine extended the range and subtlety of patristic textual metaphors as part of a comprehensive theory of the written word that was the first of its kind.”¹¹

For Augustine, not only was the cosmos seen as a book, but humans resembled texts. The metaphor became loaded because the issue was hot to explore one’s interiority. For him, “the inner person and interior life were centered in the “heart,” understood in its biblical sense as the moral and spiritual core of the human being. And throughout his writings, Augustine portrayed the heart as a place of “writing,” “erasure,” “reading,” “interpretation,” and other textual operations.”¹² As Jager concludes, the *Confessions* can be understood as the story of Augustine’s heart. The main operation performed by the text is *recordatio*, which means a recollection taking the heart (*cor*) as its main site. Indeed, we know that *recordor*, *recordari*, is a deponent verb in Latin: it is a verb that looks like a passive but is active. *Recordari* means “to remember,” “to call to mind” and to “think over.” The reflexive prefix “re-“ indicates that the heart can turn back upon itself. Jager lists the terms that designate the heart in Augustine’s *Confessions*, which include *pectus*, the chest, the breast, next to *viscera* (bowels) and *venter* (stomach). As Augustine writes, “my heart is where I am whatever I am.”¹³ The heart is both a physiological part of the body and an already inscribed text, for the Law of the letter has been incised in it.

Thus, the law of God has not been written in stone but in the “circumcised heart.” The Word inhabits the heart. Augustine’s narrative discovers it and makes it legible. His “recordation” relies on the function of memory, as we know from the famous book XI of *Confessions*.

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¹¹ Jager 2000, p. 27.

¹² Ibid, p. 28.

¹³ Quoted in Jager 2000, p. 29.

Augustine often puns on Latin echoes generated by his vocabulary, like “*coram*” meaning “in front of”: “*Coram te cor meum et recordation mea*” (*Confessions*, V, 6). Augustine says to God: “My heart and my memory are open before you.”¹⁴

The mention of the “circumcised heart” sends us to a more recent version, Derrida’s own “Circumfession.” “Circumfession” is a text in which Saint Augustine, abbreviated as “SA,” becomes his twin brother, and indeed Derrida describes himself as a modern Augustine, both being rather dark-or brown-skinned and African. These numbered fragments of a circular autobiography focus on Derrida’s circumcision and on the death of his mother. Derrida begins by stressing the “bloody” nature of his writing when he sets a parallel between “*cruor*” (flowing blood) and “*Confiteor*.”¹⁵ This confessional essay calls for a “hematology” more than a grammatology. This allows Derrida to deploy a whole phenomenology of blood whose main object spreads as a network of veins, which shows how “a crural vein expelled my blood outside...”¹⁶ The rhythm of this pulsating writing is to be determined by “the pulse of an encircling phrase, the pulsion of the paragraph which never completes itself, as long as the blood, what I call thus and thus call, continues its venue in its vein.”¹⁷ A recurrent pun on “*pulsion*” splices the Freudian drive (*Trieb*) and a vital “pulsation,” the number of heart beats per minute. This *pulsion/pulsation* will be my main conceptual hinge.

Echoing Augustine, Derrida mentions the heart several times in “Cicumfession,” often while quotes *Confessions* in Latin; thus we find “*ecce cor meum, deus, ecce cor meum...*” rendered as “Look at my heart, O God, look at my heart” (II, iv, 9, quot. p. 161, trans. p. 163). Later, we discover “*ego certe, quod intrepidus de meo corde pronuntio...*”¹⁸ translated after three pages as “I am saying this from my heart, without any fear...” However, in that same section dated from March 31, 1990, a day called “*dies sanguinis*,” a day of blood,¹⁹ we find frenzied images of “adorers of the goddess” running in the streets with their severed penises in their hands, and then we return to the hedgehog. Surprisingly, by this time, the old hedgehog will not allegorize a poem rolled in a ball; on the contrary, the image hints of raw sexuality with a nightmarish twist, as presented via a recurrent dream that Derrida had in Moscow:

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14 Ibid., p. 32.

15 Derrida 1993, p. 6.

16 Ibid., p. 10.

17 Ibid., p. 15.

18 Ibid., p. 233.

19 Ibid., p. 232.

“... a second skin which seems to be mine without being mine, and whose provisional half-ownership, the thick firm hairy spiny graft of a vegetable superepidermis, yellow-green mossy outgrowth, pale-blooded crust of an extraterrestrial would no longer leave my desire at rest, would paralyze it too, hold it still between two contradictory movements, tear off the hedgehog to make it bleed to the point of orgasm and keep it protect it suck it along its erect fur...”²⁰ (p. 235)

Surprisingly, two years after publishing his essay on poetry, Derrida rewrites the parable of the hedgehog when he gets a disturbing glimpse of a part of his body that he wants to tear off. The image then morphs into a circumcised penis whose fresh blood is sucked by the mohel, as we see in other sections. All this shows that the dominant tone of “Circumfession” is given by a quote from Paul Celan: *Es war Blut...* (CP. p. 103).

It was blood, it was
That which you shed, Lord.
It gleamed.
It cast your image into our eyes, Lord.
Our eyes and mouths stand open and empty, Lord.
We have drunk, Lord.
The blood and the image that was in the blood, Lord.²¹

We gather from these quotes that the heart is less dominant as a motif here than a thematic of blood, as oozing or flowing blood permeates these fragments.

This recurrent image leads me to my second point, the insistent manner in which the issue of cruelty underpins Derrida’s critique of psychoanalysis. Derrida first chose to focus on the concept of blood in order to talk about the treatment of cruelty that he saw in Freud’s texts and in psychoanalysis more generally. This took place in July 2000, when Derrida gave the opening lecture for the Paris *États généraux de la psychanalyse*. He took stock of a particular political situation, and began by voicing personal complaints about suffering, reminding his audience of the Jewish joke explaining who and why one becomes a psychoanalyst: a psychoanalyst is a Jewish surgeon who cannot stand the sight of blood.²² A similar analysis is developed in the Seminar on the Death Penalty. Derrida starts from the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution, the prohibition of “cruel and unusual punishments.” Derrida

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²⁰ Ibid., p. 235.

²¹ Celan 1983, p.163 (2008)

²² Ibid.

asks pointedly: have we avoided cruelty by choosing efficient or painless ways of killing? He thus examines the rhetoric of the “painless” cutting of the neck that accompanied the invention of the guillotine. Above all, according to him, cruelty remains a riddle for psychoanalysis.

By shifting from the Latin *cruor* to Freud’s *Grausamkeit*, we have moved from bloody cruelty to bloodless cruelty, which generates an echolalic “*sans sang*” (without blood).²³ However, it is not by replacing the bloody decapitation of the guillotine by a jolt from the electric chair, a lethal injection or the gas chamber, that we have abolished cruelty. In “Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul,” Derrida argues that the end of bloody cruelty does not signal the end of cruelty: it corresponds to a social modification affecting the visibility of cruelty.

Freud’s “Three Essays on sexuality” presents a theory of cruelty as linked with sexuality. “... there is an intimate connection between cruelty (*Grausamkeit*) and the sexual drive (*Sexualtrieb*).”²⁴ If there is indeed a “drive to cruelty” (*Trieb zur Grausamkeit*) for Freud, which is found at the root of the transformation of love into hate so common in paranoia, it is also present in the ambivalence evinced by all affects. Cruelty would be a stumbling stone for ethics, as Lacan hints when reading Sade and Kant side by side: its very existence negates the belief in reciprocity which is the foundation of humanitarian rules of non-aggression. Having moved beyond the pleasure principle and the morality principle, we need to return to an archaic and foundational substance. One has to face blood. As Derrida asked pointedly: *Is there a future for blood?*²⁵

To understand the substance underpinning “cruelty,” we need a theory of blood. It might be seen to underpins Carl Schmitt’s theory of the opposition between the friend and the enemy, since for Schmitt, what defines a “friend” is predicated on the concept of a blood-relative. In English as in French, “cruel” keeps its etymological link with blood that flows from a wound, *cruor*, while being linked with the blood that flows from the heart, or *sanguis*. The distinction between these two meanings of blood has been lost in modern languages like French, German and English, where we only find one term. Jean-Luc Nancy has attempted to reconceptualize it in his recent and posthumous book *Cruor*.²⁶ To make sense of the theoretical logics of blood, we can take a look at Hegel’s synthesis in his *Philosophy of Nature*.²⁷ Hegel must be the first thinker who elaborated a systematic philosophy of blood.

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23 See Derrida 2002, pp.238-40, pp. 269-271, pp. 279-280. See also Derrida 2017, pp. 219-243.

24 Freud 1953, p. 159, modified.

25 Derrida 2017, p. 219.

26 Nancy 2021.

27 Hegel 1970.

Hegel links facts of natural life to concepts stemming from the “Spirit.” In his book on the “springing point in Hegel”,²⁸ Markus Semm notes that the deployment of Spirit through Nature follows a rhythm that plays out as a tempo, that is a vital pulse. Rhythmic exchanges are underpinned by a pulsation running through all phenomena. The pulsating beat enacts a regenerative negativity exemplified by breathing and the circulation of blood.²⁹ We can follow the transformations by which blood as a substance ends up characterizing the individuality of the living subject marked by a pulsation obeying a universal law, which is the logical progression of the Concept: “The endless process of division and this suppression of division which leads to another division, all this is the immediate expression of the Notion (*Begriff*) which is, so to speak, here visible to the eye.”³⁰ One main factor accounts for the pulsation of these operations, the essential “irritability” evinced by blood:

“Blood in general, as the universal substance of every part, is the irritable (*irritable*) concentration of everything into the interior unity (...). Just as all food is converted into blood, so, too, blood is dispensed as the source from which everything takes its nutriment. That is what pulsation (*Pulsieren*) is in complete reality.”³¹

Thus for Hegel the life cycle is founded on blood, not on the heart, for the fact is that blood is seen as the agent facilitating biological dynamism. Indeed, the heart appears as a muscle that pumps blood, it is a material cause, but blood condenses the life process itself. A section devoted to breathing generalizes the same dynamics, both being underpinned by the concept of “irritability.” For Hegel, blood would be “irritable” in itself, which causes its endless mobility, and he thus rejects the theories that reduce the circulation of the blood to the outcome of mechanical force:

“From whence comes this elastic pressure of the walls and the heart? “From the irritation (*Reiz*) of the blood” they reply. According to this, therefore, the heart moves the blood, and the movement of the blood is, in turn, what moves the heart. But this is a circle, a *perpetuum mobile*, which would necessarily at once come to standstill because the forces are in equilibrium. But, on the contrary, this is precisely why the blood must be regarded as itself the principle of the movement; it is the “leaping point” (*punctum saliens*), in virtue of which the contraction of the arteries coincides

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28 Semm 1994.

29 Hegel 1970, p. 366.

30 Ibid., p.368.

31 Ibid.

with the relaxation of the ventricles of the heart.”³²

Hegel alludes here to Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of the blood in the body in 1628, when Harvey described the heart of the embryo as a “*punctum sanguinem saliens*,” a tiny pulsating point, the spot in which one recognizes that the heart begins beating. Since the cause of blood circulation cannot be a reflex action (the heart cannot beat without blood but blood needs the heart to circulate: here would be an argument *ad infinitum*),³³ the “self-movement of blood” has to be the cause of the life cycle.

Blood’s fundamental irritability then generates a principle of subjectivity by ushering in endless negativity, a negativity that turns into fire, thirst, hunger and desire. The same applies to the breathing process: “Exhalation and inhalation are a volatilization (*Verdunsten*) of the blood, a volatilizing irritability (*verdunste Irritabilität*).”³⁴ For Hegel, the operation of the lungs resembles the mechanism of the heart: “The blood is this absolute thirst (*absolute Durst*), its unrest (*Unruhe*) within itself and against itself; the blood craves to be ignited (*hat Hunger nach Befeurung*), to be differentiated.”³⁵ Like fire, blood perpetually consumes itself: “Air is in itself the fiery and negative element; the blood is the same thing, but as a developed unrest—the burning fire of the animal’s organism which not only consumes itself but also preserves itself as fluid and finds in air its *pabulum vitae*.”³⁶ We come back to a clear sense of the “restlessness of the negative,” the idea that Jean-Luc Nancy identified as Hegel’s main conceptual discovery.³⁷

Blood would allegorize subjective negativity because its restless agency limns the main law of life, for regeneration presupposes destruction, division, and negation. Is this the idea underpinning Freud’s concept of cruelty? We need to notice here that German, like French or English, has only one word, blood, sang, Blut, whereas the Latin etymology splits blood into two distinct notions: on the one hand, one finds *sanguis*, circulating blood that ensures the continuity of life; on the other, there is what is called *cruor*, turgid or flowing “gore,” that is the red blood issuing from a wound or a diseased organ. On the one hand, the essence of life, a fluid liquid passing through the veins of all mammals, on the other, the sign of impending death, blood-shedding or blood-letting,

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32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., p.369.

34 Ibid., p.392.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., pp.392-3.

37 Nancy 2002.

which might entail castration or maiming. *Cruor* is blood as I falls from a wound,” but it can also call up thick, clotted blood, or even a pool of blood. It is linked with all the connotations of « raw » as in bloody meat, which calls up cruelty via adjectives like *cruentus* and *incruentus* (suggesting “no blood-shedding”), as well as the word *crudus*, an adjective conveying the ideas of “bloody” as a state, and the action of spilling blood. Hence verbs like *crudesco* (“to become more violent”), *incrudesco* (“to become cruel”) and *recrudesco* (“to worsen”, “to reburst”). One might imagine that whereas *sanguis* conveys the theme of continuity via the constant regeneration of body fluids, even if some from of negativity is at play, *cruor* implies a violent cut, a suspension, a forceful scansion. If we return to poetry, it partakes from these two semantic domains: there is on the one hand the need to generate a certain rhythm, which may or may not rely on rhymes, parallelism, musical patterns, etc, and on the other hand to introduce a raw gesture breaking with the easy drone of rhyme and formal patterns. The rawness of *cruor* is an interruption that can appear as lodged within the cycle of life-affirming re-generation, a true “cry” or a scream when one faces death, loss, absence, or any type of excess.

The English word “cry,” which became current in the thirteenth century, derives from the old French *crier*, which goes back to Vulgar Latin *critare*, from *quiritare* “to wail, shriek.” It might be a variant of *quirritare*, “to squeal like a pig.” Beckett had understood that point clearly when, in an earlier text written in French, “Les deux besoins.” he attempted to describe the interaction of art and life as regular dodecahedron in which vital need and unquenchable desire would be spliced together:

*“Côté et diagonal, les deux besoins, les deux essences, l’être qui est besoin et la nécessité où il est de l’être, enfer d’irraison d’où s’élève le cri à blanc, la série de questions pures, l’oeuvre.”*³⁸

(Side and diagonal, the two needs, the two essences, the being that is pure need, along with the necessity of being that being, a hell of unreason from which the white-hot cry rises, the series of pure questions, the work.) The whole work of Beckett might be adduced here, especially if we agree that the poetic dimension defines his entire corpus, from the prose works to the plays.³⁹ This would take us to a wider corpus than I could tackle in one essay. In order to connect Hegel and Freud on the issue of blood and poetry, we can understand the heart as a machine whose energy is provided by blood sending us back to the drives. Blood’s excitability or irritability forces us to consider Freud’s metapsychology

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38 Beckett 1983, p. 56.

39 For the theme of pigs in Beckett, see Rabaté 2016.

in which the death drive slowly imposes itself, at least as a resistant alternative to the forces of Eros. Here is why most poetic texts that rely on the heart in order to explore human passions tend to evoke the drives as some point. I want to limn here a tension between a single drive (which, in the end, is quasi identical to the death drive) and a divided heart.

To exemplify this, I will look rapidly at an early modern corpus, beginning with Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*. This epic love-story contains the first mention of the phrase "by herte" in the sense of "memorizing." It appears in a context marked by the extensive recurrence of the word "heart" (used hundreds of times in the poem, it echoes with the other recurrent rhyme of "Troy" and "joy")⁴⁰ with its suggestions of feeling, love, passion, thought, and memory. However, we see that the meaning of "heart" imperceptibly shifts from that of the seat of affects and passions to being the site of memory. I will focus on the turning point of the poem, when Cressida, who has left Troy and is being courted by Diomedes, is about to forget her eternal vows to Troilus.

*Ful ofte a day she sighte eek for destresse,
And in hir-self she wente ay portrayinge
Of Troilus the grete worthinesse,
And alle his goodly wordes recordinge
Sin first that day hir love bigan to springe.
And thus she sette hir woful herte a-fyre
Through remembraunce of that she gan desyre.*

V, # 103, l. 715-720: Many a time she sighed in her distress, / In her imagination picturing / Her Troilus in all his worthiness, / And all his golden words remembering, / From when her love had first begun to spring; / And so she set her woeful heart on fire / By the remembrance of her lost desire.⁴¹

*To late is now to speke of this matere;
Prudence, allas! Oon of thyn eyen three
Me lacked alwey, er that I come here;
On tyme y-passed, wel remembred me;
And present tyme eek coude I wel y-see.
But futur tyme, er I was in the snare,
Coude I not seen; that causeth now my care.*

V, # 107, l. 743-749. Cressida speaks: "For it is now too late to speak of it; / Prudence, one of thine eyes – for thou hast three--/ I ever lacked, as now

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40 See the exhaustive analysis by S. L. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman 1984, pp. 316-328.

41 Chaucer 1971, p. 268.

I must admit; /Time past I safely stored in memory, /Time present also I had eyes to see; /Time future, till it caught me in the snare, / I could not see, and thence has come my care." (p. 269)

Cressida poses the philosophical question of her situation within time. Her sense of having three eyes, one caught up in the past defined by memory, one looking at the present hopeless predicament, one trying to foresee her future, accounts for her paralysis. She cannot imagine her future ; her lament points to the gap between memory and desire. In the next passage, Chaucer manifests some irony:

*For which, with-outen any wordes mo,
To Troye I wol, as for conclusioun.'
But god it wot, er fully monthes two,
She was ful fer fro that entencioun.
For bothe Troilus and Troye toun
Shal knotteles through-out hir herte slyde;
For she wol take a purpos for tabyde.*

Volume 9
Issue 1

V, #110, l. 764-770. "So, without further argument, / I'll make for Troy; let me conclude it thus." / And yet, God knows, two whole months came and went / And still her purposes were dubious. / For both the town of Troy and Troilus / Shall knotless slide out of heart; / She never will take purpose to depart. (p. 270) Finally, we come to the assessment of her lack of constancy directly presented by the voice of the poet:

*She sobre was, eek simple, and wys with-al,
The beste y-norissshed eek that mighte be,
And goodly of hir speche in general,
Charitable, estatliche, lusty, and free;
Ne never-mo ne lakkede hir pitee;
Tendre-herted, slydinge of corage;
But trewely, I can not telle hir age.*

V, # 118, l. 820-826. She was discreet and simple and demure, / And the most kindly-nurtured there could be; / And she was pleasant-spoken, to be sure, / Stately and generous; she / Had a free nature, having the quality / Of pity; but she had a sliding heart. / I cannot tell her age, I lack the art. (p. 272) It was impossible to translate this literally, and Coghill did well: "Tender-hearted, of sliding courage"... Once more, we are back to the ancient root: *corage* appears in Middle English as coming from Old French and Latin, i.e. from *cor* (the "heart"). Thus Cressida is undone by the site of the memory. Her heart functions as memory, not as the seat of love and passion.

Again, it seems difficult to establish a clear-cut distinction between the heart and the organs of perception. Chaucer may have read Guido

Pound and his poetics is well-known: this irreducibly graphic poetics was, with that of Mallarmé, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound's writing may thus be given all its historical significance."⁴³

The crucial decentering was achieved via an Oriental writing that was partly imaginary. Fenollosa simplified the writing system of the Chinese language, and reduced all ideograms to pictograms, forgetting that most of them are composed of a phonetic element linked to a radical. But Fenollosa's tendentious presentation of another writing provided a perfect starting point for Pound's conception of poetry.

Derrida's remark on the "historical significance" of Pound's gesture is true when one looks at the *Pisan Cantos*, a poetic journal written when Pound believed that he was going to be executed for treason. Pound "recollects" his past activities and meditates on the traces of his previous writings and historical events. Seeing himself about to die and writing a Testament like François Villon, Pound's Cantos reactivate all the traces of these activities in his heart:

What thou lovest well remains,
The rest is dross
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee⁴⁴

Here, the *Pisan Cantos* return to the translation of Cavalcanti's Canzone of Canto XXXVI in which love is presented as linked with vision, making *Eros* derive from *oras*, as Pound had seen it in Plotinus, but then love is produced in a vision that inscribes material traces in a heart that turns into a recording chamber. The phrase of "formèd trace in his mind" becomes a leitmotiv in the Cantos.

And his strange quality sets sighs to move
Willing man look into that formèd trace in his mind
And with such uneasiness as rouseth the flame.⁴⁵

Pound's Cantos is a book of memory, the heart's memory, a book chockfull of personal vignettes, most of which are opaque: the references recapture the tribulations of the poet exiled from New York to London, from Paris to Rapallo and Pisa. Pound thus constitutes a living tradition through the persisting effort of his poetic writing. In his later Cantos, Pound adapted from Leo Frobenius, the German anthropologist and historian if

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43 Derrida 1997, p. 92.

44 Pound, pp. 534-535.

45 Ibid., p. 178.

Africa, the term of *Sagetrieb*. This refers to a “drive to tell” that impels all groups of people to narrate stories. Such a drive would be prevalent in oral cultures, but it also persists in the heartbeats of any poetic speech. The drive to tell legends underpins the very definition of culture. The tragedy of the later Pound is that he identified the poetizing force of this same drive at the moment that he felt excluded from it. In the poems following the *Pisan Cantos*, a radical self-critique brought Pound always closer to silence. When Pound identified the poetizing force as a general drive, he himself was brought to the brink of mutism. The last fragments of the *Cantos* accomplish this ultimate shattering of the voice that is metamorphosed into text and letters—the space of the poem opened up for all, letting the drive remain triumphant, and the heart shattered, broken up in multiple pieces.

A similar issue about apology for past sins haunts Eliot’s last play, *The Elder Statesman*, a play in which poetry tends to be undistinguishable from prose. However, a few lyrical passages stress the role of the “heart” as the site of love and perhaps also of death. The ending suggests rather than shows the passing of the statesman, who retires under a tree, far from all those who are around. Earlier, Lord Claverton had told his daughter:

I've had your love under false pretenses.
Now, I'm tired of keeping up those pretenses,
But I hope that you'll find a little love in your heart
Still, for your father, when you know him
For what he is, the broken-down actor.⁴⁶

Dying without a bang and not even a whimper, invisibly because he is off stage, Claverton appears as a modern version of *Oedipus at Colonus*. It is no coincidence that the mythical murder of the Father should be represented by a road-kill with a speeding car. This is the most egregious sin Lord Claverton has on his conscience: once he ran over someone in the dark and never acknowledged this accident. This revision of Oedipus killing Laios on the highway is in line with Derrida’s “Che c’è la poesia?” With this modernizing device, Eliot finally managed to kill the adolescent poet in him. While this prosaic verse play celebrates enduring love, it destroys the “literary dictator” in him. There only remained an old man displaying his affection for a much younger wife. In the play itself, Lord Claverton is left to die alone of a heart attack under a tree. His death appears out of sight. We assume that like Oedipus at Colonus, this death spreads blessings all around, including the little hedgehogs that have come from the woods.

To recapitulate my meanderings through various poetic and

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46 Eliot 1969, p. 569.

theoretical corpuses, I would want to claim that poetry provides a more fundamental mode of expression than literature as such or philosophy as such because it is founded on a more knotted link to the drives in the Freudian sense. Its material and musical patterns require an embodied experience, and so poetry relates the body of the poet and the body of the reader to drives that point to an ontology of universal life-and-death forces. Poetry would not just be the expression of one's affects, as is often argued. In fact, when it succeeds, it excavates human language captured in singular idiolects to show that it rests on a bedrock of the drives, the paradigm of which is the death-drive. This is why poetry can be said to bridge the gap between life and death.

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Volume 9
Issue 1