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EDITORS' POSTFACE

Paratextuality, Self-Alterity And the Becoming-Text

ALISTAIR ROLLS & MARIE-LAURE VUAILLE-BARCAN

*Et sous mon ciel de faïence
Je ne vois briller que les correspondances*

Serge Gainsbourg, Le Poinçonneur des Lilas

The aim of this book has been, and is, to generate fresh ideas around the paratext both as a phenomenon and a concept. The individual chapters have, by and large, taken Genette's classification of paratextual elements as a starting point for examining different aspects of a text's relationship with its readers and/or its publishers. By way of a postface, we wish to test the perversity of the paratext a little further, to stretch its limits and to challenge the accepted understanding of what can reasonably be understood by the paratext as compared to the text. In particular, we shall examine how the beginnings of certain books extend the paratext into the diegesis proper. In short, this concluding chapter will offer something of an exit via the incipit. And so to beginnings...

Locating the beginning of this 'chapter proper' is itself a paratextual exercise. It may have begun with the previous, introductory paragraph; alternatively, it may only be getting underway now. There are a section heading, title and subtitle here, too, all of which probably, or at least relatively unproblematically, form part of the chapter itself more closely than do the authors' names, which suggest ownership rather than identity. And what of the epigraph? The question of its belonging, and indeed of its ownership, is if not our beginning then at least our starting point here. This is a highly conventional opening gambit, for even academic articles often begin with epigraphs, and the above is, according to Genette, the most common kind: it is an allographic epigraph, which is to say that it is written by another author (in this case, Serge Gainsbourg) and imported into the text by the author (or authors, in this case) of the text under discussion.¹ And yet, the distinction made by Genette between this most common type of epigraph and the autographic variety, which is an epigraph written by the author of the work into whose peritext it is inserted, seems to us rather hazy.² In the case of our epigraph above, it may not immediately be clear to the reader why it is here. Indeed, it is quite usual for the inclusion of the epigraph to pass without comment (although this is more likely to be the case for a work of fiction than in an academic essay), which suggests that there is something transparently meaningful about this inclusion, that is to say that there is a tacit agreement between the writer and reader as to the meaning of this particular epigraph (in this particular text), which in turn implies that the epigraph is drawn from a text whose

¹ Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), p. 140.

² Genette groups under the heading of the *péritexte* those elements that fall outside the 'text' within the same published volume, including the title, preface and epigraph; for their part, the cover and outer layers of the work form part of the *épitexte* (1987, p. 10-11). For the purposes of the present chapter, we shall prefer the more generic term, 'paratext', which we shall, furthermore, infuse with varying degrees of poststructuralist textuality, hence our own peritextual choice of 'paratextuality'.

meaning is equally in no doubt. So, if this act of transposition, or translation, from one text to another functions similarly to Brian Nelson's understanding of literary translation, and thus as a reading of the text,³ then in order for the epigraph to be meaningful the text being translated must be a readerly one (in the sense of Roland Barthes's *texte lisible*⁴), or what a deconstructionist might consider to be the metaphysical reading of the text, which coincides exactly with the words on the page.⁵

So, what is the meaning of the epigraph above? If this partial translation brings with it the metaphysical reading of Gainsbourg's *Les Poinçonneurs des Lilas*, then it must have something to do with the monotony of everyday life or the unjust working conditions for employees of the RATP. And yet, we chose this epigraph on the basis of these lines alone. This is a deliberate de-contextualization of these lines, whose force here is derived not from their metonymic value as representatives of the absent whole (in this case, a famous popular song) but from a new transplanted metonymy, from their recontextualization as representatives of a new metonymy or a metonymy of newness; as such, they function here as exemplars of literature in a much wider context, or the Intertext itself (as coined by Julia Kristeva⁶). In this (new) context, these lines suggest the penetrability of the impenetrable; they offer the hardness of a ceramic cover as an always-already penetrated surface, an interface that actually facilitates communication with that space beyond. To use these lines to convey such a renewal or othering of meaning is to suggest that the allographic epigraph is inevitably, to a lesser or greater degree, autographic, because it expresses either the intentions of the author who appropriates the lines or the discourse-producing power of the reader of the new context as writerly text. In such a case, this *effet-épigraphe* as an act of literary translation appears closer to Jacques Derrida's recontextualization, which expresses the self-alterity present necessarily in all textual communication, than to Genette's taxonomy, with all that the latter implies in terms of stability and fixity of meaning.⁷ And yet, as Richard Macksey points out,

[Genette's] provisional definition of the work itself [in *L'Œuvre de l'art*], is rigorously intentional: "a work of art is an intentional aesthetic object, or, which amounts to the same thing: a work of art is an artifact (or human product) [enlisted] to an aesthetic function." He underscores the viewer's or reader's share in this intentional process: one never sees the same painting twice; one never reads the same book twice.⁸

And so for Genette too, the work of the work of art, and perhaps especially the literary work, is to include within itself the keys to the writing of its own otherness; and the devices used to frame it serve equally to mark its intentionality, its situatedness within a wider textual space.⁹

³ See Brian Nelson, "Preface: Translation Lost and Found", *In Other Words: The Art of Translation*, special edition of *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 47.1 (2010), 3-7.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973).

⁵ See, for example, the work of the Yale School. We might think of the essays by Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey H. Hartman and J. Hillis Miller in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, Continuum, 1979).

⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Séméiotikè. Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1978).

⁷ On this, see "Afterword: Toward and Ethic of Discussion", translated by Samuel Weber, in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 111-60.

⁸ Richard Macksey, forward to Jane E. Lewin's translation of Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. xi-xxii (xvi-xvii).

⁹ If we are guilty of twisting Genette's paratextuality to fit our own schema, we hope to do so within the play of his own work. We should point out that the intertextuality that we are going to highlight in the paratextual

In this chapter, it is our aim to present a number of texts, all of which will be familiar to the reader of twentieth-century French literature, and which use the recontextualizing force of the epigraph to locate their texts firmly, yet ambivalently, even duplicitously, both inside and outside themselves. In the case of these texts, whose paratextual layers are multiple and complex, the impact of the addition of dermal layers to the body of the text is, perversely, to unseal it and, to appropriate Gainsbourg's lyrics, *to make the connecting lines shine*.

Voyage au bout de la nuit

We shall begin our study of famous paratexts with Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, and more particularly with Nicholas Hewitt's ground-breaking analysis of its epigraph and introductory sections. It will be our contention that Céline's novel offers a powerful model for twentieth-century paratextuality, both in the way in which it draws on previously written literature and in which it is subsequently drawn on by later works. As an Ur-paratext, if you will, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* couches its textual ambivalence in its autographic appropriation of a seemingly (approximately, deceptively) allographic epigraph. As Hewitt writes, "[w]hat is important [...] is the way in which Céline systematically chooses to subvert his own source material".¹⁰ Thus, the epigraph, which for Genette sells the book to the reader, grounds the story in distortion and partial fabrication. For Hewitt, this is the sign that the text that follows is itself a distortion of itself, or at least only part of the story. What takes place, he suggests, is an inversion: "In the fairy-story become novel, the real becomes imaginary and the imaginary real."¹¹ That we are dealing with an inversion of terms here, rather than a replacement by one of the other, is important; it takes us back to J. Hillis Miller's concept of the critic as host and the nihilistic otherness lying in wait inside all text.¹² *Voyage au bout de la nuit* will therefore remain for Hewitt what it is (the story of a journey around the world) while at the same time also being its opposite (a story that never leaves Paris): the words on the page, which the paratext tells us is a journey of pure imagination, evoke a reality that is present physically only in the paratext but which will become the ghost in the machine, dogging the imagined journey throughout its course. For the novel begins as it ends, in Paris: "[D]escription of Montmartre may be limited, though by no means absent, but it is questionable whether the action really is elsewhere."¹³

While an extensive paratext (including a series of introductory texts) is used to couch the imaginary journey in a real Paris while appearing to do the opposite, the carefully balanced coexistence of the two is contained within the epigraph, which is itself an oscillation between the autographic and allographic regimes. What Hewitt reveals in his work on Céline's *exergue*—"Chanson des Gardes Suisses 1793"—is that this poem is not, as previously thought, a pure fiction; rather, "the 'Chanson des Gardes Suisses' does exist and is not the product of Céline's imagination." In fact, "[...] it is the result of a radical rewriting of

elements of a number of seminal French texts corresponds more precisely to what Genette, in his work on the *architexte* terms 'trans-textuality'. This is clearly much closer to Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality than Genette's own, which is no more than a system of explicit referencing and quotation.

¹⁰ Nicholas Hewitt, *The Golden Age of Louis-Ferdinand Céline* (Leamington Spa; Hamburg; New York: Berg, 1987), p. 83.

¹¹ Hewitt, p. 63.

¹² See J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host", in Bloom et al., pp. 217-53.

¹³ Hewitt, p. 63. Hewitt's work redresses the balance (between real-absent and imaginary-present) in Céline's work, whose vast scale gives precedence to the imaginary journey over the real location and, as such, uses Paris as a privileged place for dream-work. This recalls the projects of the French Surrealists, who believed in the equal importance of reality and the dream but who devoted themselves nonetheless, and logically enough, to the latter.

the source material: in this case, a transposition of the *Chant de la Bérésina*".¹⁴ The paratext, that part of the text that speaks most powerfully to the reader, as the very sales pitch of the novel, speaks an absence that will haunt the text throughout the course of the journey (the introduction is pointedly about what Arthur and Bardamu *said* but its position in the paratext serves to highlight what is not said, the absent lyrics of the real military song¹⁵) until the very end when the novel retreats into the famous concluding words of silencing speech ("qu'on n'en parle plus"¹⁶); as such, the whole text becomes what Hewitt describes as a "ghostly limbo".¹⁷ Certainly, the transition from paratext to text lies in a deliberately grey area, to the extent that it is debatable, as it is for the journey itself, whether or not it actually takes place at all. After a dedication on page seven (to Elisabeth Craig), there is the epigraph discussed above (page nine); on page eleven comes the italicized passage that suggests the whole text (of which this is, then, already a part, despite the use of italics to give a paratextual appearance) is signed under the *voyage imaginaire*; on page thirteen there follows the passage described by Henri Godard, as we shall see, as prefatory, which was inserted by Céline after the novel's initial publication. What follows on page fifteen, then, seems to the reader to be the opening of the diegesis proper. Its opening sentences, however, constitute an undoing of narrative voice: "Ça a débuté comme ça. Moi, j'avais jamais rien dit."¹⁸ *Moi*, to all intents and purposes, stands as the voice of the diegesis, an unspeaking voice that offers a stark contrast to the grandiloquence of the paratext that has come before it, and which proleptically references the call for silence that is the last line of the novel. And yet, the logorrhoea of this diegesis speaks this unspeaking too volubly, thus unspeaking it and unspeaking itself as text. For, as the reader soon discovers, this five-page passage is situated historically in the pre-war years whereas the *voyage* of the novel's title appears to get underway 'properly' only on page twenty-one, on the battlefields of the First World War. Here, then, the text speaks itself again: "Une fois qu'on y est, on y est bien." We are, indeed, well inside the text, both because it has now started and also because it has the potential to have already begun in the course of the previous layers. The text, in other words, is always already begun and beginning.

To return to the paratext as limbo, it is this initial casting of Bardamu as a summoner of and companion to ghosts that gives his journey such mythical status. Hence the importance of the interpenetration of reality and fiction in the paratext: Céline uses it to sell his story in his name but also to replace himself by this ghost. Reality and the imaginary become fellow travellers, each the vehicle for the other. As Godard notes apropos of the genesis of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, "[l]e nom même de Bardamu, qui maintient le personnage à distance de celui de Céline, contribue à faire de lui une des figures mythiques du XX^e siècle".¹⁹ As we have already seen (in chapter three above), the force of the paratext can be likened to Roland Barthes's understanding of myth, which calls out to the reader or viewer and, as demonstrated in his essay on the Parisian striptease, signs the whole spectacle (here, of the novel) in the name of Art.²⁰ In this case, the artistry that will underpin the whole journey is one of otherness within self. In this way, a novel, whose diegesis proper unfolds in time with the

¹⁴ Hewitt, p. 63. The importance of Hewitt's research into the epigraph is recognized by Henri Godard in his essay 'Voyage au bout de la nuit' de Louis-Ferdinand Céline (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 169.

¹⁵ For Hewitt, Bardamu's journey, in the sense that it is a *voyage imaginaire* as laid out in the paratext, recalls Alice's journey into Wonderland; it "crystallises the unconscious traces of the conversation between Bardamu and Arthur Ganate and creates an imaginary world for them" (p. 64).

¹⁶ Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952 [1992]), p. 636.

¹⁷ Hewitt, p. 84.

¹⁸ *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, p. 15.

¹⁹ Godard, p. 150.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), p. 148.

First World War (although *Voyage au bout de la nuit* does as much as any text to obscure the starting point of the text as opposed to the paratext), begins in an earlier era. As Hewitt notes, the introduction locates the “work’s centre of gravity [...] firmly in the pre-war era” and in so doing sets up a consistent pattern of inconsistency, “a lack of logical transition which will come to characterise the links between episodes throughout the work”.²¹ The ambivalence of the whole novel is predicated on that of the paratext. It is precisely this power of the paratext which, for us, makes *Voyage au bout de la nuit* exemplary of what we shall call a *becoming-text*. These texts will all stage, in the most reflexive manner, their nihilistic otherness, and to do so they will deliberately seek to confuse the borders between paratext and text. These extended dermal layers will thus be the site par excellence of the work’s self-deconstruction (where unspeaking is spoken, and *vice versa*); and as the interface of author and reader, of reality and imagination, the zone where text and paratext coincide will necessarily recall the myth of Bardamu and the critic as (g)host.

As we shall demonstrate, this paratextual haunting, of which *Voyage au bout de la nuit* is iconic, has had a traceable impact on other texts; interestingly, its influence has also extended, or tended inwards, to the dermal layers of subsequent editions of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* itself. Godard notes, for example, how the text that confronts the contemporary reader of the ‘original French’ now contains within its text what was once quite clearly a peritextual element: “Le texte de la préface à la réédition de 1949, donné dans la collection Folio aux pages 13-14, entre l’avis liminaire de 1932 et le texte du roman,” he points out, “permet de mesurer l’évolution stylistique de Céline entre ces deux moments.”²² Thus, via what Philippe Lane refers to as the *paratexte éditorial*,²³ Céline is reinserted into his own text with ambivalent effect: on the one hand, he adds authorial voice to the text in a move that might otherwise strengthen its coincidence with a metaphysical reading (making it a readerly text); but, on the other hand, the inclusion of this voice in the duplicitous dermal layers of the novel tends to infuse Céline’s words with the imaginary (and thus the author himself endorses the reader’s production of the writerly text).

This folding of the paratext into the text, via a thickening and displacement of dermal layers, has the effect of extending the paratext right through the novel. Not only is this picked up intermittently in the form of transitions from one section to another, transitions which of course serve as much to fragment the narrative as to smooth the reader’s passage through it, but it also, as we have seen, drives the whole novel, to the extent that the text arguably functions paratextually throughout its length. In other words, there is in the becoming-text a folding of paratextual skin beneath the dermal layer of the work, with the result that the whole text self-reflexively aligns itself with its other side. The self-alterity of these texts is not, then, simply announced in an introduction; rather, the whole text becomes one with the paratext, and its outside is ultimately internalized.

Zazie dans le métro

²¹ Hewitt, p. 58. The paratextual establishment of the novel as *voyage imaginaire* allows a number of sections in the book to stand as metonyms for the whole (other, unconscious, non-real) story. For Hewitt (p. 67), the otherwise unclassifiable episode of the *Infanta Combitta* is just such an example: “[i]t indicates how to read the rest of the novel and it reinforces the conventions of the genre [of the *voyage imaginaire*].”

²² Godard, p. 147.

²³ Philippe Lane, *La Périphérie du texte* (Paris: Nathan, 1992). Lane’s term picks up Genette’s prescriptive definition of the *péritexte éditorial* in *Seuils* (1987, pp. 20-37).

A good example of such an internalized paratext can be found in Raymond Queneau's novel *Zazie dans le métro*.²⁴ This novel appears to have a most brutal entry-into-the-text: the reader is plunged directly into the voice of the principal male character Gabriel, which in turn becomes that of the novel itself (in these opening paragraphs at least). For, Gabriel opens the text with direct speech, speech that seeks to emulate, directly and closely, the language of the Parisian populous at the time of the novel's writing. The famous opening word, "Doukipudonktan", is, however, immediately othered as it turns out to be not direct speech but Gabriel's inner thoughts; it presents itself as a literal question about the odour of Paris's residents and a metonym (it is itself a series of words compounded into one item of speech) for the whole novel. As such, it gives voice to a Célinian-style paradox: the text is both a written novel and vehicle for popular language, both itself and other. This allows us to reflect on the presence of an epigraph, whose alienating appearance at first functions to understate its own presence (it is easy to pass over as it is impenetrable to most readers since it is taken from Aristotle and is given in Greek) and which also constitutes a parallel speaking and unspeaking. The reference is to the story of Atlantis, which Aristotle denounces as a myth, both raised and destroyed by its author, in this case Plato. The epigraph, both a celebration and denunciation of the classics, mirrors the text's opening word (itself a celebration and critique of popular language as speech *and* novel), thereby extending the paratext into this most directly un-introduced of texts and couching the whole novel under the sign of paratextual ambiguity.²⁵ Indeed, Gabriel's word is uttered (and simultaneously kept silent) in what turns out to be a liminal space—he is waiting for his niece, Zazie, on the platform at the Gare de Lyon. Moreover, her arrival at this railway station is followed immediately by her failure to undertake the one journey that she wants to take (on the métro), and which takes on mythical importance by the end of the novel.²⁶ The ambiguous structure of the novel therefore parallels the ambiguous plotline, which is one of taking *and* not taking the métro.

Truismes

A more recent example of this kind of ambiguity can be found in Marie Darrieussecq's first novel,²⁷ which picks up Céline's introduction and its reference to a "cochon avec des ailes d'or qui retombe partout [including, apparently, in Darrieussecq's novel], le ventre en l'air, prêt aux caresses".²⁸ *Truismes* was received, both critically and popularly, as the story of a woman's gradual metamorphosis into a pig. This metaphysical reading of the transformation text is, however, belied by the novel's paratextual apparatus, which, if read closely, can be seen to offer a circular frame to the linear progression (of woman to pig), suggesting instead that this is the story of a pig who becomes woman only to become pig again by the end but

²⁴ Raymond Queneau, *Zazie dans le métro* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

²⁵ Furthermore, *Zazie*'s status as becoming-text is only compounded by its intertextual relationship with Didier Daeninckx's contribution in 1998 to the series of novels starring the famous detective known as le Poulpe, *Nazis dans le métro* (Paris: J'ai lu [Librio noir], 1998), in which the only tangible signs of intertextuality (in Genette's sense of the term) are the pun in the title and a reworking of the initial word of Queneau's novel. On page seventy-two of the Gallimard edition (2007), Daeninckx's own Gabriel (le Poulpe's full name is Gabriel Lecouvreur) poses the following question of a young vet in the provinces (thereby reversing the Paris-provinces dichotomy in *Zazie dans le métro*, in which Zazie is a provincial interloper in Paris): "Mais d'où ça pue donc tant ?". The vet acknowledges this with a smile, "pour montrer qu'elle avait compris".

²⁶ For a more detailed reading of the paradox of Zazie's journey on the métro, see Alistair Rolls, "Into and out of the Metro? — Defining a Carrollian Space in Raymond Queneau and Louis Malle's *Zazie dans le métro*", *Nottingham French Studies*, 43.3 (2004), 11-22.

²⁷ Marie Darrieussecq, *Truismes* (Paris: P.O.L., 1996).

²⁸ *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, p. 17.

without abandoning her aspirations to humanity. As we have argued elsewhere, from this perspective the novel is a tale of anamorphosis and thus of continuous becoming: never either entirely woman or entirely pig, the protagonist follows a Deleuzian line of flight towards otherness as, alternately and by degree, a woman-becoming-pig and a pig-becoming-woman.²⁹ As in Céline's dermal layers, Darrieussecq's novel is shown to operate in exactly the same way as her protagonist, and, for this is the point, *vice versa*. The text's dynamics of auto-differentiation are established in the epigraph and an extended dermal layer, which is offered up as a sort of *avertissement de la femme-truie auteur*.

Truismes thus opens with a quotation about the butchering of a boar. While this epigraph functions as a neat inversion of the novel's protagonist along gender lines, an inversion that is later echoed by the latter's escape from butchery at the end of the novel, Darrieussecq's use of quotation at this point of the paratext is perhaps most closely aligned to the mechanics of the becoming-text in its confusion of the autographic and allographic regimes. For, while the author is given as being Knut Hamsun, the reader is not told in which of Hamsun's texts to look for it. And given the overtones of charcuterie in *Hamsun's* name and Darrieussecq's own association with Bayonne, the reader may well be tempted to consider that the epigraph is a trick, an autographic epigraph pretending to be allographic. In fact, the quotation is taken from one of Hamsun's lesser-known novels, *Benoni*,³⁰ but its function in *Truismes* appears (at least to us, who can claim little credibility as Hamsun scholars) to be an autographic appropriation, or nihilistic recontextualization, of Hamsun's lines, which then take on a new metonymic function in their new, host text. The epigraph depicts the moment when the pig feels the butcher's knife piercing its skin, which offers some tough resistance, and thence passing into the sub-dermal layers of its body, at which point the knife sinks in more easily. Importantly, the quotation showcases an act of killing that is in train (neither beginning nor ending) and the realization of death but not the moment itself. This has clear ramifications for the paratextual status of the epigraph, whose contents appear to belie its position on the outside of the text; or rather, the epigraph reveals itself to be also *moving into* the body of the text itself. This is then picked up by the dermal layer beneath the epidermis-epigraph, which offers itself to the caresses of the reader with all the ambivalence of Céline's golden-winged pig. The readers will, the narrator announces, find the going tough at first, but there is a promise that we shall get used to it as we go. The butcher's knife will inoculate and indeed already has inoculated us against the barbarity of the novel's plot. Reader and text are shown to be complicit in their sharing of this ambivalent (liberating and murdering, writerly and readerly, circular and linear) caress.

La Nausée

Whereas in *Truismes* it is the reader who is apparently inoculated by the injection of the paratext against the anguish that the novel is likely to inspire, for Genette the title of a work—the outermost of its dermal layers—produces a similar effect on the author, for whom the writing act is enabled by the salvatory call of its end-point: “[A]nticiper le ‘produit fini’ est sans doute l’un des (rares) moyens de conjurer la nausée de l’écriture.”³¹ This is, of

²⁹ See Alistair Rolls and Marie-Laure Vuaille-Barcan, “Une seule ou plusieurs femmes-truies ? Une lecture virtualisante de *Truismes* de Marie Darrieussecq”, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 46.1-2 (2009), 31-44.

³⁰ For Régis Boyer's French translation, see Knut Hamsun, *Benoni* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994 [initially Calmann-Lévy, 1980]). The quotation that serves as Darrieussecq's epigraph can be found on page 180 of Gallimard's Folio edition.

³¹ Genette (1987), p. 88.

course, in accordance with his understanding of the paratext's effect upon the reader.³² Reader and writer alike benefit from this paratextual process of 'becoming book', however opposed this may be to our own understanding of the paratext's role in the work's status as becoming-text. And it is perhaps in that most famous of nauseous-nauseating works, and most especially in its paratextual layers, that the confrontation of the becoming-book and the becoming-text is at its most telling. For not only does Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* constitute the tension between a novel that is trying to present itself as a living text unfurling in the present and a philosophy of the reality of the present that is trying to become a novel, but it also lays out a veritable ontology of paratextuality, a coming-to-the-world made inevitable, and yet always presented as something to be made freely, via perhaps the twentieth century's most famous philosophical limen—nothingness. In such a schema, man as book exists independently of his situation while, as text, he is inescapably situated.³³ Sartre's very concept of freedom is, indeed, predicated on this paradoxically situated autonomy. As a living (written, as it were, in real time) and dead (published and thus fixed in time) account of a dawning awareness of the phenomenological truths of human existence, *La Nausée* is both itself (a novel) and what it is not (it is also home to its own nihilistic deconstruction as text); it both alludes to and undermines its own salvation through its self as to-be-read. Ultimately, then, it is what it is not and is not what it is; and as a being-for-itself (a book that speaks to the reader and is thus invested by us with the trappings of consciousness³⁴), *La Nausée* is an ambiguous becoming-text. In short, it *exists* the juxtaposition of the opposing currents that are philosophy and novel, and coincides by virtue of its inherent auto-differentiation with that same metaphysical reading which has, since its publication in 1938, seen it cast, oxymoronically, as a 'philosophical novel'.³⁵

From the perspective of the paratext as becoming-book, the opening of *La Nausée* serves to ground the novel, to put a statement on the blank page, of which Sartre was notoriously afraid. But this grounding function of the paratext is also clearly integral to the

³² "Le paratexte est [done] pour nous ce par quoi un texte se fait livre et se propose comme tel à ses lecteurs, et plus généralement au public." Genette (1987), p. 7.

³³ In chapter three above, it is seen how Derrida famously denies any existence beyond the text ("il n'y a pas de hors-texte", he writes in *Limited Inc* [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988], p. 137), which in no way opposes his elaboration of the "hors livre", as Lane points out in his definition of the paratext (p. 13). As we are also suggesting, Genette himself privileges the book (as that which is published and read) over the text (that which the author conceives, and certainly that which the reader produces) in *Seuils* only to produce what appear to be moments of poststructuralist theorizing in, for example, *L'Œuvre de l'art*.

³⁴ That is to say that the book that we look at does not simply call to mind an object containing words; rather, the book's presentation of itself as text—its textness, to draw on Still and Worton's terminology—coincides with its textuality or its tendency to extend beyond itself, via the paratext, into the intertext, in exactly the same way as human consciousness continuously leaks out of the human body onto the world around it while simultaneously being reclaimed by the body, whose autonomy is not compromised by this permeability. For more on textness and textuality, see the introduction to Judith Still and Michael Worton (eds), *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 1-68 (especially, pp. 4-6).

³⁵ Traditionally, this expression is used to describe the way in which the novel is part philosophy part novel, as though it is in fact not really one or the other. For us, *La Nausée*, to borrow Sartre's expression, 'exists' the philosophical novel, by which we understand that it is both philosophy and novel in the same way that the Sartrean *être pour-soi* is both body and consciousness, tensely, inescapably and in fluctuating proportions *but always both*. In this way, *La Nausée* is a philosophical novel in the same way as Charles Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris* is prose poetry—instead of being poetic prose or prosaic poetry, Baudelairean prose poetry brings together, under tension, the two mutually exclusive modes of poetry and prose. As a 'genre', prose poetry exhibits the same paradoxical currents as the becoming-text; indeed, with its extensive dedication (the famous "À Arsène Houssaye") and short, yet deeply, even schizophrenically, polarized opening poem "L'Étranger", which stands metonymically for the whole collection, *Les Petits poèmes en prose* are exemplary of the paratextual phenomenon that we are describing here.

dynamics of the becoming-text. In this respect, Genette's comments on collectively produced works, performed before an audience, are of interest: "[L]e caractère collectif y est beaucoup plus nécessaire et agissant que pour le 'public' d'une œuvre littéraire ou même picturale, qui n'est guère qu'une collection d'individus."³⁶ Two things here will immediately resonate with the reader of *La Nausée*: first, the novel's ambiguity hinges on the perversity of diaries in general (which presuppose a reader, even if they appear to be the ne plus ultra of an author's writing for self, hence their importance in modernist literature where the reader's complicity in the production of meaning is intensified through the suggestion of a broken bond of intimacy) and of Roquentin's diary in particular, which clearly pays lip service to this mode, its own use of dated sheets appearing variously either coy or satirical; second, Genette's turn of phrase recalls Sartre's epigraph, which 'predates' the dated sheets in the novel and ensures that the diary will function, self-consciously, as something more than a personal record of events, and more even than a diary read in the intimate act of discovery by a solitary reader. For not only is Roquentin's diary published, and therefore produced as a performance, but its epigraph, in its own perverse endorsement of Genette's categorization of the literary work as something less collective than a musical recital or piece of theatre, actually undoes its own words, suggesting the very opposite is true: "C'est un garçon sans importance collective, c'est tout juste un individu."³⁷ The liminal position of the epigraph has the effect of connecting this quotation with *La Nausée*'s own reader in an initial and disingenuous breach of the diary compact (where its Modernism is efficiently condensed in this one line—this has all the appearance of a signal to the reader to begin reading the novel, disguised as a warning that it is the work of an author whose words are not worth reading). Clearly, this is a reminder of the paratext's inevitable intersection with intertextuality, whereby the epigraph extends beyond the novel's own skin into that of other texts. Thus, it is what it is not: it *is* a collective work, and it *is* important as a performance (of this interconnection). Moreover, as Genette notes in *Seuils*, the epigraph effect is further enhanced by the association with the author of the allographic epigraph.³⁸ In this case, the author of Sartre's epigraph is of the utmost paratextual importance because it is none other than Céline.

The reference to Céline's play *L'Église*, if at first surprising because so many of us readers know him for his two major novels or his pamphlets, appears logical when one realises that it was in this play that Bardamu first came to life. Interestingly therefore, Sartre's epigraph not only references the extremely important unimportance of Bardamu, within the French canon, but it also establishes Roquentin's diary mode in the context of Bardamu as theatrical performance and thus very much as part of a collective experience in Genette's sense. Intertextually, of course, this also serves to couch the entire novel in the ambivalence of Céline's *voyage imaginaire*. Thus, before we even get beyond the epidermal layer, we are assured that Sartre's text will always be both itself and other.

In addition to the intertextual specificity of the paratextual reference to Céline, the existential nature of the becoming-text is also suggested by certain resonances with Sartrean ontology in Genette's own description of the way that the paratext presents its work to readers as a book. As we have shown, the paradox of Sartre's own presentation of *La Nausée* as book is steeped in ambiguity inasmuch as it is very much not the work of literature aspired to by Roquentin as a means of salvation from the anguish of existence. This book is pointedly not an *être en-soi*; it does not coincide with itself. Genette continues his discussion of the 'bookness' that the paratext sells in the following terms: "Plus que d'une limite ou d'une

³⁶ Gérard Genette, *L'Œuvre de l'art : Immanence et transcendance* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994), p. 66-7.

³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938 [2002]), p. 9.

³⁸ "[Aussi] l'important dans un grand nombre d'épigraphes est[-il] simplement le nom de l'auteur cité." Genette (1987), p. 147.

frontière étanche, il s'agit ici d'un seuil", which he understands as a "[z]one indécise' entre le dedans et le dehors, elle-même sans limite rigoureuse, ni vers l'intérieur (le texte) ni vers l'extérieur (le discours du monde sur le texte), lisière".³⁹ This suggests that for Genette himself the book's deconstruction lies in this paratextual link to its readership-as-facticity: the two-way permeability of the book's borders indicates that its readers endow it with a non-coinciding identity, which is directly comparable to the consciousness that we humans assume to be present in our fellow beings. Where *La Nausée* differs from most of its literary peers, and what it has in common with our other becoming-texts, is its exaggerated celebration of this double-sidedness.

In terms of its paratextual structure, *La Nausée* is perhaps the most complex of our becoming-texts. Like *Truismes*, it showcases its opposing (virtualizing *and* actualizing) currents throughout its length—with each instance of the nausea functioning to reveal the fundamental reality not only of the world but also of the text. And yet, *La Nausée*'s linear development is arguably even more self-reflexive: it is from diary to novel form: as the diary form cedes before the text's increasing becoming-book-ness, so too its paratextual apparatus (there are increasingly fewer uses of dated sheets) fades into a narrative that is more like a diegesis proper. This aside, there are also grounds for offering the beginning of the dated sheets of the diary (page seventeen) as the first sub-dermal layer of the text. Prior to this are a dedication (Au Castor, page seven), the epigraph (page nine), the publishers' note (page eleven) and the undated sheet (pages thirteen to sixteen). As we have seen, the epigraph's intertextuality immediately suggests a double text; its grammatical structure also reinforces the liminality that is the nothingness that embeds the text within this collective context while allowing it freedom of self-definition. The impersonal pronoun, *ce*, that is twice repeated in the epigraph is itself suggestive of double movement. It is used to introduce the nouns (*un garçon* and *un individu*) since they have, for obvious reasons, not been previously referenced (in the host text). Furthermore, it is a non-gendered pronoun, used precisely to introduce nouns, whose context will be provided by the expression of their gender through the accompanying article. *Ce* is therefore used when the nouns that it introduces have no grammatical context. And yet at the same time, it can only be used *because* there is a context that makes the utterance meaningful—in this case, the source text of the allographic epigraph. *Ce* does two things, then: on the one hand, it picks up the context of the (absent) source and, on the other, stands for what is to come. In this case, the nouns *garçon* and, perhaps more interestingly, *individu*—with all the latter term entails in terms of body and consciousness, and solipsistic, inner activity—stand for the text. The epigraph thus describes the novel itself: 'it' is an individual and thus extends beyond itself, just like the epigraph, unlike a simple object made of sheets of paper bound together. Clearly, this is also the case for the opening line of Céline's diegesis proper, with its lower-register form of what is effectively the same pronoun (*Ça a débuté comme ça*), where the emphasis on beginning also picks up, linguistically, what has gone before. And as we shall see presently, it also serves to locate *La Nausée* within a poetics of ambiguity that goes back to the previous century.

The role of the famous *avertissement des éditeurs* has been well documented.⁴⁰ It functions proleptically to suggest that the whole novel is to be read with caution: just like a publishers' note claiming the diary's authenticity while at the same time protesting the novel's place in a long line of novels-posing-as-diaries, the meaning of the text will always

³⁹ Genette (1987), p. 7-8.

⁴⁰ Hewitt, for example, notes the duplicity of the eighteenth-century literary conceit, which belies the manifest statement that the novel is a genuine diary. Nicholas Hewitt, "'Looking for Annie': Sartre's *La Nausée* and the Inter-War Years", *The Journal of European Studies*, 12 (1982), 96-112.

be both in and beneath its own lines.⁴¹ The *feuilleton sans date*, for its part, extends the more obviously paratextual elements into the murky ground of the text itself. It also builds the tension of the philosophical novel by simultaneously suggesting the need to unfurl in the present, both to see and be seen clearly (the famous “pour y voir clair”, page thirteen), and the presence of another side to the story (the allegorical underside of the pebble, page fourteen). Interestingly, it also uses its mimicry of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*’s paratextual structure to align itself with the *voyage imaginaire*: the novel very clearly establishes its location at the other end of the railway line from Paris, but in such an ambiguous text, where one side of a pebble *peut en cacher un autre*, it is tempting to read into this position its polar opposite. Perhaps, like Bardamu’s *voyage*, Roquentin’s journey (he claims, in a thoroughly unconvincing account, already to have done his travelling) never leaves Paris.

The proof of the plausibility, at least, of such an hypothesis is, again as in the self-alterity of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, all in a song. In Sartre’s case, “Some of These Days” replaces the “Chanson des Gardes Suisses”. As early as 1970 Eugenia Noik Zimmerman noted Sartre’s reversal in *La Nausée* of the black singer and the white, Jewish composer, who in the parallel world of reality correspond to the white, Jewish diva Sophie Tucker and the black composer Shelton Brooks.⁴² Zimmerman reads this reversal of identity through the lens of jazz:

[I]n the final analysis, when we leave the question of the genesis of Sartre’s novel and consider its significance, it matters little which of the two people involved with the song Sartre chose to be a Negro and which he chose to be a Jew. [...] He has fused the notion of the creative artist as outsider with the notion of the Jew and the Negro as outsider.⁴³

Given that our perspective here is that of the paratext and, therefore, of the simultaneous movement towards, or double presence of, the inside and outside, we should add to this conclusion the importance of the presence in *La Nausée* of both this inversion and its uninverted ‘real’ configuration. For, only six pages into Sartre’s diegesis proper, as Roquentin goes into his first fetishistic absenting of himself from the sex act with *la patronne* (which replaces, and is replaced by, the image of the missing Anny) and before the notes of “Some of These Days” take on this same delusional function, we are treated to the ‘imaginary’ spectacle of a white woman running backwards into a black man’s arms on a railway station platform.⁴⁴ This vignette tells two stories: first, it puts the real history of the song into the novel, balancing outsiders with insiders; second, it points to the veiled underside of the song, whose verse alone is given voice in the novel. The song as outsider is the story of love lost and the repeated missing of loved ones at railway platforms, as played out, appropriately, *in reverse* by the union of the black man and white woman. The ‘whole story’ of “Some of These Days” is absent-present throughout the novel, always partial, always veiled and symbolically referenced. It is the song of Anny’s departure from the gare

⁴¹ Perhaps the best-known example of this conceit is Pierre-Ambroise Choderlos de Laclos’s *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782), whose own *avertissement de l’éditeur* plays a double game, revealing that the letters that follow it are in fact an epistolary novel (and thus the opposite of Sartre’s note) with nonetheless (like Céline’s epigraph) “un fond de vérité”. Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), p. 14.

⁴² Eugenia Noik Zimmerman, ““Some of These Days”: Sartre’s ‘Petite Phrase’”, *Contemporary Literature*, 11.3 (1970), 375-81.

⁴³ Zimmerman, p. 380.

⁴⁴ *La Nausée*, p. 22.

Saint-Lazare and the song of Roquentin's return to, or absence from, Paris.⁴⁵ Insofar as it operates at the nexus of Genette's opposed performantial fields of realization and improvisation, it is also throughout the novel's length the double-sided song of the paratext.⁴⁶

"Le Dormeur du val"

Clearly, this double-sidedness is not new to poststructuralist text or even twentieth-century literature. On the contrary, a textuality formed in the space between the construction and dissolution of identity can be straightforwardly mapped onto the Parisian poetics of Charles Baudelaire's mid-nineteenth-century expression of a new, critical modernity. Indeed, our reading of "L'Étranger" as both paratext and metonym for the whole prose poetic text that is *Le Spleen de Paris* demonstrates how the poetic gaze and voice of the traditional verse form are problematized in the modern metropolis,⁴⁷ where the limen that was previously a gateway for the reader into the poet's vision (as objective and at a distance in space and time from both the author's contact with the muse and the reading experience⁴⁸) now constitutes the experience itself, for poet and reader alike. In other words, in modernist poetry, and perhaps especially prose poetry, attempts to distinguish between text and paratext are rendered almost redundant.

Despite this tendency for the dermal layers of the paratext to become folded into the body of the poetic text, French poetry of the nineteenth century is rich with examples of the poem's paradoxical whole (or its tendency to become un-whole, to un-read itself even as it is read) being showcased in its dermal layers. Given our discussion of impersonal pronouns in the paratextual apparatus of *La Nausée* and *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, the opening words of Arthur Rimbaud's "Le Dormeur du val" are particularly interesting: "*C'est un trou de verdure*".⁴⁹ Just as this *ce* pushes forwards into the poem that "Le Dormeur du val" will become, it also refers back to the poetic context of its articulation: the poem is both verdant and a hole, in other words a paradox in which the baseness of *trou* is opposed to the self-referentially poetic term *verdure*. Paratextually, this initial oxymoron establishes the whole text within a poetics of self-alterity, which includes other paradoxical similes, such as "des haillons d'argent", and which undermines the poem's apparently linear decay (from life to death). The green hole is also echoed by the two red holes of the final line. This use of inverted terms to frame the poem emphasizes that life and death are always co-present in a cycle of becoming.

Such inherent self-alterity is reflected in poststructuralist theory by the closure and opening of text that are simultaneously produced in the reading experienced. The impersonal nature of Rimbaud's pronoun is in this way made personal, both as the voice of the poet and

⁴⁵ *La Nausée*, p. 219. For a more detailed reading of the song's 'other side' in the novel, see Alistair Rolls, "'This Lovely Sweet Refrain': Reading the Fiction back into *Nausea*", *Literature and Aesthetics*, 13.2 (2003), 57-72.

⁴⁶ The association of Sartre's *vieux ragtime* with jazz may at first appear incorrect. In his study of the work of the work of art, however, Genette is careful to establish jazz's liminal position between rehearsed performance, or composition, and improvisation. "[L']autonomie d'une improvisation ne peut être absolue", he notes. "En pratique [...] une improvisation, musicale ou autre, s'appuie toujours soit sur un thème préexistant, sur le mode de la variation ou de la paraphrase, soit sur un certain nombre de formules ou de clichés" (1994, p. 68). In this way, Sartre's paratext and jazz text are one and same: both are predicated on the interpenetration of the improvised or autographic, on the one hand, and, on the other, the referenced or allographic.

⁴⁷ See note thirty-five above.

⁴⁸ For compelling readings of this poetics of modernity, see Ross Chambers's *Loiterature* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) and Michel Covin's *L'Homme de la rue: Essai sur la poétique baudelairienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000). Chambers refers to this distancing effect as 'belatedness'.

⁴⁹ Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvres poétiques* (Paris: Editions Atlas, 1991), p. 63 (our emphasis).

the reader (as producer of the writerly text). Consider Richard Machin and Christopher Norris's discussion of the situatedness of poetic meaning and identity:

The source of meaning always used to be an author. But it might be the reader (just another author), language (the medium as the message), or ideology (a mixture of all three). We do always require a source, a centre around which we can coordinate strategies to 'make sense' of a piece of writing—much as we require the subject for a verb. (In this sense, 'It's great', said of a poem, is akin to 'It's raining', said of the weather.) Within the ensuing discourse a new subjectivity emerges, which the text then claims and reproduces as its own. Since, without enlisting the help of powerful rhetoric, we can't attribute will to an (often departed) author, and since we get the feeling that, no matter how partisan we are, significance within the text is not solely our own responsibility, on many occasions the text's usurpation of a strictly human capacity to make meaning takes place by default. There is certainly a sort of floating subjectivity around when we talk about literature, an 'it' waiting to seize its chance to become an 'I'.⁵⁰

The place of the pronoun 'it' in the statement 'it's raining' is directly comparable to that of the paratext in relation to the text that it presents; it is arguably both inside and outside (the meaning of) this statement. If we follow Machin and Norris's line, then, the contextualization of the otherwise floating subjectivity of poetic text, in an attempt to produce meaning, is *per se* a paratextual act. From this perspective, the apparently limited scope for paratextuality in poetic text (there is insufficient room in a short poem for the dermal layers of the text to be replicated as sub-dermal folds inside it) can be reconfigured as an equivalence of poetics and paratextuality. Certainly, we have tried to demonstrate in this chapter how this impersonal subjectivity is given a personal voice via the paratext, albeit *sotto voce* or vicariously, as absence—through the signposting of its presence in the 'other' text. In the case of "Le Dormeur du val" this folding of the opening gambit into a succession of oxymoronic similes effectively occupies the whole poetic space. The 'it', or poem, is therefore both itself and the voice that it is not, that is to say whence it came (the muse or voice of its inspiration) or whither it is destined (the voice of the reader or of its interpretation). This internalization of the paratext, then, is the expression of 'it' as always already *becoming-I*.

Paroles

Our final example of the becoming-text is the poetry of Jacques Prévert, whose *Paroles* are a twentieth-century example of this same paratextual folding.⁵¹ While we might think immediately of the dual voice of "Le Cancre", with its chiasmatic opening lines ("Il dit non avec la tête / mais il dit oui avec le cœur"), or "Déjeuner du matin", where a lamenting of the suppression of words beneath the weight of everyday gestures ultimately stands as an expression—in everyday words—of the ethereal (this is the non-poetic poem as elevation to

⁵⁰ Richard Machin and Christopher Norris (eds), *Post-structuralist Readings of English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). This quotation is taken from the editors' introduction (pp. 1-19) p. 4.

⁵¹ Jacques Prévert, *Paroles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). The edition quoted here is the 1993 Folio edition. These poems were very much a product of the end of the Second World War and were first published in Paris by Le Point du Jour in 1945. The original anthology was added to in 1947 before its publication by Gallimard.

poetry), the poem that perhaps best expresses the meeting of opposed ‘becoming-I’s at the interface of text and non-text is “Rue de Seine”.⁵²

Although this poem appears at first glance to be the story of two lovers talking at cross-purposes on the rue de Seine as their relationship decays, the opening lines set up an ambiguity suggestive of a relationship breakdown of another, more reflexive type:

Rue de Seine dix heures et demie
le soir
au coin d’une autre rue⁵³

When considered paratextually, these lines announce a double space. Like the chiasmatic double (‘yes’ and ‘no’) poem that is “Le Cancre”, “Rue de Seine” offers itself as a site of mobility. It seems to take place both in rue de Seine and at the corner of another street. And yet what is the poem if not rue de Seine, its eponymous locale? That is to say that “Rue de Seine” is a street that bears its name and another one; it is itself and the site of its own otherness.

The departure from Paris of this particular becoming-text is less dramatic than the imaginary journeys of *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *La Nausée*. In this case, the other space does not even feign non-Parisianness. In terms of its doubly Parisian structure, the poem’s becoming-I echoes the opposition of presentation and representation (or re-presentation) on which Ross Chambers and Michel Covin’s understanding of the poetics of modernity are predicated. The Parisian streets along which one walks in real time (which are present to us) are always ghosted by the streets of the city past (for Chambers) and our mental representations of that same city (for Covin). This is the power of *la flânerie*: walking in the city activates a double space of familiarity and unfamiliarity;⁵⁴ each city street is somehow both here and there. If “Rue de Seine” announces itself to the reader as poem (and more than just a *scène de rue* in reverse), and as a poem constructed on the tension between rue de Seine and another street, it is because this is the paradoxical, prose-poetic identity of rue de Seine itself. In addition to being a continuous double actualization as street and poem, when considered from a poststructuralist perspective, “Rue de Seine” is a double *street-poem* because it is simultaneously offered (by the poet, as becoming-book) and de-/re-constructed (by the reader, as becoming-text). For, reading itself operates the same defamiliarization as walking in Paris: as Chambers suggests, “reading a text is a matter of activating the split between ‘saying’ and ‘meaning’”.⁵⁵ Despite its more familiar verse structure, Prévert’s poetry is auto-antonymically Parisian in the same way as Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris*; it gives voice to words unsaid by recalling the absence that is the constant underside of presence.⁵⁶

⁵² These three poems, “Le Cancre”, “Déjeuner du matin” and “Rue de Seine” can be found in *Paroles*, pp. 63, 148-9 and 60-2, respectively.

⁵³ *Paroles*, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Chambers, p. 217.

⁵⁵ Chambers, p. 217. And as Covin (*passim*) stresses, Paris is prose poem.

⁵⁶ While we should not personally hesitate to identify Prévert’s *Paroles* as prose poetry on the basis of their self-reflexively, and specifically Parisian, embodiment of the auto-differentiation of modernity, the question of their generic classification is a vexed one indeed. In a famous article in 1958 Jacques Poujol, having himself hesitated over the categorization of this “poésie nouvelle qui se moque de la poésie”, finally decided that “les écrits de Prévert sont de la poésie et non de la prose”. (Jacques Poujol, “Jacques Prévert ou le langage en procès”, *French Review*, 31.5 (1958), 387-95 [391, 392].) This is symptomatic, we should suggest, of the popular understanding of this popular, and popularizing, work; it also speaks volumes for the way in which Baudelaire’s auto-antonymic form has been misunderstood, and put aside, as a sort of mixture of poetry and prose.

The lines that follow position a human character, a ghost to haunt the eponymous, geo-poetic protagonist: “au coin d’une autre rue /un homme titube... un homme jeune”. And like the street itself, the man is an oscillation, quite literally. The hesitation that both man and street (re)present is punctuated periodically by a demand for truth—“Pierre dis-moi la vérité”. This is the poem’s second—or other—leitmotiv; as such, it parallels the mantric recurrence of the eponymous street within the poem. This call for truth, in the abstract sense, that which is opposed to the existential reality of the present, underscores the dissection of “Rue de Seine” into itself and its other, rue de Seine, and in so doing, it takes on the paratextual status of the title. Both elements—title as expression of prose-poetic self-alterity and leitmotiv as, arguably disingenuous, demand for clarity—cut into and integrate the body of the poem, functioning like the sub-dermal folds of the paratextual song in *La Nausée* or the periodic dreams within the dream of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. In other words, the poem stages the breakdown of that most amorous of literary *ménages à trois*—that between the poet and his muse, on the one hand, and the poet and the blank page, on the other.⁵⁷

The hesitation of the poem recalls what Covin considers “l’indétermination du poète”.⁵⁸ But it also, of course, parallels the foundational hesitation of the paratext, oscillating between text and non-text. This takes us some way to explaining the airing of dirty linen in “Rue de Seine”. Not only are internal (domestic) matters aired publicly, and thus taken outside, but the outside is also taken in (in this case, the muse, the poet and the threat of the publishing house are all brought inside the text). Thus, the personal voice of the poem (the *je* of “je veux tout savoir”) is an expression of the desire to know (how its inner workings play ‘out’) as well as a desire to be known (by the reader). The poem is a series of self-reflexive lines of poetry, all of which function as sub-dermal folds, taking the outside in and the inside out. Rather than an impersonal pronoun (the seemingly ubiquitous *ce*), which grounds the personal narrative that follows in an intertextual, and depersonalized, mechanics, Prévert elects to proliferate personal pronouns in order to expose the impersonal mechanics at work in “Rue de Seine” (in addition to the *je* of the poem, there are also the *il* of the poet—the desire to give structure to abstract thought—and the *elle* of the muse—the will to become, to be structured as poem). Thus, when *il* puts on his *imperméable*, it is to dress himself as a typical line in a poem by Prévert; and when the poet is left at the end of the poem, locked in hesitation before his typewriter, he offers a *mise en abyme* of the writing process. Once again, as in so many of the *Paroles*—Prévert’s little acts of speech becoming capitalized as poetry—but perhaps more reflexively staged here than in the others, the inability to write poetry is broken down into its constituent (anti-)parts until it has become its own antithesis. The poem is not only the voice, but the proof of the impossibility of the non-poem. “Rue de Seine” is quite simply its own other, almost to the exclusion of its more obviously present self as absence.

By folding the paratextual layers of the poetic text into the body of the poem, Prévert inoculates his work against the nausea of the blank page. As was demonstrated in David Gascoigne’s opening chapter above, the paratext, the will of the text to become book and/or the will of the book to become text, is no longer left on the edge, between here and there; instead, its power is mobilized and infused throughout the text. In the end, in the infinite regress of the typewriter within the typewriter, the power of Prévert’s poetry lies in the

⁵⁷ Covin’s description of the way in which the self-alterity of Baudelaire’s prose poetry is established in *Le Spleen de Paris* is an uncanny evocation of the paratextual dynamics of “Rue de Seine”. Prévert then, like Baudelaire before him, is “partagé entre le souci de faire apparaître, dans le titre, le motif parisien, et celui de montrer explicitement que le traitement de ce motif [exige] désormais une forme nouvelle : le petit poème en prose” (Covin, p. 51). The title of “Rue de Seine” performs both these functions throughout the poem.

⁵⁸ Covin, p. 51.

poignancy of its failure to coincide with itself. In this last becoming-text, the point of separation of paratext and text is abandoned, and the poem (in this case, “Déjeuner du matin”) becomes a lovers’ lament, one more song of separation:

Et moi j’ai pris
Ma tête dans ma main
Et j’ai pleuré⁵⁹

Here, at the end, the paratext is all there is.

⁵⁹ *Paroles*, p. 149.