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Rethinking Queer Poetry:

Queerness in the French Lyric Tradition from 1819 to 1918

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in French and Francophone Studies

by

Louise Alison Brown

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Rethinking Queer Poetry:

Queerness in the French Lyric Tradition from 1819 to 1918

by

Louise Alison Brown

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Laure Murat, Chair

Current conceptions of queer poetry focus solely on poetry written by a queer poet or poetry written about a queer subject-matter. Consequently, they rely on primarily biographical and thematic readings of poetic texts. In this dissertation, I argue that a poem's queerness does not derive solely from the queer identity of its author or the queer nature of its thematic content, and I call for a critical approach to queer poetry that supplements its conventionally biographical and thematic readings with more literary and theoretical readings. In order to rethink current conceptions of queer poetry, I examine the nature of both queerness and poetry, and I explore the ways in which the two intersect. I situate this exploration in the French literary tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a context marked by three cultural phenomena of particular interest – a revitalization of the lyric tradition, a burgeoning interest in non-normative sexual and gender identities, and the emergence of *modernité* in the artistic domain. An examination of these intersecting phenomena provides a framework for exploring the intricate relation between poetry and queerness. On a discursive level, I demonstrate that the French lyric tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is shaped by, and shapes in return, expressions and conceptions of queerness. And on a more theoretical level, I develop the notion of "literary queering" to demonstrate how a poem's queerness can also result from its subversion or transgression of literary conventions such as the structure of the love lyric paradigm, the nature of versification, and the relation between text and page. As a result, I show that the literary field of queer poetry is in fact much larger and more diverse than we currently assume, and that a more comprehensive critical approach to queer poetry involves novel applications for both poetic theory and queer theory.

The dissertation of Louise Alison Brown is approved.

Joseph E. Bristow

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Laure Murat, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

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VITA

Before attending the University of California, Los Angeles, Louise Alison Brown earned a Master of Arts with Honors in French Literature in 2011 and a Bachelor of Arts with Highest Distinction in French in 2007. She completed both degrees at the University of Kansas, Lawrence.

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INTRODUCTION

What is queer poetry? Is it poetry written by a queer poet such as Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, or Renée Vivien? Is it poetry written about a queer subject-matter, like Charles Baudelaire's "Lesbos" ("Lesbos") or "Femmes damnées" ("Damned Women"), which describe scenes of Sapphic eroticism? Or is it poetry that challenges normative knowledges about the nature and functioning of the poetic genre, such as Marie Krysinska's free-verse poems, Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrams, or Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" ("A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance")? Our conception of queer poetry depends in large part on our understanding of queerness, and it determines, to a large extent, our critical approach to poetic texts. Current conceptions of queer poetry focus solely on poetry written by a queer poet or poetry written about a queer subject-matter. Consequently, they rely on primarily biographical and thematic readings of poetic texts. In this dissertation, I argue that a poem's queerness does not derive solely from the queer identity of its author or the queer nature of its thematic content, and I call for a critical approach to queer poetry that supplements its conventionally biographical and thematic readings with literary and theoretical readings of poetic texts.

In order to interrogate the concept of queer poetry, I consider the nature of both queerness and poetry, and I examine the ways in which the two can intersect. I situate this examination in the French literary tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a result of three concurrent cultural phenomena, this context fosters a particularly intricate relation between the poetic and the queer: Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, French society became increasingly fascinated with questions of "sexual perversion" and "gender subversion," and this burgeoning cultural interest led to a proliferation of discourses on the matter. This discursive phenomenon was paralleled by a sudden revitalization and rapid evolution of the French lyric tradition. After the relatively scarce poetic production of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the turn of the nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of poetic works and a dynamic succession of large-scale poetic movements. And in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the notion of *modernité*, which began to take hold in the artistic domain, encouraged poets to experiment with formal and stylistic innovations that undermined prosodic conventions and destabilized conceptions of the poetic genre.

I ask how these concurrent cultural phenomena intersected and influenced one another. In what way did the revitalized lyric tradition shape the discursive production of queerness in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France? And in what way was it shaped by it in return? How might the formal and stylistic poetic innovations characteristic of *modernité* constitute forms of "literary queering"? Under what circumstances can formal poetic features like versification be considered queer? And what insights can be gained from conceptualizing queerness in poetic terms? Such questions reveal important intersections between literary studies and LGBTQ studies, and they concern the critical potential of both poetic theory and queer theory.

State of the Field

Despite the rapidly growing field of LGBTQ+ studies and its frequent intersection with literary studies, the questions raised above remain largely, if not entirely, unanswered. The most in-depth study concerning the role of French literature in the discursive production of queerness is Michael Lucey's *Never Say I: Sexuality and the First Person in Colette, Gide, and Proust* (2006). Lucey closely examines the social and historical contexts influencing twentieth century literary articulations of queer sexualities, and he focuses his analysis on the literary technique of first-person narration. By drawing from the field of linguistics, Lucey thoroughly explores the pragmatic and metapragmatic issues at stake in the writing and reception of literary works by Marcel Proust, André Gide, and Colette, who all narrated stories of same-sex desire in the first person. But the scope of Lucey's study does not consider first-person expressions of same-sex desire in the context of poetry. As a literary form that is practically defined by its relation to the pronoun "I," lyric poetry could provide a rich terrain for such a systematic analysis of pragmatic and metapragmatic issues surrounding first-person articulations of queerness.

In *The Gendered Lyric: Subjectivity and Difference in Nineteenth-Century French Poetry* (1999), Gretchen Schultz applies this level of systematic and contextualized analysis to lyric poetry, but in regards to the period's literary representations of gender, rather than queerness. By analyzing "the changing inscriptions of gender on various levels of the poem at disparate moments in nineteenth century France" and by considering "the play of gender in a number of overlaying categories (formal, rhetorical, ideological, and subjective) that define the lyric experience," Schultz provides a systematic examination of French poetry as it relates to historical conceptions and representations of gender (6-7). When applied in relation to the notion of queerness, a similar degree of formal and stylistic analysis, which takes into account various aspects of lyric convention particular to nineteenth century French poetry, could provide novel insights into the ways in which the French lyric tradition has informed, and has been informed by, the period's discursive production of queer identity and desire.

Nicole Albert's *Lesbian Decadence: Representations in Art and Literature of Fin-de-Siècle France* is the only extant critical work to consider the role of French lyric poetry in the discursive production of queerness. Published in French in 2005 and then in a revised English edition in 2016, this study in comparative literature traces literary and non-literary representations of lesbianism at the turn of the twentieth century. Albert's overview of literary representations incorporates the work of poets such as Charles Baudelaire, Renée Vivien, and Pierre Louÿs, as well as lesser-known poets such as Lucie Delarue-Mardrus. And her second chapter on "The Poets' Muse" catalogues diverse poetic depictions of Sappho. Albert's discussion, however, does not take into consideration the formal, stylistic, and rhetorical characteristics of these poetic depictions. As such, *Lesbian Decadence* underlines poetry's central role in the period's discursive production of lesbianism, but it does not examine the nature of this role.

Extant criticism exploring the intersections of the French lyric tradition and the discursive production of queerness in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France is limited not only in scope, but also in its critical approach. Published in 2014, Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins's *Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* is the most recent and extensive collection of critical approaches to the study of lyric poetry. The anthology contains a section entitled "Lyric and Sexual Difference," which, according to the editors, provides "several examples of gender criticism and queer theory that generate different histories of lyric reading by foregrounding questions of sexual difference" (7). These examples are intended to demonstrate "how attention to ideologies of sexual difference also tends to call into question ideologies of the lyric" (504). Of the five exemplary articles, however, four address questions related uniquely to women's writing and employ feminist readings. The only selection out of the five to address questions of queerness is Thomas E. Yingling's 1990 article entitled "The Homosexual Lyric." Yingling's readings of Hart Crane's poetry trace the evolution of Crane's references to homosexuality throughout his poetic corpus. But since Yingling is concerned primarily with the content of such references, his critical approach is limited to entirely thematic readings of poetic texts.

In *Queer Lyrics: Difficulty and Closure in American Poetry* (2002), John Vincent reminds us that there is more to a poetic text than its thematic content. He therefore argues that critical approaches to poetic representations of queerness should not be limited to purely thematic readings. While there are many excellent studies that highlight the queerness of a poet's work or life, Vincent remarks, the lyric as a literary form has not yet been examined in relation to questions of queerness. He attributes this neglect to queer theorists' privileging historical readings of texts over more formalist approaches, which tend to produce transhistorical readings less concerned with recovering a queer literary tradition (xiii). He proposes that lyric form also plays a significant role in transmitting queer meaning: "Lyric devices have been, since Whitman, used as tools in powerful survival and world-making strategies," he explains (xiii). By focusing on rhetorical suspense as one such device, Vincent argues that Walt Whitman's use of the "not … not … not … but" structure, which characterizes many of the "Calamus" poems, "corresponds to the thematic oscillation between absolute availability and absolute unavailability, materiality and ghostliness, and between the proffering and withholding of 'the truth' about the poet's sexual identity" (14). He approaches the poetry of Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, John Ashbery, and Jack Spicer in a somewhat similar manner, by examining how their use of literary devices such as paradox, polysemy, and disembodiment affect their different expressions of queer identity or desire.

By incorporating a consideration of literary devices into his analyses of poetry, Vincent thus moves beyond the purely thematic readings that characterize earlier critical approaches to poetic expressions of queerness. But his critical approach remains limited in another important way. Vincent states that his readings of poems by Crane, Moore, Ashbery, and Spicer "will always attend to the effect of sexual identity on the meanings in the poem" (xvi). In other words, since he works entirely from within the domain of biographical readings, Vincent analyzes these poems in relation to their author, and more particularly, in relation to their author's sexual identity. Critics after Vincent have continued to rely on such biographical readings when examining poetic expressions of queer identity or desire. This approach, however, implies an essentializing view of queerness. By assuming that queer poets' sexual identities will inform the meanings of their poems, critics are, at best, assuming that such poets are primarily concerned with the expression of their own queer identity or desire. Or, somewhat more problematically, critics are assuming that such poets' sexual identities will affect the meaning of their poems regardless of the poems' thematic content. Such an essentializing reading reduces the poetry of presumably queer poets to an expression, whether intentional or unintentional, of queerness.

For this reason, my approach to queer poetry moves beyond primarily thematic *and* biographical readings. In order to move beyond thematic readings, I build upon Vincent's approach. In addition to incorporating a consideration of literary devices into my analyses of poems, I focus on the nature and function of lyric poetry as a literary form. I ask why an individual might chose to express a queer identity or desire through *poetry* in particular: How does this poetic expression differ from novelistic, theatrical, or non-literary expressions of queerness? In what ways does the poetic genre facilitate or complicate such expressions of queerness? How might characteristically lyric features, like rhyme scheme and meter, non-linear syntax, highly connotative language, or the ambiguous referent of the lyric "I" shape expressions of, and even conceptions of, queer identity or desire? And in order to move beyond biographical readings, I examine the role of poetry in the *production* as well as the *expression* of queerness. Rather than simply viewing a poetic text as a reflection of its author's queer identity, I consider how a poem might function as a source of queerness, in and of itself. How might certain poems' destabilizations of the lyric "I," for example, queer the historically heteronormative nature of lyric subjectivity? Can manipulations of conventional rhyme scheme and meter constitute purely literary forms of queering? And how might visually innovative presentations of a poem's text work to queer normative processes of meaning production? Such questions become possible when working with a definition of queer that is not limited in its application to the ideology of heteronormativity.

Defining Queer

Queerness is notoriously difficult to define. Its meaning has evolved significantly over the last few centuries; its current definitions are varied and sometimes even contradictory; and for certain theorists, queerness must, by its very nature, defy definition. The Merriam-Webster dictionary notes that the first uses of queer as an adjective can be traced back to the early 1500s, where it signified "differing in some way from what is usual or normal" ("Queer"). It was first used as a verb in the early 1800s, meaning "to spoil the effect or success of something" ("Queer"). And it first appeared as a noun later in that century to refer to a person whose sexuality or gender deviated from established norms ("Queer"). In the twentieth century, this nominal use of the word was popularized as a slur to stigmatize such individuals. And through its linguistic re-appropriation by members of the LGBTQ+ community, it has also come to function positively as an umbrella term with which any and all members of the community can self-identify.

With the advent of Queer Theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholars began exploring the signifying potential of queer as an adjective, and especially, as a verb. Informed by poststructuralism, scholars of queer theory avoided the nominal use of queer to denote an identity in the humanist sense (a stable and defining essence) by focusing instead on how it might be employed to resist normative identities and challenge the normative knowledges that shape them. In this vein, the term queer has taken on a myriad of definitions as scholars have attempted to describe what basically amounts to a non-identity, and as they have attempted to theorize the practice of undermining normalized practices. In *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (1995), for example, David Halperin argues that queer "demarcates not a positivity but a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative" (62). As such, "Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence" (62). For Cherry Smith in "What Is This Thing Called Queer" (1997), by comparison, queer is less an undefinable and deviant identity than it is "a strategy, an attitude" that "articulates a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality, and the family" (280). In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (1993), Michael Warner proposes that queer is not so much a questioning of "the normal behavior of the social" as a questioning of "the *idea* of normal behavior" so as to "bring skepticism to the methodologies founded on that idea" (xxvii). And for Annamarie Jagose, who maintains in *Queer Theory* (1996) that "queer itself can have neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics," the concept remains amorphous in terms of its nature and purpose (96).

A further disputed aspect of "queer" concerns the context(s) in which it manifests and operates. For Halperin, queer is a "positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practice" (62). In this sense, "it could include some married couples without children, for example" (62). But while Halperin confines manifestations of queerness to the realm of sexual practice, he considers its subversive potential to have a much wider scope: "It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject," he states, "that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviors, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-construction, and practices of community – for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire" (62). As Cathy Cohen demonstrates in "Punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens" (1997) however, "these intersecting systems of power" can only be restructured if we understand queer to lie outside not simply heterosexuality, but rather, outside the "dominant constructed norm of state-sanctioned white middle- and upper-class heterosexuality" (441). Sexuality is not the only domain in which norms function to maintain a certain structure of power, since the construction of normative sexuality is also intricately entwined with the construction of normative racial, class, and national identities. As such, queerness becomes manifest in the domain of race, socio-economic class, and statehood, as well as sexuality.

And just as there is no true consensus on how to define queer, there is no true consensus on how, and what, *to* queer. For Monique Wittig, it comes down to the presumed opposition between the male sex and the female sex. In *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (1992), she argues that the category of sex, like that of gender, has been socially constructed. "For there is no sex," she explains, "There is but sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary" (2). Heterosexuality, which Wittig characterizes as a social system based on the oppression of women by men, justifies this oppression through the doctrine of the difference between the sexes. And so, liberation from this oppression requires "destroying the categories of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals" (20). As a literary writer of experimental fiction, Wittig takes on this task in the domain of language, where she focuses on one element in particular – grammatical gender. She argues that it is through the existence of grammatical gender that sex "permeates the whole body of language and forces every locutor, if she belongs to the oppressed sex, to proclaim it in her speech" (79). In heavily gendered languages like French, when a woman speaks, she must speak *as a woman*; language has delineated her subjectivity in advance, and it can only ever be a sexed subjectivity. For this reason, Wittig works to destroy the category of gender in language, an objective that inspires and structures her novels *L'Opoponax* (1964), *Les Guérillères* (1969), and *Le Corps lesbien* (1973).

Judith Butler builds upon Wittig's belief that the opposition of the sexes is not the origin of oppression but the mark of it, and she transfers this contrary perspective to the realm of gender identity. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler explains that gender is not expressive, but performative. That is to say, gender attributes "effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (141). In this sense, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (140). These acts can manifest discursively, behaviorally, physically, etc., and it is their enforced repetition in culturally recognizable and accepted ways that constitutes the subject.[1] There is no subject that exists outside this stylized repetition of acts and the gender identities that they construct. And so, Butler argues, it is not possible to simply destroy sex or gender categories by refusing to use them or participate in them. For this reason, she proposes "a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves" (128). "If," Butler writes, "repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?" (32). In turning to the realm of language, Butler gives the example of the discursive resignification of the word "queer." By systematically appropriating and redeploying the queer identity, those labeled as such have reversed its de-sanctioning power in order "to sanction a contestation of the terms of sexual legitimacy" ("Critically Queer" 23).

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[1] See Judith Butler's "Critically Queer," particularly pp. 21-23, for discussion of the compulsory nature of this repetition.

For Lee Edelman, a proponent of the "anti-social thesis" in queer theory, we should not be attempting to sanction anything. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Edelman takes issue with the particularly pervasive norm of the invaluable Child. "Historically constructed […] to serve as the repository of various sentimentalized cultural identifications," Edelman explains, "the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (10-11). This social order prioritizes the interests and wellbeing of its figurative, future, ideal citizen, often over the interests and wellbeing of its actual, current citizens, by constructing a social reality "operating in the name and in the direction of a constantly anticipated future reality" (8-9). Edelman proposes that we refuse to participate in this "Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism" that "only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations as reality itself" (4, 18). And the only position allowing for such a refusal, Edelman explains, is the position of the queer, particularly as it is characterized by the conservative right – a threat to reproduction and to the perpetuation of the social order as we know it.

For Edelman, the queer is to the social order as the death drive is to Jacques Lacan's symbolic order: "As the constancy of a pressure both alien and internal to the logic of the

Symbolic, as the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (9). The queer, for Edelman, "exposes the obliquity of our relation to what we experience in and as social reality," and if we are to intervene in the reproduction of such a reality, we must embrace heteronormativity's ascription of negativity to the queer (6-7). Rather than queering heteronormative ideologies in an attempt to sanction queer subjectivities within the social order, we should be queering the driving ideology of the social order at large – that of reproductive futurism, which is reinforced through an idealization of the figure of the Child.

But if reproductive futurism "only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it," how does this queer non-subject manifest? In no specific way. It is simply a place holder that various illegitimate identities will likely occupy at various times. But its nature and function can be conceptualized in linguistic terms: The death drive, Edelman explains, "holds the place of what meaning misses in much the same way that the signifier preserves at the heart of the signifying order the empty and arbitrary letter" (9). And through its alignment with the death drive, the queer functions in a similar manner. In the realm of language, the queer is the arbitrary letter, the empty place holder that has no inherent meaning, yet upon which we have constructed an entire system of meaning – much like the social order. It is this ultimate meaninglessness that has the potential to undermine the reality we have constructed upon it.

The queer theories of Wittig, Butler, and Edelman differ in significant ways. While Wittig turns her attention to undermining the use of gender in language in order to destroy the categories of sex in society, Butler does not believe such a goal is possible. If gender in fact constitutes the subject whose sex it claims to express, one must continue to perform a gender in order to remain a subject. Our agency therefore lies in our ability to subversively perform gender in order to resignify what is meant by "feminine" and "masculine." And for Edelman, we should not be striving to remain subjects at all because the social order is a constructed reality that only invests us as subjects if we invest in its premise of reproductive futurism by prioritizing the well-being of the figurative Child.

But these theories also intersect with and parallel one another in important ways. Wittig, Butler, and Edelman all contextualize their theories within a discussion of the nature and function of language. And the larger underlying mechanism of each of their theories is the same: Wittig aims to challenge heterosexuality by destroying sex as an identity category. Butler aims to challenge heteronormativity by resignifying gender through a process of subversive repetition. And Edelman aims to challenge what he terms "reproductive futurism" by calling for us to *not*, in fact, fight for the Child. Each theorist has taken issue with a hegemonic ideology, turned toward one of its principal norms, and proposed a method for undermining this norm. While their methods may differ (with Wittig preferring to destroy the norm, Butler to resignify it, and Edelman to oppose it), their theories all aim to undermine this norm in such a way as to challenge the hegemonic ideology that it serves to reinforce.

Given the dynamic nature of the term queer, I work with a definition that is both practical and theoretical. In a practical sense, I use it to refer to poets who do not appear to conform to either historical or modern-day conceptions of normative gender identifications or sexual orientations. And in a more theoretical sense, I use the term to refer to something that challenges a hegemonic ideology by undermining one or more of its norms. Since undermining a norm is not necessarily the same thing as differing or deviating from that norm, this theoretical conception of queer is more specific than most current conceptions, which do not adequately distinguish between “different,” “deviant,” and “queer.” At the same time, this definition is more flexible than most current definitions because it is not limited to the specific ideology of heteronormativity. It can operate to undermine ideologies that intersect with heteronormativity, such as those maintained by normative constructions of race, class, or statehood; it can undermine ideologies that are even more encompassing than heteronormativity, like the ideology of sexualnormativity[2]; and it can challenge dominant ideologies that function in domains seemingly far removed from that of gender and sexuality, such as the domain of literature.

New Pathways

By defining queer in terms of its engagement with ideologies and their norms, I am able to extract it from its conventional engagement with social norms and transpose it into an engagement with literary norms, a contextual shift that opens new pathways for critical applications of queer theory and critical approaches to poetry. Queer theory has lost some of its edge in recent years. As queer has become a buzzword in literary studies, undiscerning applications of the term have somewhat diluted the concept, confounding it most frequently with “deviance” or simply with “difference.” The application of queer theory to literary norms and ideologies, however, can renew its critical edge, since the task of extracting queerness from its social context and transposing it into a literary context requires identifying and articulating, in theoretical terms, what exactly makes something queer and what exactly constitutes an act of queering. And while the notion of literary queering can involve purely formal elements of literary texts, it is by no means transhistorical. Much like social norms, literary norms change over time, as do the ideologies that they serve to enforce. The queerness of a given poem therefore depends in large part on the historical context in which it is written and read, on the poem's relation to poetic convention, and on its engagement with the lyric tradition.

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[2] Sexualnormativity is reinforced by the norm of allosexuality, which assumes that all subjects must have a sexual orientation.

Current critical approaches to queer poetry do not incorporate this level of contextualized reading. This is likely due to the assumption that a poem's queerness derives solely from the identity of its author or the nature of its subject-matter, hence the reliance upon primarily biographical and thematic readings. While such readings provide important insight into poets' expressions of gender identity or sexual orientation, they do not consider queerness in its theoretical sense, and they do not account for the particularly *poetic* nature of such expressions. When working with a theoretical understanding of queer, however, a poem's queerness can arise from other aspects of the poetic act, as well. The text's visual presentation on the page, the poet's manipulation of certain formal elements, or the destabilizing readings that the poem produces can all contribute to a poem's queerness if they undermine an established literary norm in such a way as to challenge an accepted truth about the nature and function of poetry. In this sense, a poem like Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" ("A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance"), which has neither a queer author (presumably) nor a queer subject-matter, could nonetheless be considered queer. Literary forms of queering therefore call into question current conceptions of "queer poetry," a literary category that is perhaps much larger and more diverse than we currently assume.

In this vein, I incorporate a large variety of poets and their works into my examination of the intersections between poetry and queerness. The first chapter looks at queerness in relation to the figure of the poet. Throughout history, poets have been characterized in various ways, from social anomalies to social anomies, from enlightened individuals to monstrous individuals. And in nineteenth century France, these characterizations began to consolidate, appearing consistently enough in literary discourse to form identifiable poet "types." I ask if there is anything queer about French cultural conceptualizations of the poet during this time. Further, I consider whether any particular poet types might have influenced, or been influenced by, cultural conceptualizations of sexual types, which began to appear at or around the same time. Drawing from Alfred de Vigny's *Stello*, I compare his characterization of the *poète maudit* (accursed poet) with Marcel Proust's characterization of the sexual invert in *La Race maudite* (*The Accursed Race*) to reveal the similarities between their anomalous statuses in society. My analysis of the *poète voyou* (delinquent poet) draws from poetic works by Paul Verlaine and Pierre François Lacenaire to explore how the poet, conceived as social anomy and functioning in deliberate disaccord with societal norms and values, recalls queer theory's deconstructive drive to denaturalize dominant social classifications and destabilize normative social order. I turn to Arthur Rimbaud's description of the *poète voyant* (enlightened poet) to examine the queer potential of a poetic vision that disrupts meaning, transcends the ideologies that inform it, and imagines an alternative reality. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the *femme poète* (poet woman). Drawing from publications by various male critics, as well as poetic works by Renée Vivien and Charles Baudelaire, I examine how the figure of the "poet woman" relates to the concurrently developing notion of a "third sex" and how Sappho, as a particularly lesbian poet figure, relates to Baudelaire's poetic ideal.

The second chapter looks at queerness in relation to the lyric "I." Centuries of lyric tradition have shaped this lyric "I," which, by the nineteenth century, comes to have a particularly constraining effect on the poetic subject that it precedes and conditions. As Judith Butler argues in "Critically Queer" (1993), "Where there is an 'I' who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that

‘I’ and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will” (18). In this second chapter, I examine how certain poets, over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, succeeded in forging a new trajectory, one that created space for the expression and formation of a queer subjectivity. Drawing from Butler’s theory of subversive repetition as a way to “work the weaknesses” in a given norm, I discuss poets who took up the highly conventionalized lyric “I” in somewhat destabilizing ways, and I examine how this destabilizing use of the lyric “I” leads to a variety of queer readings. The chapter begins with an analysis of the poetry of Marcel Proust, whose inconsistent use of the first-person pronoun renders it referentially ambiguous and challenges normative conceptions of both poetic and gay subjectivity. I then turn my attention toward the lyric “I” in the context of translation to analyze how Renée Vivien’s use of transcreation, Pierre Louÿs’s pseudo-translation, and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore’s possible enactment of auto-translation blur the distinction between author and translator, a hierarchical binary traditionally conceptualized in heteronormative terms. The chapter concludes with a look at certain poets’ destabilizations of the lyric “I” in the context of the French love lyric tradition, a literary domain that has been firmly intertwined, historically and structurally, with heteronormative constructions of identity and desire. I analyze how Paul Verlaine’s use of a plural feminine first-person pronoun and Renée Vivien’s use of an explicitly androgynous first-person pronoun destabilize the foundational structure of the love lyric paradigm, which relies on the binary opposition of lyric “I” and lyric “you,” subject and object, male and female, self and other.

The third and final chapter looks at queerness in relation to the poetic line. Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, poets manipulated the poetic line on a semantic, metric, and visual level. I ask how such manipulations might have facilitated expressions of queerness, might constitute forms of literary queering, and might aid in new conceptualizations of queerness. The chapter begins by approaching the poetic line from a semantic perspective. In my analysis of poetic texts by Marcel Proust, Renée Vivien, and Paul Verlaine, I examine how the poetic line can express queerness both verbally and non-verbally, and I consider what kinds of interpretive issues arise when reading queerness through a line's non-verbal elements such as meter, rhyme scheme, or form. I also analyze Mallarmé's "Sonnet in -x" to determine if its cultivation of meaninglessness represents a form of queer negativity. I then approach the poetic line from a metric perspective to examine if and how Victor Hugo's "dislocated alexandrine," Marie Krysinska's free verse, and Charles Baudelaire's prose poems, might constitute literary forms of queerness. And I conclude the chapter by approaching the poetic line from a visual perspective. At the end of the nineteenth century, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, poets began to attribute substance and plasticity to the poetic line – a previously transparent structural framework – by visually manipulating it and repositioning it upon the page. I analyze one of Guillaume Apollinaire's calligrams and Stéphane Mallarmé's "A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance" to explore how their experimental presentations of the poetic line upon the page might help us visualize beyond the heteronormative paradigm and conceptualize new directions for queer theory.

With each of these chapters, I intend to provide a different perspective on the relation between the poetic and the queer in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France. And by demonstrating the intimateness and the intricateness of this relation, I hope to accomplish three critical aims: First, to highlight French lyric poetry's pivotal role in the period's discursive production of queerness, a role that has been largely neglected in both literary studies and LGBTQ+ studies; second, to thoroughly examine the nature of queerness and the critical potential of queer theory; and third, to challenge current conceptions of, and critical approaches to, queer poetry – a literary category that has the potential to be much larger and more complex than we currently assume.

CHAPTER 1: THE POET TYPE

Over the course of French literary history, the poet has been characterized in a variety of ways from prophet to bohemian to rabble-rouser. And in nineteenth century France, such cultural characterizations of the poet figure arise frequently enough in literary discourse to constitute identifiable poet “types.” This chapter examines the nature of these types, focusing specifically on the *poète maudit* (accursed poet), the *poète voyou* (delinquent poet), the *poète voyant* (enlightened poet), and the *femme poète* (poet woman). It considers the queerness of such poetic identities and explores the relation between their formation and the formation, shortly afterward, of novel sexual types. And it concludes with a discussion of male poets’ identifications with the figure of Sappho, who re-emerged during the nineteenth century as a definitively lesbian figure, and whose lesbianism became closely tied to Charles Baudelaire’s poetic ideal.

Section 1: The *Poète Maudit*

The eponymous character of Alfred de Vigny’s *Stello* (1832) is a suffering poet who is regularly afflicted by “les coups d’une tristesse impérissable” (“episodes of endless sorrow”) (95).[3] During one such episode, he calls on the aid of a certain Docteur Noir, with whom he has a long discussion concerning the nature of poets and the misfortune that has beleaguered them throughout history. Over the course of this discussion, the doctor and Stello develop and present a theory of the poet as *maudit* (accursed). How does this characterization of the poet relate to characterizations of the sexual invert, which emerged a little later in the period? And how does it correspond to more modern conceptions of queerness?

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[3] All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

The Docteur Noir reflects upon the suffering and unhappiness that has afflicted poets since the age of Homer, remarking that "les Poètes […] forment, de son temps au nôtre, une chaîne presque sans interruption de glorieux exilés, de courageux persécutés, de penseurs affolés par la misère" ("Poets have formed, from the time of Homer to our present day, an almost continuous line of glorious exiles, courageous martyrs, and tortured philosophers") (247). Why such exile, persecution and misery? Stello attributes this fate to the poet's being essentially different from, and superior to, the masses. In one sense, poets are looked down upon as useless to the functioning and progress of the state (242). And in another, they are resented for their genius and fame: "Multitude sans nom ! Vous êtes née ennemie des noms !" ("Nameless populace! You were born an enemy of the renowned!"), exclaims Stello, "à peine avez-vous fait une gloire, vous la trouvez trop haute et vous la minez sourdement, vous la rongez par le pied et la tête jusqu'à ce qu'elle retombe à votre niveau" ("no sooner have you created a hero than you find him too revered and you quietly begin to undermine his fame, eroding it from both ends until he falls back down to your level") (243). The doctor adds to these reasons the fact that the poet is fundamentally at odds with those members of society occupying positions of power and authority. Referring to the poet Gilbert in particular, he notes that "du jour où il sut lire il fut Poète, et dès lors il appartint à la race toujours maudite par les puissances de la terre" ("from the moment he knew how to read, he was a Poet, and he belonged, from that point onward, to the race of individuals cursed by those in power") (120). "Le Pouvoir est une science de convention" ("Power is a matter of convention"), he explains, adding that "tout ordre social est basé sur un mensonge plus ou moins ridicule" ("every social order is founded upon a more or less absurd lie") (249). "Les beautés de tout art" ("The delicacies of every art"), on the other hand, "ne sont possibles que dérivant de la vérité la plus intime" ("can only derive from the most intimate of truths”), and for this reason, “le Pouvoir, quel qu’il soit, trouve une continuelle opposition dans toute œuvre ainsi créée” (“Power, in whatever form, finds itself in perpetual opposition to any such work of art”) (249-50). As speakers of truth, poets are a threat to the carefully disguised lies upon which the power structures of society are based. Subject, for these reasons, to an “ostracisme perpétuel” (“continuous ostracism”), the poet lives a life of social alienation, persecution, and unhappiness (243).

A century later, in the opening pages of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1921), Marcel Proust elaborates his theory of the sexual invert. Punctuated with allusions to the poetry of Alfred de Vigny, these opening pages establish a very particular literary framework within which to understand this newly emerging sexual type. Having developed the notion of the *poète maudit* in *Stello*, de Vigny serves as an important reference for Proust, who draws from such a characterization of the poet when developing his own characterization of the sexual invert. And in Proust’s earlier elaboration of this theory, the similarity between poet and sexual invert emerges in much more explicit terms. This initial elaboration can be found in the chapter of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (*Against Sainte-Beuve*) entitled “La race maudite” (“The Accursed Race”).

Recounting the various hardships afflicting members of this accursed race, Proust explains that the sexual invert will suffer,

> […] jusqu’au jour infaillible où tôt ou tard il sera dévoré, comme le poète reçu dans tous les salons de Londres, poursuivi lui et ses œuvres, lui ne pouvant trouver un lit où reposer, elles une salle où être jouées, et après l’expiation et la mort, voyant s’élever sa statue au-dessus de sa tombe, obligé de travestir ses sentiments, de changer tous ses mots, de mettre au féminin ses phrases, de donner à ses propres yeux des excuses à ses amitiés, à ses colères, plus gêné par la nécessité intérieure et l’ordre impérieux de son vice de ne pas se croire en proie à un vice que par la nécessité sociale de ne pas laisser voir ses goûts ; (258)
>
> ([…] until the inevitable day when, sooner or later, he will be devoured, like the poet who, received in all the salons of London, is nonetheless prosecuted on account of his

> work, unable to find a room for the night or an audience to hear his work, and after his expiation and death, sees a statue of himself erected at the head of his tomb, obligated to disguise his feelings, to change all of his words, to make his sentences grammatically feminine, to make excuses for his friendships, his frustrations, even more troubled by his internal urges, and by the natural imperative of his vice to not see himself as having any vice, than by the social imperative to not let his personal tastes show;)

The similarity between the experience of the sexual invert and that of the poet is reinforced by the ambiguous syntax of Proust's comparison, which progresses seamlessly from a description of the poetic identity to a description of the sexual identity, leaving it unclear at which point Proust ceases to enumerate the hardships of the *poète maudit* and begins to enumerate those of the *race maudite*.

Proust explains that the sexual invert's unhappiness has two principal sources – first, a certain "infortune innée" ("innate misfortune") that predisposes this individual to various "malheurs injustes" ("unjust hardships"), and second, a life of persecution in which this individual is subjected to society's active scorn and reprobation (259). The first source of unhappiness arises from the inevitable difficulties experienced by the sexual invert in the domain of attraction and love. Proust remarks that while love can be a difficult venture for any individual, "pour cet être à qui la nature fut si … la difficulté est centuplée. L'espèce à laquelle il appartient est si peu nombreuse sur la terre qu'il a des chances de passer toute sa vie sans jamais rencontrer le semblable qu'il aurait pu aimer" ("for this individual to whom nature has been so … the difficulty is hundredfold. The species to which he belongs is so small in numbers throughout the world that he may very well live his entire life without meeting an individual of similar disposition and whom he could have loved") (260). The resulting isolation of the sexual invert is then enhanced by society's failure to understand his true nature. Like the *poète maudit,* deemed either useless or elitist by the masses, the sexual invert is "[l']objet tantôt d'une méconnaissance aveugle qui ne les aime qu'en ne les connaissant pas, tantôt d'un dégoût qui les incrimine dans ce qu'ils ont de plus pur, tantôt d'une curiosité qui cherche à les expliquer et les comprend tout de travers […]" ("either subject to a general disgust that incriminates such individuals on account of their purest attribute, or subject to a general curiosity, which, in attempting to explain these individuals, understands nothing of their true nature") (256). And in addition to living in isolation, the sexual invert lives through persecution. As Proust explains, this "race maudite, persécutée comme Israël et comme lui ayant fini, dans l'opprobre commun d'une abjection imméritée, par prendre des caractères communs, l'air d'une race" ("this accursed race, persecuted like the Jews of Israel, and like them, faced with the general scorn of an unmerited abjection, having taken on the common airs and characteristics of a race"), is not only subject to, but also defined by, society's active scorn and reprobation (256). Persecuted by society and isolated from the masses, the sexual invert appears to suffer the same sources of unhappiness as the *poète maudit*. And so, it is entirely possible that nineteenth century characterizations of this particular poetic identity served as a model for Proust's twentieth century characterization of this particular sexual identity.

But the *poète maudit* resembles contemporary conceptions of a queer identity as well. In a chapter of *The Straight Mind* (1992) entitled "On the Social Contract," Monique Wittig discusses the marginalized position of lesbians within society. "To live in society is to live in heterosexuality," she argues, since "social contract and heterosexuality are two superimposable notions" (40). Given the all-encompassing nature of heterosexual ideology, perhaps the *poète maudit*, as an identity set apart from society, carves out a space for queerness to manifest. Michael Warner's characterization of society points to a similar possibility. In *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993), he understands Wittig's comment in a more materialist context:

> Het[erosexual] culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist. Materialist thinking about society has in many cases reinforced these tendencies, inherent in heterosexual ideology, toward a totalized view of the social. (xxi)

According to Warner, heterosexual ideology appropriates, as one of its central values, the notion of reproduction. In a similar way, bourgeois society of nineteenth-century France promoted, as one of its central values, the notion of production. And as Jean-Luc Steinmetz has remarked in "Du poète malheureux au poète maudit" ("From the Unfortunate Poet to the Accursed Poet"), the social alienation and persecution experienced by the *poète maudit* was also historically founded in "l'ostracisme que la Révolution (ou les Encyclopédistes) fit subir à *l'artiste considéré comme inacceptable, inassimilable, à moins qu'il ne joue les utilités*" ("the ostracism that the Revolution (or the Encyclopedists) imposed upon *the artist viewed as inacceptable, inassimilable, unless he served some useful function*") (83). If the poet's ostracism stemmed from the fact that he did not "serve some useful function," where this appearance of usefulness was determined primarily by bourgeois society's socio-economic values, as Steinmetz explains, it may be because the poet's perceived lack of productive value was considered as disadvantageous to society as the homosexual's perceived lack of reproductive value.

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman discusses the more disquieting implications of non-production in a society that shapes its entire politics around a narrative of "reproductive futurism." Embracing the larger political and social capacities of the queer, Edelman argues that, "Far from partaking of this narrative movement toward a viable political future […], the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form" (4). In this sense, a lack of productive utility (in whatever form it may take) implies a more threatening and pervasive defiance of society – a counter to the perpetuation of society as we know it and to all that it views as valuable. The *poète maudit* caused similar concerns. Steinmetz concludes that, while society disapproved of the poet's inutility within a socio-economic framework, the poet's ostracism "s'explique aussi par l'*anomie* qu'il représente" ("can also be explained by the *anomy* that he constituted") (83). The poet was not only alienated from society; he was also a threat to it. And as Steinmetz remarks, "Toute forme de totalitarisme ne pourra qu'éliminer ceux qui opposent aux cadences sociales le rythme de leur cœur" ("Any form of totalitarianism can only eliminate those whose heart beats to a different social cadence") (83). This observation accounts for nineteenth-century French society's ostracism of the poet figure as much as it does contemporary society's oppression and repression of the non-heterosexual. From anomaly to anomy, the poet came to represent a source of social instability, much like Edelman's characterization of the queer individual.

Section 2: The *Poète Voyou*

The notion of anomy is more explicitly associated with characterizations of the *poète voyou* (delinquent poet), a type of poet who actively cultivates a certain incompatibility with society, functioning in deliberate disaccord with its norms and values. This section will focus on two poets in particular, Paul Verlaine and Pierre François Lacenaire, who succinctly capture the characteristics of the *poète voyou* in both their poetic works and their personal lives.

Verlaine's first published poem is entitled "Monsieur Prudhomme" ("Mister Wiseman"). Inaugurating, so to speak, Verlaine's role as poet, the sonnet serves to characterize this poetic identity by contrasting it with that of the gentleman named in the poem's title – *Monsieur Prudhomme*:

Monsieur Prudhomme

Il est grave : il est maire et père de famille.
Son faux-col engloutit son oreille. Ses yeux
Dans un rêve sans fin flottent, insoucieux,
Et le printemps en fleurs sur ses pantoufles brille.

Que lui fait l'astre d'or, que lui fait la charmille
Où l'oiseau chante à l'ombre, et que lui font les cieux,
Et les prés verts et les gazons silencieux ?
Monsieur Prudhomme songe à marier sa fille

Avec monsieur Machin, un jeune homme cossu.
Il est juste-milieu, botaniste et pansu.
Quant aux faiseurs de vers, ces vauriens, ces maroufles,

Ces fainéants barbus, mal peignés, il les a
Plus en horreur que son éternel coryza,
Et le printemps en fleur brille sur ses pantoufles.

(Mister Wiseman

He is solemn: he is a mayor and the family's father.
His detachable collar swallows his ear. His eyes swim
Unconcerned in an endless dream
And flowering spring shines on his slippers.

What is the golden star to him, what is the arbor
Where the bird sings in the shade, what to him
Are skies and green meadows and lawns' calm?
Mister Wiseman considers marrying his daughter

To Mister Whatsit, politically middle-of-the-road,
A young man of means, a botanist, potbellied.
As for these rogues and good for nothing

Versifiers, these bearded idlers dressed so ill,
He dreads them more than his head cold, which is perpetual,
And on his slippers shines flowering spring.)[4]

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[4] Translation by Karl Kirchwey.

The *Monsieur Prudhomme* (Mister Wiseman) described in the poem was most likely inspired by the fictional character of the same name, created in 1830 by Henry Monnier as a caricature of the bourgeois individual. This character figured in several of Monnier's works, up through *Monsieur Prudhomme chef de brigand* in 1860. In *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, editor Iain McKay describes the character as "plump, foolish, conformist and sententious," noting that "he was called by Honoré de Balzac 'l'illustre type du bourgeois de Paris' ('the renowned bourgeois Parisian')" (782).

Verlaine's sonnet continues this characterization. Its first two stanzas are dedicated to a description of *Monsieur Prudhomme*, depicting him as a typically bourgeois member of society whose appearance and thoughts reveal his concern with material wealth and social status. As "maire et père de famille" ("mayor and head of the family"), he is a patriarchal figure of both public and domestic spheres. His "faux-col" ("detachable collar") and "pantoufles" ("slippers") signal his adherence to the norms of materialist fashion and to notions of presentability. And, untouched by even the most romantically poetic nature of his surroundings, his reveries concern only his immediate social establishment. His daydreams culminate in the realization of a central institution of heteronormative society: marriage. In the next stanza, we read that Monsieur Prudhomme dreams of marrying his daughter to *Monsieur Machin* (Mister Whatsit), an equally "proper" young man whose resemblance to his future father-in-law will conserve and perpetuate this model of patriarchal bourgeois society. Like *Monsieur Prudhomme*, whose very name encapsulates his normative nature, *Monsieur Machin* bears the name of an equally generalizable identity.

As the next lines make clear, however, poets constitute a different type of individual. Described from the perspective of Mister Wiseman, these poets do not possess such a universal or valid identity type. They are not named, but disparagingly paraphrased as “faiseurs de vers” (“versifiers”). Lying outside normative and identifiable social roles as “vauriens” (“rogues”), “maroufles” (“good-for-nothings”), and “fainéants barbus” (“unshaven idlers”), they are characterized not only as economically unproductive, but also as socially offensive, without scruples or conscience. In a word, they are *voyous* (delinquents). Characterized in this way, the poet figure creates space for queerness to manifest within the heteronormative bourgeois society of nineteenth-century France. As Verlaine’s poem reveals, this poet type exists in strict opposition to the bourgeois ideals of Mr. Wiseman and Mr. Whatsit, and in stark contrast to the heteronormative society that Mr. Wiseman dreams of perpetuating.

While Verlaine’s sonnet highlights the perceived disaccord between poet and normative society, Lacenaire’s poem, entitled “Pétition d’un voleur à un roi voisin” (“A Thief’s Petition to a Neighboring King”), works with this disaccord to destabilize notions of socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. After committing a number of thefts, frauds, and murders, this infamous “poet-assassin” wrote the majority of his poetry in prison during the years leading up to his final conviction and execution in 1836. Lacenaire wrote this particular poem in 1833, while incarcerated at La Force Prison. By calling into question the social distinction between thief and king, the poem destabilizes conventional identity categories and challenges the value that we conventionally assign to them:

> Pétition d’un voleur à un roi voisin
>
> Sire, de grâce, écoutez-moi :
> Sire, je reviens des galères …
> Je suis voleur, vous êtes roi,
> Agissons ensemble en bons frères.
> Les gens de bien me font horreur,
> J’ai le cœur dur et l’âme vile,
> Je suis sans pitié, sans honneur :

Ah ! faites-moi sergent de ville.

Bon ! je me vois déjà sergent :
Mais, sire, c'est bien peu, je pense.
L'appétit me vient en mangeant :
Allons, sire, un peu d'indulgence.
Je suis hargneux comme un roquet,
D'un vieux singe j'ai la malice ;
En France, je vaudrais Gisquet :
Faites-moi préfet de police.

Grands dieux ! que je suis bon préfet !
Toute prison est trop petite.
Ce métier pourtant n'est pas fait,
Je le sens bien, pour mon mérite.
Je sais dévorer un budget,
Je sais embrouiller un registre ;
Je signerai : « Votre sujet »,
Ah ! sire, faites-moi ministre.

Sire, que Votre Majesté
Ne se mette pas en colère !
Je compte sur votre bonté ;
Car ma demande est téméraire.
Je suis hypocrite et vilain,
Ma douceur n'est qu'une grimace ;
J'ai fait … se pendre mon cousin :
Sire, cédez-moi votre place.

(A Thief's Petition to a Neighboring King

Sire, give grace and hear me:
Sire, I return from the galleys…
I am a thief, you are a king,
Let us act together as brothers.
I cannot bear those men of good will,
My heart is cold, and my soul is vile,
I am without pity and without honor:
Ah! Make me the bailiff of the city.

Good! I see myself as bailiff already:
But sire, this is not much, I think.
My appetite is growing now:
Come, sire, a little indulgence.
I am as vicious as a little dog,

As malicious as a monkey;
In France, I'm a veritable Gisquet:
Make me the police commissioner.

Great gods! I am a good commissioner!
No prison is large enough.
I feel, however, that I can do better still.
My merits far exceed this.
I know how to blow a budget,
I know how to jumble the records;
I will sign off as "Your subject,"
Ah! Sire, make me minister.

Sire, Your Majesty
Do not grow angry!
I am counting on your goodness;
For my request is quite audacious.
I am hypocritical and foul,
My sweetness is but a grimace;
I had … my cousin hanged:
Sire, concede to me your place.)

In the first stanza, the thief directly addresses the king. After establishing their strikingly different social positions ("Je suis voleur, vous êtes roi" ("I am a thief, you are a king")), the thief proceeds to his proposition that they nonetheless act "ensemble en bons frères" ("together as brothers"). The following lines reveal what this cooperation entails – that the king make the thief "sergent de ville" ("the city bailiff"). Leading up to this direct request, the thief gives a description of himself as having "le cœur dur et l'âme vile" ("a cold heart and a vile soul"), and as being "sans pitié" ("without pity") and "sans honneur" ("without honor"). Lacenaire's rhetorical use of the colon after the description of these *voyou* qualities, however, implies a logical conclusion: The thief has *these* qualities, ergo, he should hold *this* social position. In this case, his cold heart, vile soul, and lack of pity and honor render him most suitable for the position of city bailiff.

Continuing this rhetorical structure throughout the poem, Lacenaire relates increasingly powerful and admirable social positions to increasingly *voyou* qualities. Having been made bailiff, the thief demands to be made police commissioner on account of his viciousness, malice, and likeness to the zealot commissioner, Henri Gisquet. After acquiring this function, he then requests that of minister, given his ability to blow a budget and mismanage public records. And finally, citing his hypocritical and villainous nature, and the specific deed of having his cousin hanged, the thief proposes taking the place of the king himself. While presented in opposition to the king at the beginning of the poem, by the end, the thief is depicted as his equal, not only in terms of their position on the social hierarchy, but in terms of their very nature. A so-called exemplary member of society has become interchangeable with a so-called delinquent one.

Lacenaire's defiance of society's values and laws, paired with his bourgeois background and literary interests, rendered him a source of curiosity for the nineteenth century French public and media, who closely followed his murder trial. But the poet-assassin also exemplified the *poète voyou*'s ability to function as a source of social instability. As sociologist and queer theorist Adam Green has demonstrated, it is this capacity for destabilization that underpins modern conceptions of queerness. In his 2007 article, "Queer Theory and Sociology," Green concludes that the major strains of queer theory can be unified "by a deconstructive *raison d'être* that aims to 'denaturalize' dominant social classifications and, in turn, destabilize the social order" (28). Through his deliberate transgression of society's laws and his literary subversion of society's identity categories and power structures, Lacenaire's enactment of the poet as *voyou* did exactly this.

Section 3: The *Poète Voyant*

"The theory of the poet as seer, as prophet and interpreter of the gods, as one endowed with supernormal powers, may accurately be called the perennial philosophy of poetry," notes Gwendolyn Bays, who, in 1967, traces this poetic identity from its emergence in Ancient Greece to its rebirth in nineteenth century France (17). This characterization of the poet has adopted various forms throughout history, especially over the course of the nineteenth century. Victor Hugo, for example, viewed the poet as a type of prophet figure endowed with the power of foresight and the responsibility of relaying this enlightened perspective to those around him. In "La fonction du poète" ("The Purpose of the Poet"), published in 1840, he writes:

> Le poète en des jours impies
> Vient préparer des jours meilleurs.
> Il est l'homme des utopies,
> Les pieds ici, les yeux ailleurs.
> C'est lui qui sur toutes les têtes,
> En tout temps, pareil aux prophètes,
> Dans sa main, où tout peut tenir,
> Doit, qu'on l'insulte ou qu'on le loue,
> Comme une torche qu'il secoue,
> Faire flamboyer l'avenir ! (lines 81-90)
>
> (The poet in unholy times,
> Arrives to make for better days.
> He is a man of utopia,
> His feet on Earth, his eyes elsewhere.
> It is he who, over many heads,
> In every era, like every prophet,
> In his hand, which holds all,
> Must, be he cursed or praised,
> Like the torch he grasps and waves
> Light up with flames the future.)

Alphonse de Lamartine saw the poet as a more terrestrial visionary figure, one whose work inspires others to realize their dreams of a better society. In *Des destinées de la poésie* (*The Fate* *of Poetry*) (1834), the poet praises the progressive possibilities of Romantic poetry, “qui plane sur la société et qui la juge, et qui, montrant à l’homme la vulgarité de son œuvre, l’appelle sans cesse en avant, en lui montrant du doigt des utopies, des républiques imaginaires, des cités de Dieu, et lui souffle au cœur le courage de les tenter et l’espoir de les atteindre” (“which soars over society and judges it, and which, in revealing to man the crudeness of his work, calls him endlessly forward, directing him toward utopias, imaginary republics, and cities of God, and fills his heart with the courage to pursue them and the hope of achieving them”) (82). He remarks, however, that the average person needs an interpreter to understand such urgings, and so declares: “c’est à nous de lui en servir, et de lui expliquer, par ses sentiments rendus dans sa langue, ce que Dieu a mis de bonté, de noblesse, de générosité, de patriotisme et de piété enthousiaste dans son cœur” (“It is our responsibility to fulfill this role, and to explain to him through his feelings rendered into words, the goodness, nobility, generosity, patriotism, and enthusiastic piety that God has placed within his heart”) (83). This “nous” (“us”) of course refers to the poets, who put such visions into words and communicate them to the people.

Gérard de Nerval can also be characterized as an enlightened poet, but one whose visionary ability manifests in the form of hallucinations and dream-like states. In *Aurélia : Ou le rêve et la vie* (*Aurelia: The Dream and the Life*) (1855), Nerval states that “Le rêve est une seconde vie” (“A dream is an alternate life”), and describes it as “un souterrain vague qui s’éclaire peu à peu, et où se dégagent de l’ombre et de la nuit les pâles figures gravement immobiles qui habitent le séjour des limbes” (“an indistinct underworld that grows gradually clearer, where the solemnly still, pale figures of the other world emerge from the shadows and the darkness”) (*Œuvres* 3: 695). This world is obscure at first, he explains, “Puis le tableau se forme, une clarté nouvelle illumine et fait jouer ces apparitions bizarres : – le monde des Esprits s'ouvre pour nous" ("Then the scene takes shape, a new sense of intelligibility illuminates these bizarre apparitions and brings them to life: – the Spirit world opens up to us") (3: 695). It is during "l'épanchement du songe dans la vie réelle" ("the dream's effusion into real life"), however, when this dreamworld overflows into the real world, that the poet experiences truly visionary abilities (3: 699). Nerval recounts that when this began to happen to him, "tout prenait parfois un aspect double – et cela sans que le raisonnement manquât jamais de logique, sans que la mémoire perdît les plus légers détails de ce qui m'arrivait" ("everything would start to appear doubled – but without my reasoning becoming any less logical, without my memory losing the slightest detail of what was happening to me") (3: 699).

Rather than inhibiting the poet's understanding of reality, such an experience enhanced it by allowing him to view two realities at once. Since he remained lucid and rational during these visionary experiences, Nerval hesitates to consider them a form of infirmity. "La science a le droit d'escamoter ou réduire au silence tous les prophètes et voyants prédits par l'Apocalypse, dont je me flattais d'être l'un !" ("Science is able to skirt around or silence all of the prophets and seers foretold by the Apocalypse, of which I was one!"), he exclaims in a letter to Mme Alexandre Dumas, shortly after his release from hospital (*Œuvres* 1: 1383). "Comme il y a ici des médecins et des commissaires qui veillent à ce qu'on n'étende pas le champ de la poésie aux dépens de la voie publique" ("Since there are doctors and officials here whose role it is to ensure that one does not expand the poetic domain at the expense of the beaten path"), he explains, "on ne m'a laissé sortir et vaguer définitivement parmi les gens raisonnables que lorsque je suis convenu bien formellement d'avoir *été malade*, ce qui coûtait beaucoup à mon amour-propre et même à ma véracité" ("they would not let me officially leave and mingle with the public again until I formally agreed to having *been infirm*, which cost me a lot of self-respect and even truthfulness”) (*Œuvres* 1: 1383). As Nerval resolves in *Aurélia*: “je crois que l’imagination humaine n’a rien inventé qui ne soit vrai, dans ce monde ou dans les autres, et je ne pouvais douter de ce que j’avais *vu* si distinctement” (“I believe that the human imagination has never invented anything that is not true, in this world or in others, and I could not doubt what I had so distinctly *seen*”) (*Œuvres* 3: 717).

This section will focus on Arthur Rimbaud’s conception of the *poète voyant* since he developed his poetic theory around the identity and discussed it explicitly in two letters – his letter to Georges Izambard on May 13, 1871, and his letter to Paul Demeny on May 15, 1871. Rimbaud’s theory of *voyance* (poetic vision) and his method for attaining it have produced a variety of critical interpretations over the last few decades: Gwendolyn Bays, writing in the 1960s, understands Rimbaud’s poetic vision in psychoanalytic terms, focusing on its relationship to dreams and the unconscious (21). In a more Marxist approach, Anna Louise Ortiz, writing in the 1980s, understands Rimbaud’s *poète voyant* as envisioning “a brotherhood of men” and an ideal form of social progress (107). And in a different sense again, writing in the late nineties, James W. Brown focuses on the *poète voyant* as a “disembodied voice” who sees reality directly, rather than as a prophetic figure who sees visions or has hallucinations (99). In “‘Voix et Voyance’ in Rimbaud’s ‘Départ’,” Brown explains that in most cases, “we perceive not directly but through image, language, mental constructs and ideas, all of which belong to the past and the known” (95). For this reason, Rimbaud’s *poète voyant* reaches the “unknown” through the experience of “egolessness,” where the poet is free from the interference of bodily and intellectual perceptions of reality (98).

In the wake of Brown’s post-modernist approach to notions of *voyance,* queer theory also provides a productive framework for understanding Rimbaud’s conception of the poet as *voyant*.

Rimbaud writes to Izambard on May 13, 1871 that in order to render oneself *voyant*, “il faut être fort, être né poète” (“you must be strong, be born a poet”), to which he adds definitively: “et je me suis reconnu poète” (“and I have acknowledged that I am a poet”) (249). He clarifies that *voyance* is inherently linked to the poetic identity, which certain individuals, like himself, inevitably occupy. In his letter to Demeny on May 15, 1871, he elaborates on this idea, adding that in the process of becoming *voyant*, the poet “devient entre tous le grand malade, le grand criminel, le grand maudit, – et le suprême Savant – Car il arrive à l’inconnu !” (“becomes, among all things, the great madman, the great criminal, the great accursed one, – and the ultimate Savant – For he arrives at the unknown!”) (251). In this sense, the poet as *voyant* appears in correlation with other poet types of the period, with “le grand malade” (“the great madman”) recalling the *malédiction du poète* (affliction of the poet), and “le grand criminel” (“the great criminal”) recalling the *poète voyou*. Arriving at the end of the list, after the “grand maudit” (“the great accursed one”), is the “suprême Savant” (“the ultimate Savant”) – he who has seen all and knows all. Situating the *voyant* within the same trajectory as the *maudit* and the *voyou*, Rimbaud implies that it is through first becoming these other poetic types that the poet eventually arrives at the unknown and becomes the “ultimate Savant.” The queerness of the *poète maudit* manifests in terms of an isolating disconnect with society, and the queerness of the poet as *voyou* manifests as a deliberate cultivation of a lifestyle apart from, and against, society. Considering the *voyant* within the same trajectory, the queerness enabled by this identity differs slightly again. Rather than failing to assimilate into society, and rather than taking a stand against its norms, the *poète voyant* is capable of seeing beyond social norms and realities altogether in order to imagine, find, or create an alternative to society as it currently exists, or as it is currently perceived.

Queer theorist Nikki Sullivan points to a correspondence between this type of vision and queerness. In *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2000), she notes that queer theory's deconstructive component is important because in deconstructing presumed oppositions such as homosexuality and heterosexuality, the unnatural and the natural, "it enables us to acknowledge the constructedness of meaning and identity and thus to begin to imagine alternative ways of thinking and of living" (51). This is similar to what Lee Edelman claims in *No Future*, when he suggests that "queerness exposes the obliquity of our relation to what we experience in and as social reality, alerting us to the fantasies structurally necessary in order to sustain it and engaging those fantasies through the figural logics, the linguistic structures, that shape them" (7). Endowed with a queer vision, then, a person could "see" the constructed nature of society and imagine alternatives to that which appears as an inevitable and natural social reality.

Could this type of vision be at work in conceptualizations of the poet as *voyant*? This possibility becomes most evident through an understanding of *voyance* that tends toward James Brown's interpretation. As mentioned above, Brown understands *voyance* in Eastern philosophical terms, as a form of direct seeing that takes place beyond the conceptual realm (96). He explains that "What prevents the ordinary mind from seeing basic reality, the 'what is,' may be defined in Buddhist terms as defilement and distortion brought about by ignorance, greed, desire, anger and a host of other intervening personal (egoic) factors" (95). And he adds that "Another impediment to seeing reality directly is the thought process itself and the formation of concepts, opinions and values about what one is perceiving" (95). Brown distinguishes this notion of vision from what he considers the more Western notion, which entails a visionary state brought about by distortions, such as dreams or hallucinations.

In Rimbaud’s own writings however, Brown sees some ambiguity and overlap with respect to the poet’s methods and is not sure that they clearly coincide with either Western or Eastern notions of seeing. He states that “Rimbaud’s ‘long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens’ (‘long, immense, and reasoned disruption of all the senses’) in order to arrive at the unknown, was an unusually drastic means of going beyond normal perception and entering the visionary state. And whether or not the young poet knew so at the time, it certainly did not correspond with Eastern traditions for attaining enlightenment, wherein visions and hallucinations would be viewed as obstacles to clear and direct seeing” (96). In this case, Rimbaud’s method seems to entail something more than what would be necessary for entering a hallucinatory state, but also something ineffective for attaining a form of direct seeing in the Eastern sense. It is what such a method implies regarding the role of ideologies, however, that points to a queer understanding of *voyance*.

In his May 15 letter, Rimbaud explains that after implementing this systematic method of “dérèglement” (“disruption”) and after becoming all of the poet types mentioned above, the poet arrives “à l’inconnu, et quand, affolé, il finirait par perdre l’intelligence de ses visions, il les a vues !” (“at the unknown, and when, crazed, he finally loses the intelligence of his visions, he will have seen them”) (251). It is only once the poet has lost the meaning of his visions, once they have become unintelligible to him, that he has truly seen. *Voyance* in this sense also implies a shedding of ideologies, which inform our knowledge systems, lead us to “make sense” of what we see, and ultimately shape our perceptions of reality. This corresponds to Brown’s understanding of *voyance*, which he sees as uninfluenced by “the known.” But the role of ideologies in impeding *voyance* also points to an alternative interpretation of Rimbaud’s “long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens” (“long, immense and reasoned disruption of the senses") (251). If the poet must lose the intelligibility of what he sees, this approach does not only pertain to disrupting sensory perceptions. "Sens" can be read for its additional definition – that of "meaning" itself, so that by disrupting "tous les sens," the poet is also disrupting "all of the meanings" created by knowledge systems like language and culture, which shape our perception of reality.

Adam Green points to the pervasive role of such knowledge systems in making society appear inevitably heteronormative, and he explains queer theory's function in disrupting this appearance:

> As a deconstructionist framework trained on denaturalization, queer theory is something of a wrench wedged in the performative interval, laying bare the genealogy of a given discourse and its institutional, political, and collective effects, including its pedagogical and diagnostic manifestations, its role in moral campaigns, its consequences for governmentality, and, broader still, the limits of social ontology. (43)

In this sense, queer theory functions in much the same way as Rimbaud's "disruption" of our perceptions of reality. And in the same way that Rimbaud's method might aim to disrupt meaning or intellectual as well as sensory perceptions, so queerness, according to Carla Freccero, also serves to disrupt the intelligibility of the "known." In *Queer/Early/Modern* (2006), Freccero focuses on meaning as it is created through texts and language, noting that the "Queer is what is and is not there, what disaggregates the coherence of the norm from the very beginning and is ignored in the force to make sense out of the unintelligibilities of grammar and syntax" (18).

Her characterization of queer as "what is and is not there" is interesting with respect to the question of social ontology that Adam Green raises, as well as the question of vision, more generally. As something which "is and is not there," where and how does queerness exist in relation to society? And to whom, and under what circumstances, does the queer manifest as visible? As Freccero’s comment indicates, queer can be understood in Derridean terms as the “always already there”; and with respect to the question of social ontology, it can be understood as an alternative way of being that has always existed, but is ignored, silenced, or rendered invisible by the ideologies that shape our perception of reality as heteronormative. At the end of his May 15 letter to Demeny, Rimbaud concludes: “Les seconds romantiques sont très *voyants*: Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Théodore de Banville. Mais inspecter l’invisible et entendre l’inouï étant autre chose que reprendre l’esprit des choses mortes, Baudelaire est le premier voyant, roi des poètes, *un vrai Dieu*” (“The second wave of romantics are very *enlightened*: Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Théodore de Banville. But since examining the invisible and hearing the unheard is not the same thing as reviving the spirit of dead things, Baudelaire is the first *voyant,* king of poets, *a true God*”) (253). If Baudelaire is the “first *voyant*, king of poets” on account of his ability to see the unseen and hear the unheard, as a true *poète voyant,* he may indeed be well suited to see that which is and is not there: “the unknown,” the queer.

Whether “the unknown” at which Rimbaud’s *poète voyant* finally arrives is a vision of an alternative reality, a utopian vision of the way things could be, or a vision unimpeded by obstructive ideologies, it is a space *par excellence* for queerness to manifest. The *poète voyant*’s desire to reach “the unknown” was a desire to go beyond “the known” – and the ideologies that inevitably informed it – to a place where meaning had been disrupted and the poet could finally perceive an alternative way of being or thinking, one that was perhaps always already there, but simply ignored, “invisible” or “unheard.”

Section 4: The *Femme Poète*

In *La petite sœur de Balzac* (*Balzac’s Younger Sister*) (2015), Christine Planté traces the emergence of the *femme auteur* (author woman) in nineteenth century France. She discusses the historical reasons leading to an increase in women writers at this time and considers the social and literary implications of the woman as author. A central premise of her study is that the "author woman" can be understood in terms of a myth or type: "la femme auteur, dont il sera question dans ces pages, et dans les textes du XIXe siècle que j'y évoquerai, n'existe pas, j'entends, comme *réalité* historique. Il y a *des* femmes qui écrivent […] Mais *la* femme auteur est un personnage, un *type*, où s'investissent les idéologies et les fantasmes du XIXe siècle, qui l'a inventée" ("the author woman, as she appears in these pages and in the nineteenth-century texts that I will invoke, does not exist, that is, as a historical *reality*. There are women who write […] But *the* author woman is a characterization, a *type,* who incarnates the ideologies and the fantasies of the nineteenth century, which invented her") (13). This section explores society's attitudes toward the most troubling sub-category of the *femme auteur* – the *femme poète*. It examines similarities between representations of this particular poetic identity and representations of the poet as *maudit*, *voyou*, or *voyant*. And considers how the *femme poète* as an identity type might relate to another sexual identity that was emerging in France at the same time – the "third sex."

It was in society's refusal to value, or even accept, female subjectivity that the notion of *femme auteur* emerged as a type. Planté explains that the generalizing discourse of the period's literary criticism "ne veut voir en elle que la représentante d'une espèce trop dangereuse pour qu'on ne cherche pas à l'étiqueter, afin de mieux la cerner et l'isoler" ("saw her as nothing but the representative of a species too dangerous to not label, in order to better grasp it and contain it") (29). The danger that she was seen to pose was pervasive and even catastrophic: "Il n'est pas question pour les intellectuels de (se) représenter la condamnation des femmes écrivains comme une petite affaire de défense de leur identité et de leurs privilèges" ("For these intellectuals, it was not simply a question of representing this condemnation of women writers as a defense of their own identity and their own privilege"), Planté observes. "C'est la défense de la famille, de la nation, du genre humain qui se trouve invoquée" ("They did so in defense of the family, of the nation, of humankind"), she explains, noting that "on brandit une fois de plus la menace de la décadence" ("the threat of decadence was once again invoked") (110-11).

What made the *femme auteur* such a threat? And what was her relation to decadence? One reason for this judgment is the fact that, by publishing their work, literary women were entering into the public sphere. In *The Gendered Lyric*, Gretchen Schultz has explained that, normally restricted to the private sphere of the home, "for a woman to publish, to place herself in public view, was either a monstrous or an indecent act," where "women poets were frequently accused of a figurative kind of exhibitionism, summed up by the epithet *monstre*, derived from the Latin *monstrare*, meaning 'to show'" (37). But the immodest exhibitionism perpetrated by the *femme auteur* is not the only characteristic that leads to the epithet *monstre*. The term has several significations, one of which the *Trésor* dictionary defines as "Chose (abstraite) qui provoque l'étonnement ou la désapprobation par son caractère incohérent ou hors des normes" ("(Abstract) thing provoking surprise or disapproval through its disjointed or non-normative nature") ("Monstre" 1030). The *femme auteur* was a monster in this sense as well. By pursuing a literary career, she was perceived by society as neglecting the familial sphere and rejecting the normative female role of wife and mother: "Que viendrait faire ici une femme écrivain?" ("What was a woman writer up to?"), asks Planté, "D'abord, on le sait, perturber l'harmonieux fonctionnement de la famille, où elle refuserait de se plier à l'humble rôle de l'épouse. Mais aussi mettre en question des différences et des catégories trop élémentaires pour qu'il soit question de les interroger et d'accepter leur brouillage" ("First, as we all know, she came to trouble the harmonious functioning of the family, in which she refused to bow to the humble role of wife. But also, she called into question differences and categories that were considered too fundamental to be questioned or blurred") (*Petite sœur* 110). These differences and categories were those of sex and gender. With respect to the binary division of gender and its associated gender roles, blurring the distinction between writer, on the one hand, and wife/mother on the other, appeared so unquestionable that adherence to one implied rejection of the other. And with respect to the traditionally unquestioned alignment of sex with gender, the woman writer's combination of female sex with a masculine gender role was seen as inherently incoherent. The *femme auteur* was a monster because she was "incoherent" and "not within norms." As such, she created a space for queerness to manifest by calling into question the supposedly essentialist categories of sex and gender and by destabilizing their organization.

In *La loi du genre* (*The Law of Gender*) (2006), Laure Murat traces the concept of a *troisième sexe* (third sex), focusing on its construction through various discourses (primarily police, medical, and literary) in the period ranging from 1835 to 1939. This "third sex," which ultimately comes down to an incoherence of sex and gender alignment, has existed since ancient times, but it became a much discussed and newly theorized concept in the nineteenth century. Murat remarks that, "Si l'expression remonte à Platon, il est d'usage de dater l'acceptation *moderne* de troisième sexe de l'époque romantique. En 1834, Balzac introduit un personnage lié à bien des égards à l'émergence du concept" ("Whereas the expression dates back to Platon, it is common practice to trace the *modern* understanding of third sex back to the Romantic era. In 1834, Balzac introduced a character that is in many ways linked to the emergence of this concept") (31). This character is Vautrin, who first appeared unambiguously as a homosexual figure in *Le Père Goriot* (*Father Goriot*) (1835).[5] Later, in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (*The Splenders and Miseries of Courtisans*) (1838-47), Balzac referred to this homosexual manifestation of the third sex with the colloquialism "*tante*" ("aunty"), inspiring Proust's initial writings on *la race des tantes* (the race of Aunties), upon which he eventually based his concept of *la race maudite* (the accursed race).[6]

Laure Murat observes that, "En théorie, le « vice » de cette « race maudite » repose sur un axiome, une loi: l'inversion du genre par rapport au sexe" ("In theory, the 'vice' of this 'accursed race' was based on an axiom or law: the inversion of one's gender with respect to one's sex") (321). In the case of Proust's and Balzac's use of the third sex, this inversion manifested in terms of non-heterosexuality, but the expression can refer to other misalignments of sex and gender, such as the many domains in which "active" women began to transgress their assigned gender roles and adopt activities deemed masculine. Murat discusses the transgressions of such women, who either worked, rode the bicycle, wore pants, or who wrote and published. She concludes that while "La femme de sport peut choquer, la femme de lettres, elle, exaspère. Objet de sarcasmes, cette précieuse ridicule indigne du nom d'intellectuelle défierait plus que toute autre femme active la différence des sexes, dont elles s'excluraient d'emblée en prenant la plume ou le stylo, qui aurait tout d'un instrument phallique" ("the sportive woman was shocking, the literary woman – she was infuriating. Subject to many a sarcastic remark, this pretentious young lady, who did not merit the label of intellectual, defied, more than any other active woman, the difference of the sexes, from which she excluded herself entirely by picking up the quill or pen, the most phallic of instruments") (367). With the literary domain considered to be the most masculine of these gendered activities, its penetration by women constituted the most transgressive of acts.

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[5] See Honoré de Balzac. *Le Père Goriot, La Comédie humaine,* edited by Pierre-Georges Castex, vol. 3. Gallimard, 1976, p. 192.

[6] See Honoré de Balzac. *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes, La Comédie humaine,* edited by Pierre-Georges Castex, vol. 6. Gallimard, 1976, p. 840; See also Laure Murat. *La Loi du genre*. Paris: Fayard, 2006, p. 321 for a discussion of this genesis.

Within the nineteenth century French literary domain, there exists various literary genres, each also gendered in a hierarchy from feminine to masculine. Planté delineates these categorizations: "les plus femmes des genres-femmes: roman, lettres, journal intime, et les plus hommes des genres-hommes : l'histoire et la poésie" ("the most womanly of the woman-genres: the novel, letters, diary entries, and the most manly of the man-genres: history and poetry") (*Petite sœur* 231). She specifies that "Le débat concerne d'ailleurs davantage les *sujets*, autorisés ou interdits, que les genres, sauf pour la poésie, qui se voit, elle, interdite aux femmes en tant que quintessence de l'art et création par excellence" ("The conflict arose more from the *subject matter*, whether permitted or prohibited, than from the genres themselves, except in the case of poetry, which, as the essence of art and the act of creation *par excellence*, was naturally forbidden to women") (231). So, while the *femme auteur* was the most transgressive of the period's increasingly active women figures, the *femme poète*, writing in the most quintessentially masculine genre of an already masculine domain, was the epitome of abnormality, incoherence, and monstrosity.

It is in part this incoherence and resulting monstrosity, that Renée Vivien addresses in her poem, "Enseignement" ("The Teaching"), which was published in *Sillages* in 1908. The poem describes the art and nature of witches, figures often viewed as monstrous, and always distinctly feminine. It begins with the stanza:

Tu veux savoir de moi le secret des sorcières ?
J’allumerai pour toi leurs nocturnes lumières,
Et je t’apprendrai l’art très simple des sorcières.

(You want to learn from me the secret ways of witches?
I will illuminate for you their nocturnal source of light,
And I will teach you the art, most simple, of witches.)

The poem continues, stating that witches live during the night and sleep during the day, and that celestial bodies are more familiar to them than earthly spectacles, before recounting their persecution by those who do not understand them, as well as their general indifference to this world and their solitary and hidden existence.

Several readings of the text are possible. One pertinent interpretation views the description of the witches’ existence as a metaphorical description of the lesbian’s existence. Vivien often referrs to female same-sex love in her poetry, and this interpretation could explain the poem’s references to an “inverted” and hidden way of life, where the witches live at night and sleep during the day, and where “Elles savent cacher au dur regard du jour / Leur cœur, leur haine triste et leur si triste amour” (“They know to hide from the harsh gaze of day / Their heart, their sad hatred and their sorrowful love”) (lines 28-29). More pertinent to the question at hand, another interpretation reads the witches as metaphorical representations of women poets, an identity that Vivien also frequently addresses in her poetry. This interpretation sees in the witch figure’s association with witchcraft and spells a particularly feminine form of the poet as *voyant*, whose divinatory or occult powers manifest as the ability to create reality through a magical use of words and language. But either way, read as metaphors for women loving women, or for women as poets, the witches embody the sexual or gender transgressions associated with those of “the third sex.”

As verses four through seven reveal, these witches also occupy a position of otherness not dissimilar to the otherness of the *poète maudit* and the *poète voyou*:

> On les craint, on les chasse, on ne les aime pas.
> Elles ont fui l'auberge et le commun repas.
> Elles n'ont point compris, on ne les comprend pas.
>
> Cependant elles sont très simples… On doit naître…
> Pour les comprendre, il faut quelque peu les connaître
> Et savoir qu'elles ont le droit d'être et de naître…
>
> Chacun parle très haut et du bien et du mal.
> L'on sait que c'est un tort grave d'être anormal,
> Leur cœur inoffensif n'a point conçu le mal.
>
> Mais ces femmes sont les maudites étrangères.
> Car dans un monde épais leurs âmes sont légères,
> Et ses lois leur seront à jamais étrangères. (lines 10-21)

> (They are feared, they are hunted, and liked they are not.
> They have fled the homestead and the communal table.
> They have not understood, and understood they are not.
>
> They are, however, simple … they were at one time born …
> If you know them in the slightest, you will understand their ways
> And realize that they have the right to be and to be born …
>
> We all speak so much about the good and the bad.
> We all know what an error it is to be abnormal,
> Yet their innocent hearts have known no bad.
>
> But these women remain accursed and foreign.
> Because in a crude world, their souls are light,
> And to them, forever its laws will be foreign.)

As a result of their "tort grave d'être anormal" ("grave error of being abnormal"), the women are viewed as incomprehensible and threatening. They are foreigners in this crude world, whose laws, whether natural or societal, will remain just as foreign to them.

The question of otherness finds an interesting variation in a final characteristic of the *femme poète*. In addition to occupying a position of other in relation to society and its laws, the woman poet more monstrously, and equally queerly, occupied a position of otherness with respect to herself. This monstrosity concerned the nature of her physical being. As literary critic Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly declares in *Les Bas-bleu* (*The Blue Stockings*) in 1878, "les femmes qui écrivent ne sont plus des femmes. Ce sont des hommes, - du moins de prétention, - et manqués !" ("women who write are no longer women. They are men, - or at least they desire to be, - and are failed versions at that") (xi). This is why he preferred to refer to women writers by the term "Bas-bleus," whose masculine grammatical gender accentuated the fact that such individuals could no longer be identified as female. "Les Bas-bleus ont, plus ou moins, donné la démission de leur sexe" ("The Blue Stockings have, more or less, abdicated their sex"), according to the critic (xi). No longer female, yet not successfully male, the *femme auteur* was a kind of hybrid of the two. As Planté concisely states: "Mi-femmes mi-hommes, ni femmes ni hommes, des monstres, des êtres *hybrides*" ("Half-women half-men, neither women nor men, they were monsters, *hybrid* creatures") (*Petite sœur* 269).

Some critics of the period, like Edmond de Goncourt, depicted this hybrid creature as intersex. On December 8, 1893, Goncourt wrote in his *Journal*: "[…] si on avait fait l'autopsie des femmes ayant un talent original, comme Mme Sand, Mme Viardot, etc., on trouverait chez elles des parties génitales se rapprochant de l'homme, des clitoris un peu parents de nos verges" ("If an autopsy of such original women as Mrs Sand and Mrs Viardot, etc., had been performed, it would have shown genital organs more similar to those of a man, a clitoris much like our penis") (197). Other critics, however, depicted a more amalgamate collection of physical attributes. In his 1905 publication, *Le mensonge du féminisme* (*The Sham of Feminism*), Théodore Joran recounts the opinion of his friend, Léon H., who believed that "Georges [*sic*] Eliot avait le visage d'un homme, la tête énorme, les cheveux désordonnés, un gros nez, les lèvres épaisses, les moustaches bien prononcées, les mâchoires volumineuses, le visage chevalin" ("George Eliot had the appearance of a man, a large head, unruly hair, a large nose, thick lips, a noticeable mustache, a square jawline, and a horselike face"), and that "George Sand avait la voix d'un homme et portait volontiers le costume masculin" ("George Sand had the voice of a man and readily donned masculine clothing") (403). He also believed that "Mme de Staël avait le visage (ajoutons-y: et le style) d'un homme" ("Mme de Staël had the appearance (and let's not forget: the style) of a man"), and concluded that "Presque toutes les femmes géniales de l'Amérique et de l'Angleterre en ces dernières années avaient la mandibule forte comme l'homme" ("In recent years, almost all of the brilliant women of North America and England have had the strong jawline of a man") (403). His depiction of such supposed "monsters" recalls the more common definition of the term, which the *Trésor* describes as a "créature légendaire, mythique, dont le corps est composé d'éléments disparates empruntés à différents êtres réels, et qui est remarquable par la terreur qu'elle inspire" ("mythical creature inspiring terror, whose body is comprised of disparate elements borrowed from other beings") ("Monstre" 1030). While she did not quite inspire terror, the "type" that came to depict women authors and poets in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries monstrously combined – in the eyes of male critics – seemingly incongruous attributes and qualities that belonged to two distinctly different "espèces" ("species") – the masculine man and the feminine woman.

As Planté observes, these hybrid creatures became increasingly frequent in the intellectual discourses of the Third Republic, a frequency witnessed by a proliferation of different names used to designate them:

> Pour résister à la confusion qui s'instaure en eux-mêmes et exorciser le danger de brouillage, les polémistes recourent à la magie des noms, et ne tarissent pas d'invention verbale pour désigner et flétrir, à la suite des bas-bleus, des viragos et des vieilles filles desséchées qui mènent cette sarabande infernale, les *femmelins*, les *hommes-femmes*, les travestis, les invertis, les *Chérubins* et *filles-pages*, les *prodigieuses coquettes* et les *vieilles coureuses de sabbat* du romantisme. (*Petite sœur* 111-12)
>
> (In order to combat the confusion created by these women and to exorcize the danger of their categorical transgressions, polemicists turned to the magic of naming, and the well did not run dry when it came to their verbal creativity in designating and debasing, after the blue stockings, the viragos and dried up spinsters that conducted this infernal song and dance, the femlings, the women-men, the cross-dressers, the sexual inverts, the cherubs and page-girls, the prodigious coquettes and the old witches of romanticism.)

This phenomenon was part of a widespread increase in discourses related more generally to "the third sex." While "l'idée d'un troisième sexe transcendant les genres traverse et hante toutes les époques, sans exception" ("the notion of a gender-transgressing third sex spanned and haunted every era, without exception"), notes Laure Murat, "Le siècle compris entre 1835 et 1939, si prodigue en figures nouvelles, discours et théories, aura constitué l'un des chapitres les plus bavards et les plus prometteurs de son histoire : entre ces deux dates, le troisième sexe *a été* inventé et *s'est* inventé en tant que sujet" ("the century stretching from 1835 to 1939, prolific in its production of new identities, discourses and theories, constitutes one of the most verbose and auspicious chapters in the history of the third sex: between these two dates, the third sex was invented – and invented itself – as a subject") (397-98). And along with this invention emerged the conception of the woman poet as a particular type of individual. Writing in the most masculine genre of the already masculine literary domain, the *femme poète* constituted, for nineteenth-century French society, an especially monstrous individual in several senses of the term, from indecent exhibitionist to incoherent anomaly to amalgamate hybrid creature. As a result, she occupied a position of otherness similar to that of previously mentioned poet types –

an otherness with respect to the laws of society, its norms, mores, and ideologies. But she also occupied a position of otherness regarding the so-called laws of nature, with her existence lying somewhere outside nature's apparently inviolable organization into two distinct sexes and genders. Queerness can be found in these positions of "monstrous other," which open up a space of incoherence and hybridity, of combinations and misalignments of distinct sexes and their correspondingly distinct gender roles.

Such combinations of masculine and feminine gender qualities were not always considered monstrous, however. This honorable qualification was reserved for the woman poet. For the male poet in the nineteenth century, incorporating feminine qualities into his male subjectivity was the sign of a quintessentially Romantic genius. In a 1907 article about Anna de Noailles's *Les éblouissements*, Proust compares Anna de Noailles to a male poet depicted in one of Gustave Moreau's paintings. Describing this painting, Proust remarks:

> […] on se demande, à le bien regarder, si ce poète n'est pas une femme. Peut-être Gustave Moreau a-t-il voulu signifier que le poète contient en lui toute l'humanité, doit posséder les tendresses de la femme ; […] S'il avait voulu peindre son poète à notre époque et dans nos pays et l'entourer cependant d'une beauté précieuse, il aurait été obligé d'en faire une femme. Même en Orient, d'ailleurs, même en Grèce, il s'y est souvent décidé. Alors, c'est une poétesse qu'il nous montre […]. (534-35)
>
> ([…] one wonders, when looking carefully, if this poet is not in fact a woman. Perhaps Gustave Moreau wished to signify that the poet embodies all of humanity, and therefore must also possess the tenderness of a woman; […] If he had wanted to depict this poet in our own time and place, while still surrounding him with precious beauty, he would have been obliged to make him a woman. Even when set in the Orient, incidentally, or even when set in Greece, his poet is often depicted as such. It is, then, a poetess that he presents us with […].)

Proust does not elaborate on this conception of the poet as an ideal combination of both man and woman, beyond remarking that Anna de Noailles, as a female poet, has the advantage of incorporating her own feminine beauty into her poetry, as opposed to depicting the beauty of a separate object, such as a muse. As he remarks, she is “à la fois l’auteur et le sujet de ses vers” (“both the author and the subject-matter of her verse”) (536). But he does consider the significance of such a sexually ambiguous representation of the poet: “Je ne sais si Gustave Moreau a senti combien, par une conséquence indirecte, cette belle conception du Poète-femme était capable de renouveler un jour l’économie de l’œuvre poétique elle-même” (“I do not know if Gustave Moreau was aware of the extent to which, by indirect consequence, this beautiful conception of the Woman-Poet would one day revitalize the economy of the poetic work itself”) (535). His crediting the poet’s gender androgyny with the renewal of poetry itself no doubt refers to the remarkable revitalization of the lyric tradition at the beginning of the nineteenth century, where the Romantic poet figure adopted and exploited particularly feminine qualities.

In *The Gendered Lyric*, Gretchen Schultz addresses the literary combination of qualities deemed masculine and feminine over the course of the nineteenth century, particularly in the Romantic, Parnassian, and Symbolist movements. She remarks that Romanticism, which launched lyric poetry’s revival at the beginning of the century, was curiously linked with cultural concepts of femininity, which Parnassian poetry would later counter with a more virile ideal. This Romantic femininity stemmed from the aesthetics of spontaneity and emotive effusion articulated by Germaine de Staël, one of the founders of French Romanticism.[7] And it was elaborated in the movement’s incorporation of qualities such as sentimentality, fecundity, fluidity, and diffusion.[8] Writing within such an aesthetic, the male poet was often seen to embody these feminine qualities in a sort of hybrid nature, both genius and sentimental, beholder of both worldly knowledge and intimate subjectivity. In this sense, as Schultz has observed, "the Romantics participated in a historical moment that reimagined the author as one having access to a wide range of gendered attributes" (21).

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[7] See Madame de Staël, *De l’Allemagne*, edited by Simone Balayé. Garnier-Flammarion, 1968, particularly Chapiter X “De la poésie” and Chapter XI “De la poésie classique et de la poésie romantique,” pp. 205-214.

[8] See Gretchen Schultz, *The Gendered Lyric*. Purdue University Press, 1999, particularly Chapters 1 and 6, for examples of these qualities.

At the same time, the literary tradition also rediscovered Sappho as a poetic figure. Sappho has appeared on and off in French literature from about the mid sixteenth century through the twenty-first century. And literary and cultural representations of her have ranged from lover of women, to lover of men, to chaste virgin, to prostitute, to teacher.[9] In *Fictions of Sappho 1546-1937* (1989), Joan DeJean traces the evolution of Sapphic fictions in French literature throughout these periods, noting that, "In the course of the nineteenth century in France, Sappho leaves behind the often modest and always timid heterosexuality in which she had been disguised for nearly a century to reemerge as a figure of highly charged sexuality, first a courtesan, later a (sometimes depraved, sometimes oversexed) lesbian" (13). While the reemergence of Sappho as a poet of deviant female sexuality can be attributed to several factors, one important reason is the "otherness" that such a figure represented to contemporary male authors and poets.[10] In DeJean's opinion, "Historically, the most influential fictions of Sappho and her poetry have been conceived by those male authors somehow able to identify with the original woman writer, to succeed in a special variant of what Froma Zeitlin calls 'playing the other,' in this case, re-voicing a most problematic other: a woman who wrote of a woman's desire for women" (7-8).

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[9] See Catharine Stimpson's foreword to Joan DeJean's *Fictions of Sappho*, particularly page xiv, for an overview of Sappho's various depictions throughout history.

[10] See Gretchen Schultz, *Sapphic Fathers*. University of Toronto Press, 2014, particularly Chapter 1, for a discussion of this phenomenon.

So how does this otherness of the Sapphic poet figure relate to poetic manifestations of queerness? Initially, and most obviously, given the evolution of Sappho's representation, a poet's identification with the poet figure during this period came to entail an identification with a person of queer sexuality in a legitimized literary context. Paul Verlaine perhaps put it most concisely in his "Ballade Sappho" ("Sappho Ballad") by ending each stanza and refrain with the declaration, "Je suis pareil à la grande Sappho" ("I am just like the great Sappho"):

> Ma douce main de maîtresse et d'amant
> Passe et rit sur ta chère chair en fête,
> Rit et jouit de ton jouissement.
> Pour la servir tu sais bien qu'elle est faite.
> Et ton beau corps faut que je le dévête
> Pour l'enivrer sans fin d'un art nouveau
> Toujours, dans la caresse toujours prête.
> Je suis pareil à la grande Sappho. (lines 1-8)
>
> (My gentle hand of mistress and lover
> Flows and laughs over your cherished skin
> Laughs and enjoys your own delectation.
> To serve you, for this you know it was made.
> And your beautiful body I must unclothe
> To intoxicate it fully with an art always new
> Always ready and willing, and quick to caress.
> I am just like the great Sappho.)

As this first stanza suggests, however, Verlaine's identification with Sappho was not limited to questions of queer sexuality; it was also linked to a more aesthetic concept, underlined by the stanza's rhyme scheme, which pairs the "la grande Sappho" ("the great Sappho") with "un art nouveau" ("a new art").

In order to consider this more aesthetic relation between Sappho and a new form of art, a closer look at Charles Baudelaire's treatment of the Sapphic poet figure proves useful. Baudelaire was the first of the period's poets to shape Sappho's emergence as a primarily lesbian figure. According to DeJean, "Baudelaire's portrait of Sappho is most striking because, alone among contemporary men of letters, he makes her Sapphic. And this homosexual Sappho is the key to Baudelaire's redefinition of literary lesbianism" (271). His three long poems treating the subject of Sapphic sexuality form one of the earliest sections of his 1857 *Fleurs du Mal* (*Flowers of Evil*), a collection whose original title, incidentally, was *Les lesbiennes* (*The Lesbians*). But beyond Baudelaire's inclusion of such Sapphic figures into his poetry, it is his poetic identification with Sappho and her fellow inhabitants of Lesbos that reveals a much more intricate connection between the poetic and the lesbian identity.

In "Lesbos," the first of Baudelaire's three "lesbian poems," the poet depicts the island of Lesbos as a locus of exotic voluptuousness. But he also describes it as a place of sadness and regret as it laments the suicide of its inhabitant, Sappho, who threw herself into the ocean after having blasphemously offered her body to a man. The first seven stanzas of the text form an extended apostrophe to the island itself, but in the eighth stanza, the poet introduces his own presence into the text through the pronoun "nous" ("us"). After asking which of the gods could possibly condemn Sappho, the poet asks more generally:

> Que nous veulent les lois du juste et de l'injuste ?
> Vierges au cœur sublime, honneur de l'archipel,
> Votre religion comme une autre est auguste,
> Et l'amour se rira de l'Enfer et du Ciel !
> Que nous veulent les lois du juste et de l'injuste ? (lines 36-40)
>
> (What do we care for the laws of right and wrong?
> Maidens of highest heart, pride of the land,
> As worthy as another's is your creed,
> And love will laugh at Heaven and at Hell!
> What do we care for the laws of right and wrong?)[11]

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[11] Translation by James McGowan.

By including himself among those who are subject to the laws of the "just" and "unjust," the poet reveals that he is also familiar with such judgment, and he questions its legitimacy. He, along with the inhabitants of Lesbos, considers their "religion" as righteous as any, their heart as sublime, and the nature of love as indifferent to such places of judgment as Hell and Heaven.

Baudelaire further developed his identification with the lesbians of Lesbos in "Femmes damnées" ("Damned Women"). In this text, the poet does not mention Sappho specifically, but describes the troubled pleasure characterizing the experience of women who, like Sappho, love and live with other women. After describing the "douces langueurs" ("sweet languor") and the "frissons amers" ("shudders of pain") experienced by these Sapphic women, the poet ends the text with another apostrophe:

> Ô vierges, ô démons, ô monstres, ô martyrs,
> De la réalité grands esprits contempteurs,
> Chercheuses d'infini, dévotes et satyres,
> Tantôt pleines de cris, tantôt pleines de pleurs,
>
> Vous que dans votre enfer mon âme a poursuivies,
> Pauvres sœurs, je vous aime autant que je vous plains,
> Pour vos mornes douleurs, vos soifs inassouvies,
> Et les urnes d'amour dont vos grands cœurs sont pleins ! (lines 21-28)
>
> (O maidens, demons, monsters – martyrs all,
> Spirits disdainful of reality,
> Satyrs and seekers of the infinite,
> With rain of tears or cries of extasy,
>
> You whom my soul has followed to your hell,
> Poor sisters, let me pity and approve –
> For all your leaden griefs, for slakeless thirsts,
> And for your hearts, great urns that ache with love!)[12]

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[12] Translation by James McGowan.

Described in this way, the Sapphic women appear to embody the same sense of otherness that serves to marginalize the poet figure of the nineteenth century.

Like the *poète maudit*, these ostracized martyrs are also "damned," living as monstrous others, alone on their island. Joan DeJean, commenting on Baudelaire's representation of the Sapphic figure throughout the three poems, believes that this *maudit* quality contributes to the originality of his literary incorporation of Sappho:

> Baudelaire is the first French lyric poet to reject simple adaptation of the Sapphic original, à la Catullus or Ronsard, in favor of a highly original personal fiction of Sappho. He presents Sappho as the classical model for his ideal of modern heroinism: female mannishness (*mascula Sappho*), a woman devoting herself to intellectual creativity, a woman perpetually virginal because she refuses men access to her body. Such a woman was "lamentable," was of necessity "damned," that is, would, in his fiction of her, inevitably be ostracized." (274)

To this comment she adds: "That the 'sublimity' of Sapphic 'sterility' would be threatening to civic values was inevitable: the notes Baudelaire prepared for his lawyer for the 1857 trial about the *Les fleurs du Mal*'s obscenity reveal that it did not occur to him to try to contest this" (274). And so, by representing Sappho and her fellow inhabitants of Lesbos as "sublimely sterile," as well as living apart in a colony for women, a fact which he knew to be threatening to civic values, Baudelaire depicts the Sapphic figure in terms reminiscent of the *poète voyou* (delinquent poet) as well, given the threats that this poet type poses to contemporary social structure and values. In her 2008 article, "Gender, Sexuality and the Poetics of Identification," Gretchen Schultz comes to a similar conclusion regarding the otherness of Baudelaire's Sappho. She notes that, "Ultimately, Baudelaire's lesbian poetry permits an identification with what he saw to be the poet's and the lesbian's shared social and moral abjection, rather than with women or love for the same" (97).

In “Lesbos,” however, Sappho appears closely linked not only with the otherness of the poet as *maudit* or *voyou*, but also with Baudelaire’s notion of *voyance* (poetic vision). And in this case, the poet’s identification with Sappho is, in fact, based on her specifically lesbian “love for the same.” After inserting himself into the poem through his use of the pronoun “nous” (“us”) and his questioning of the “lois du juste et de l’injuste” (“laws of the just and the unjust”), the poet continues in the next stanza:

> Car Lesbos entre tous m’a choisi sur la terre
> Pour chanter le secret de ses vierges en fleurs,
> Et je fus dès l’enfance admis au noir mystère
> Des rires effrénés mêlés aux sombres pleurs ;
> Car Lesbos entre tous m’a choisi sur la terre. (lines 41-45)
>
> (Since I am Lesbos’ choice from all on earth
> To sing the secret of her flowering maids,
> And I from childhood worshipped in the cult
> Of frenzied laughter mingled with somber tears –
> Since I am Lesbos’ choice from all on earth,)[13]

As the speaker states, he, as poet, was admitted early on into the “noir mystère” (“dark mystery”) of the inhabitants’ woman-loving lifestyle on Lesbos. The dark mysteriousness attributed to this existence recalls the impenetrability and incomprehensibility that often shrouded female same-sex relations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially from the perspective of the desiring male gaze.[14] Baudelaire’s characterization of the lesbian experience in this way recalls the literary period’s various characterizations of *l’Inconnu* (the Unknown): In “Femmes damnées” (“Damned Women”), Baudelaire refers to the lesbian women as “chercheuses d’infini”

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[13] Translation by James McGowan.

[14] See Laure Murat. *La Loi du genre*. Paris: Fayard (2006), p. 326 for a discussion of this phenomenon in Marcel Proust’s *La Recherche* (*In Search of Lost Time*).

(“seekers of the expanse”) (line 23). And in “Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte” (“Damned Women: Delphine and Hippolyte”), after making love to Delphine, the young Hippolyte feels “un abîme béant” (“a gaping abyss”) (line 76) growing inside her, “profond comme le vide” (“deep as the void”) (line 77). In response to this reaction, the poet interjects, telling both women to plunge “au plus profond du gouffre” (“to the depths of the abyss”) (line 87) and to flee “l’infini” (“the expanse”) (line 104) that they carry within them. It is in the poem “Lesbos,” however, that we see the poet penetrating the otherwise impenetrable abyss, void, or expanse of lesbian love. Not only is the poet admitted into the “dark mystery,” but, as he explains in the same stanza, he is chosen out of everyone else on Earth “pour chanter le secret de ses vierges en fleurs” (“to sing the secret of Lesbos’s virgins in bloom”). This ability to sing, or verbally interpret, the unspoken secret of Lesbos’s flowering virgins, the original flowers of evil, recalls the poetic ideal so longingly described in the last lines of “Élévation” (“Elevation”), where the poet imagines the happiness of the enlightened individual “qui plane sur la vie, et comprend sans effort / le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes!” (“who soars above life and understands with ease / the language of flowers and of speechless things”).

The state of *voyance* depicted in “Élévation” is reinforced in the imagery of “Lesbos” as well. After describing his admission into the mystery of female same-sex love, which has given him the ability to sing the secret of this existence, the poet continues in the next stanza:

> Et depuis lors je veille au sommet de Leucate,
> Comme une sentinelle à l’œil perçant et sûr,
> Qui guette nuit et jour brick, tartane ou frégate,
> Dont les formes au loin frissonnent dans l’azur ;
> Et depuis lors je veille au sommet de Leucate, (lines 46-50)
>
> (I spend my time on watch from Leucas’ peak,
> A sentinel with sure and piercing eye,
> Who searches night and day for sail or hull,

The distant forms that tremble in the blue;
I spend my time on watch from Leucas' peak)[15]

Like the skylark of "Élévation" that hovers over the land, effortlessly seeing and interpreting all that lies below, the poet in "Lesbos" also becomes all-seeing, describing himself as a sentinel with clear and certain vision, who oversees the vast azure of the surrounding sea from high above, on the summit of Leucadia. And it is his identification with a specifically lesbian representation of the poet figure Sappho that facilitates his approach to such a poetic ideal.

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[15] Translation by James McGowan.

CHAPTER 2: THE LYRIC "I"

In "Critically Queer" (1993), Judith Butler argues that "there is no 'I' who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse" (18). Subjectivity is discursively produced, and for this reason, the subject is shaped by the constraints of language, which precedes and conditions its social recognition (18). "Where there is an 'I' who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse," explains Butler, "there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that 'I' and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will" (18). How, then, does one succeed in forging a new trajectory, one that enables, for example, the formation and expression of a queer subjectivity?

Butler points to the opportunity created by the "instability and incompleteness of subject-formation" (18). Performed through the compulsive repetition of discursive norms, subject-formation remains an on-going process and implies the impossibility "of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one's social identity is inaugurated and mobilized" (18). This impossibility constitutes a weakness in the discursive norm. And this weakness can be worked – that is to say, exploited for its queer potential. In order to work the weaknesses inherent in discursive subject-formation, Butler proposes a form of "discursive resignification," through which certain norms of language can be "redeployed, twisted, queered from prior usage," much like the strategic appropriation and resignification of the term "queer," itself (19). In this sense, the constraining effects of discourse "mark at once the *limits* of agency and its most *enabling conditions*," since the norms that shape the expression and identity of the subject are subject themselves to a strategic re-appropriation and re-articulation, a process that can lead to their eventual resignification (20). As Butler concludes, "The resignification of norms is thus a function of their *inefficacy*, and so the question of subversion, of *working the weakness in the norm*, becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation" (26).

Can a subversive re-articulation of lyric norms forge a new trajectory within poetic discourse, one that enables the formation of a queer subjectivity and the expression of a queer desire? The lyric tradition, whose oldest and most defining feature is perhaps the centrality of the first-person pronoun – the so-called "lyric 'I'" – has a particularly constraining effect on the poetic subject that it precedes and conditions. Centuries of discursive repetition have shaped this lyric "I," which, by the nineteenth century, can be safely assumed to represent a cisgender, masculine, heterosexual subject. Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, certain poets succeed in destabilizing this normative conception of the lyric "I" by working particular weaknesses in its norms. This section will explore such poets' subversive re-articulations of the first-person pronoun in various contexts and consider the queering effects of such a destabilized lyric "I."

Section 1: The Autobiographical Lyric "I"

In the poem, "Two Loves," written by Lord Alfred Douglas in 1892, the poet makes reference to a "love that dare not speak its name," a phrase that has since been adopted as a euphemism for homosexual love. It was made famous by Oscar Wilde's trial, during which the prosecutor attempted to prove Wilde's homosexuality by asking him to explain what was meant by the expression and to give his reaction to Lord Alfred's poem as a whole. Despite Wilde's eloquently phrased response, his ultimate conviction and imprisonment for gross indecency on account of his relations with Lord Alfred Douglas reveals one of many reasons why such love would dare not speak its name. Male homosexuality remained a crime in Britain throughout the nineteenth century and the majority of the twentieth century. It was not decriminalized in

England and Wales until 1967, and in Scotland until 1980.[16] In France, same-sex relations were decriminalized much sooner, with the new penal code of 1791. But as Laure Murat notes in *La loi du genre* (*The Law of Gender*), same-sex relations, especially between men, remained in the opinion of the public and the police, “la plus ignoble des passions” (“the most revolting of passions”) and a threat to societal structure and mores (27-28). And in the literary domain, this legal and social condemnation of homosexuality found an equally powerful effector in the period’s predilection for literary censure.

How, then, does one speak of a love that, for various reasons, dare not speak its name? This question becomes especially pertinent for lyric poets, whose literary form, which is centered on intimate expressions of the self and the self’s desires, so directly implicates its author in any such expressions. As Ross Chambers remarks in his 2004 article, “Four Ways to Meddle with Subjectivity,” the lyric poem has historically been, and often continues to be, governed by the assumptions of autobiography. He refers to what he calls the “lyric pact,” where “an equivalence is assumed between the identity of the poet, as the agent responsible for writing the poem, and that of the lyric subject that is produced by the language of the poem […] as the ‘I’ who speaks in the poem” (220). This perceived transparency between the lyric “I” and the poet-author can be traced back to the poetry of the Renaissance, where Petrarch’s sonnets or Ronsard’s odes, for example, were considered deeply personal expressions of the poets’ own feelings and desires (Whidden 38-39).

With the emergence of the Romantic movement in France, the autobiographical nature of the lyric “I” was actively promoted as a defining feature of lyric poetry. As literary critic Mme de Staël notes in *De l'Allemagne* (1839), "La poésie lyrique s'exprime au nom de l'auteur même ; ce n'est plus dans un personnage qu'il se transporte, c'est en lui-même qu'il trouve les divers mouvements dont il est animé" ("Lyric poetry is the direct expression of the author himself; he no longer speaks through the words of a character, having discovered within himself the various modulations that animate him") (206). Poets also frequently alluded to such a characteristic. Lamartine, in the 1849 preface to his *Méditations*, distances himself from previous lyric conventions when he famously declares: "Je suis le premier qui ai fait descendre la poésie du Parnasse, et qui ai donné à ce qu'on nommait la muse, au lieu d'une lyre à sept cordes de convention, les fibres mêmes du cœur de l'homme" ("I am the first to have dismounted poetry from its Parnassian summit, and to have given our so-called muse not the conventional seven strings of the lyre, but the very fibers of the human heart") (145). The poet explains that when writing his *Méditations,* he endeavored to produce a deeply personal and individual literary work: "je m'exprimais moi-même pour moi-même" ("I was expressing myself for myself"), he states, adding that "Ce n'était pas un art, c'était un soulagement de mon propre cœur, qui se berçait de ses propres sanglots" ("It was not an art, it was a respite for my own heart, which soothed itself with its own tears") (151). He claims that, for this reason, with the publication and first appearance of his *Méditations*, "le public entendit une âme sans la voir, et vit un homme au lieu d'un livre" ("the public heard a soul without seeing it, and saw a man instead of a book") (151-52).

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[16] See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. Quartet Books, 1990, p. 11. See also Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*. Routledge, 1981, pp. 106-109.

The Romantic ideal of a truly subjective poetry is challenged in various ways over the course of the century, but the autobiographical assumption underlying the lyric's use of the first-person pronoun is never truly eliminated. Dominique Combe discusses the persistence of this convention in comparison to the function of the first-person pronoun in other genres, such as prose:

> La poésie lyrique pose en définitive […] les mêmes problèmes que n'importe quel genre à la première personne – que le roman, en particulier : *Du côté de chez Swann* et *Les Fleurs du mal* sont composés à la première personne, sans pour autant ressortir à l'autobiographie. Il est aujourd'hui communément admis comme une évidence qu'un roman ou un récit écrit à la première personne n'a pas pour autant nécessairement une valeur autobiographique. La distinction méthodologique fondamentale de la narratologie est ainsi celle du narrateur et de l'auteur, et l'usage de la première personne ne constitue aucunement une garantie d'« authenticité », c'est-à-dire de référentialité, et peut s'inscrire dans le cadre de la fiction. On peut donc se demander pourquoi, dans le cas de la poésie lyrique, aujourd'hui encore, le lecteur continue spontanément à identifier le sujet de l'énonciation au poète comme personne. (52)
>
> (Ultimately, when it comes to first-person narration, lyric poetry poses the same problems as any other genre – as the novel, in particular: *Swann's Way* and *The Flowers of Evil* are written in the first person, but they do not for that reason constitute autobiographies. It is considered self-evident nowadays that a novel or a text written in first person does not for that reason carry any autobiographical value. The fundamental methodological distinction of narratology is therefore the separation of narrator and author, and the use of the first person provides no guarantee of "authenticity," which is to say, of referentiality; it can be inscribed in the domain of fiction. And so one wonders why, in the case of lyric poetry, the reader continues to this day to automatically associate the subject of the enunciation with the poet as person.)

Given the persistence and pervasiveness of the lyric's autobiographical assumption, any poetic attempt to express, in the first person, a love that dare not speak its name, must negotiate and mitigate the implications of this assumption.

Marcel Proust's Referential Ambiguity

In *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) (1913-27), Marcel Proust thoroughly explores, through the use of a first-person narrator, the question of inversion as a sexuality and identity. But in addition to his monumental prose work, Proust has also produced a significant amount of poetry, some of which dates back to his adolescence and involves first-person expressions of queer desire. The majority of these queer poems were never intended for publication, and it is perhaps for this reason that their expressions of queer desire are at times much more explicitly and passionately declared than any such expressions in his great novel. A concise example is Proust's first known poem, which he wrote in 1888 when he was 17 years old, and which he dedicated to Daniel Halévy, his classmate at the time:

> Pédérastie
>
> Si j'avais un gros sac d'argent d'or ou de cuivre
> Avec un peu de nerf aux reins lèvres ou mains
> Laissant ma vanité – cheval, sénat ou livre,
> Je m'enfuirais là-bas, hier, ce soir ou demain
>
> Au gazon framboisé – émeraude ou carmin ! –
> Sans rustiques ennuis, guêpes, rosée ou givre
> Je voudrais à jamais coucher, aimer ou vivre
> Avec un tiède enfant, Jacques, Pierre ou Firmin.
>
> Arrière le mépris timide des Prud'hommes !
> Pigeons, neigez ! Chantez, ormeaux ! blondissez, pommes !
> Je veux jusqu'à mourir aspirer son parfum !
>
> Sous l'or des soleils roux, sous la nacre des lunes
> Je veux … m'évanouir et me croire défunt
> Loin du funèbre glas des Vertus importunes !
>
> (Pederasty
>
> If I had money from a boundless mint
> and sinew enough in hands, lips, loins,
> I'd shun the vanity of politics and print,
> and leave – tomorrow? No, *tonight*! – for lawns
>
> luminous with artificial green
> (*without* the rustic flaws of frost and vermin),
> where I'd forever be sleeping with one
> warm child or other: François, Firmin? …
>
> For what is *manly mockery* to me?
> Let Sodom's apples burn, acre by acre,

I'd savor still the sweat of those sweet limbs!

Beneath a solar gold, a lunar nacre,
I'd … *languish* (an *ars moriendi* of my own),
deaf to the knell of dreary Decency!)[17]

Even though the poem was written at the end of the nineteenth century, it is strongly reflective of Romantic themes and images. Its idealization of a rustic nature retreat, free from the constraints of society, as well as its colorful expression of the poet's intense emotions and desires, reflect some typical Romantic and lyric characteristics. Of course, what differentiates the poem from conventional Romantic and lyric themes is the confession of a particularly queer romantic and erotic desire. The poet (whether or not he can be conflated with Proust) reveals himself as masculine through his use of the adjective "défunt" ("dead") in line 13, and he rather clearly states in the second quatrain his desire to forever sleep with, make love with, or live with the warm body of a young man – a Jacques, Pierre, or Firmin.

Reading "Pédérastie" in relation to Proust's other first-person poems, however, reveals some incongruences in his use of the lyric "I." These incongruences call into question the referential nature that relates the first-person pronoun to the poet, and the poet to the author. The following text provides an example. Like "Pederasty," it also deals with the subject of homosexuality, but in a less personal and more humorous way. Harold Augenbraum speculates in his editorial notes that the poem could be alluding to Russia's dominance over Bulgaria through reference to the rumored homosexuality of Ferdinand de Bulgarie (304):

On prétend qu'un russien, digne que Dieu le garde,
Sut éveiller encor un dernier sentiment
(En y laissant son corps glisser jusqu'à la garde)
Au cul pourtant tanné du pauvre Ferdinand.

---

[17] Translation by Richard Howard.

Que la flamme éparpille et arde
Jusqu’à ma dernière harde
J’évoquerais si j’étais barde
Devant une foule hagarde
L’inimaginable instrument
Plus dur en vérité qu’un métal de Dinant
Plus pressé qu’un foireux qui tarde
Plus léger qu’un flocon qu’on carde
Cinglant plus fort qu’une nasarde
L’insensible paroi qu’il larde,
Y virant comme une guimbarde,
Tel le bateau lorsqu’il embarde
Et le frôlant plus tendrement
Que telle lèvre papelarde,
Le tout sans réveiller le moine Ferdinand.
Pourtant au sein d’un songe il crut qu’il sentait là
Le membre aimé jadis de … d’Antoine Sala
Ô souvenir exquis de la vingtième année
Il pressait d’un doigt lourd cette verge veinée
Que le sperme argentait comme un ruisseau d’avril
« Veux-tu que je t’enfile Antoine », ainsi dit-il.
Répondit en chrétien le fils de Coralie :
Je ne veux qu’un échange, Ô toi (…)
Tu me (…) à l’Infante Elchie.

(They say a Russian, may God preserve his soul,
Managed to rouse a flutter of sensation
In Ferdinand’s leathery, tanned, and well-worked hole
By slipping in up to the hilt his brave baton.
May fire consume to ash and coal
My last rags and belongings all:
If I were a poet, I would tell
To a wide-eyed crowd the marvel
Of this flabbergasting tool
Harder, I swear, than Dinant’s well-forged iron,
Malingering like a coward from his battalion,
Lighter than fluffy carded wool,
Lashing that insensate wall
It greases harshly with its drool,
Swiveling there like an ancient wagon
Or tilting like a heeling yawl
And brushing it more tenderly than
A touch from the lips of a cardinal.
All this without waking monkish Ferdinand.
Yet in dream he thought he was feeling – *ooh la la!* –
The once-beloved member of – Antoine Sala.

> O exquisite memory of his twentieth year
> When he pressed that veiny want with heavy finger
> And spurted out silver sperm like an April brook.
> “Shall I screw you now, Antoine?” ’Twas thus he spoke.
> To hear that good Christian, Coralie’s son, reply:
> “I want only one exchange, Ferdinand --- i.e.:
> that you --- me to the Infanta Elchie.”)[18]

The poem provides an interesting example of Proust’s use of homosexuality as a source of mockery. But with respect to the question of the lyric “I,” lines 7-9 stand out: “J’évoquerais si j’étais barde / Devant une foule hagarde / l’inimaginable instrument” (“If I were a bard, I would tell / To a wide-eyed crowd the marvel / Of this flabbergasting tool”). This peripheral statement suddenly throws into question the identity of both the speaking “I” and the poet, as well as their relation to Proust as author. Does the use of the imperfect tense (“If I were a bard”) imply that the speaker is not in fact a poet? The continuation of the poem seems to contradict this hypothetical statement as the “I” does, in fact, go on to evoke the instrument, in great detail, for the next seven or eight lines: “Plus dur en vérité qu’un métal de Dinant […] tel le bateau lorsqu’il embarde” (“Harder, I swear, than Dinant’s well-forged iron […] Or tilting like a heeling yawl”) (lines 10-16). Do these lines imply that it is Proust, rather than the “I,” who is not a poet? Where is the poet in this poem? Or who is the poet? Or rather, who is the “I”?

In another of Proust’s texts, the first-person pronoun is feminine. Presented as a prose poem, it begins with the paragraph:

> Pourquoi j’aime tant les chèvrefeuilles ? C’est parce que mon bien-aimé a planté un chèvrefeuille, sous la fenêtre de ma chambre afin qu’à mon réveil la grisante odeur de ses fleurs me dise : « Toute la nuit les pensées de ton bien-aimé n’ont cessé d’exhaler vers toi leur plus doux parfum d’amour. »

---

[18] Translation by Rosanna Warren.

> (Why do I so love the honeysuckle? It is because my beloved has planted a honeysuckle under my bedroom window so that when I wake, the intoxicating smell of its flowers will say to me: "All night long, the thoughts of your beloved have ceaselessly exhaled to you their sweetest scent of love.")[19]

Each successive verse begins with a similar question referring to different kinds of flowers and is followed by an explanation recounting the suffering and eventual suicide of the male lover who offered them. The poem ends with the following stanza:

> Non, mon cœur ne lui a jamais appartenu quoique le sien fut bien à moi. Mon cœur n'appartiendra jamais à personne et je ne sais seulement si j'ai un cœur ; mais je sais bien qu'aucun amour ne saura prendre ma vie car je suis une honnête petite femme ; une honnête petite femme ne doit pas aimer : elle doit faire rire, pleurer et mourir les autres : mais son cœur à elle doit ignorer toute souffrance.
>
> (No, my heart never belonged to him, though his heart was certainly mine. My heart will never belong to anyone and I don't even know if I have a heart; but I know well that no love will be able to take my life because I am a decent little woman; a decent little woman does not have to love: she must make others laugh, cry, and die: but her own heart must be unacquainted with all suffering.)[20]

In his editorial note, Harold Augenbraum indicates that, "At the end of this prose poem Proust noted 'H. Heine trad. M. P.'," to which he adds, "An endnote in the Francis and Gontier collection says that 'this piece was translated from a German version at the Lycée Condorcet.'" Augenbraum also explains that "Fortini omits it from his Italian translation because 'it seems to be a translation from Heine.'" He concludes the editorial note by stating: "I have not been able to locate anything in Heine that approximates it" (280). The only indication that this poem is a translation of another text seems to be Proust's endnote referencing H. Heine. If it is a translation, however, this raises a different set of questions regarding Proust's relation to the text:

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[19] Translation by Lydia Davis.
[20] Translation by Lydia Davis.

What about this particular poem makes Proust copy it out and translate it into his own words? Does he identify with it in some way? If so, could it be in terms of his own understanding of homosexuality as inversion, where a gay man is, in a sense, a woman on the inside?[21] Or could it be a "straight" identification with the male lover, who is in turn imagining and bitterly ventriloquizing the thoughts of an indifferent woman? In any case, presented as a poetic text, there is no narrative framework to contextualize the poem's discursive act and to situate the poem's "I." Once again, Proust's relation to the first-person pronoun cannot simply be read in accordance with the genre's autobiographical assumption.

Proust is by no means the first or only poet to have written with a lyric "I" whose referent is not clearly the poem's author. In "La pipe," for example, Baudelaire writes with an "I" that belongs to an author's pipe, which in turn describes the thoughts and feelings of its author, who takes up the position of object in this literary dynamic. And the more definitively Romantic poet, Victor Hugo, also produced quite a few poems that call into question the identity and nature of the lyric "I." In the first poem of his "Livre Lyrique" ("Lyric Book") in *Les quatre vents de l'esprit* (*The Four Winds of the Spirit*) (1881), the "I" equates itself with the poet, but also with various inanimate objects. This objectification occurs in contrast to the earthly phenomena, such as the thunder and darkness, which are in turn personified:

> Je suis fait d'ombre et de marbre.
> Comme les pieds noirs de l'arbre,
> Je m'enfonce dans la nuit.
> J'écoute ; je suis sous terre ;
> D'en bas je dis au tonnerre :
> Attends ! ne fais pas de bruit.
>
> Moi qu'on nomme le poëte,

---

[21] See Karl Ulrichs's *The Riddle of Man-Manly Love*, in which he describes a homosexual man as "the soul of a woman in the body of a man."

Je suis dans la nuit muette
L’escalier mystérieux ;
Je suis l’escalier Ténèbres ;
Dans mes spirales funèbres
L’ombre ouvre ses vagues yeux.

[……………………………] (lines 1-12)

(I am made of shadow and marble.
Like the dark feet of the tree,
I dig down into night.
I listen; I am underground;
And from there I say to the thunder:
Just wait! Don’t make a sound.

I whom others call the poet,
I am in the night so silent
The impenetrable staircase;
I am the staircase of Darkness;
In my funereal spiral,
The shadow opens its hazy eyes.)

Given the defining status of the autobiographical lyric “I” during the Romantic period, and the persistence of the autobiographical assumption in the lyric tradition, how does one explain the incongruences of the lyric “I” highlighted by such poems? In some ways, they might be considered weaknesses in the norm. In a Romantic or lyric tradition that promotes a truly subjective poetry, this ideal can only be maintained by overlooking these weaknesses. They can be read simply as exceptions, or, more particularly, explained away as examples of poetic license or as purely figurative representations. The very need for such explanations, however, hints at the idealized nature of this norm and the inefficacy that haunts it.

Proust’s poetry constitutes a collection of texts that work these weaknesses. The incongruences in the nature and function of his lyric “I” create a certain ambiguity regarding its referential nature. This ambiguity undermines the autobiographical assumptions that would otherwise underlie our readings, creating a space of plausible deniability for the author. What is to prevent the "I" in "Pédérastie," for example, from also being read as a purely figurative representation of Proust, or as an imitation of someone else, or as the adoption of another perspective? Such plausible deniability is advantageous in mitigating the implications of the lyric's autobiographical assumption, especially in articulations of a love that dare not speak its name.

But in addition to the practical advantages of cultivating such ambiguity, Proust's poetry reveals its more subversive effects. By cultivating the ambiguity surrounding the lyric's first-person pronoun, Proust destabilizes the ways in which we, as readers, make sense of poetic texts within the lyric tradition, as well as the ways in which we understand sexualities as distinct, pre-determined subjectivities. The following poem, entitled "Je contemple souvent le ciel de ma mémoire" ("I Often Contemplate My Memory's Skies"), provides an example of such queering effects. Despite the "je" ("I") in the poem's title, the first-person pronoun is consistently presented in its plural form, "nous" ("we"), throughout the body of the text. It is in large part the ambiguity concerning the referents of this "we" that destabilizes our interpretations of the poem and its subjectivity, as well as our conceptions of Proust's identity and sexuality. Over the course of the following pages, I will trace the first-person pronoun throughout the poem, proposing possible readings of the text and revealing how these unstable readings change as the poem progresses.

The text begins with the following two stanzas:

Le temps efface tout comme effacent les vagues
Les travaux des enfants sur le sable aplani
Nous oublierons ces mots si précis et si vagues
Derrière qui chacun nous sentions l'infini.

Le temps efface tout il n'éteint pas les yeux
Qu'ils soient d'opale ou d'étoile ou d'eau claire
Beaux comme dans le ciel ou chez un lapidaire
Ils brûleront pour nous d'un feu triste ou joyeux.

(Time erases all just as the waves
Efface the children's castles on the beach
We'll forget these words so precise, so vague
Still sensing the infinite behind each.

Time effaces all it does not erase the eyes
Be they of star, clear water, or opal
As rich in the skies or on the jeweler's table
They flame for us, joyous or sadly wise.)[22]

Who is the "nous" (we) that will be forgetting "ces mots si précis et si vagues" ("these words so precise and so vague"), and remembering only "les yeux" ("the eyes"), whose memory will burn "d'un feu triste ou joyeux" ("as a solemn or joyous fire")? Given the poet's admiration of the eyes as a focal point of beauty and desire, in addition to the traditionally Romantic theme of *tempus fugit*, which is established by the anaphora "le temps efface tout" ("time erases everything"), we might assume the poem to be about the memory of lost love between the poet and the poet's beloved (in the style of Alphonse de Lamartine's "The Lake," for example). In this sense, the poet as lover could be reassuring a beloved that although time erases everything, "il n'éteint pas les yeux" ("it does not dull the eyes") and so the image of each other's eyes will live on in each other's memory. There are no contextual or grammatical indications in these stanzas as to the gender of the poet or of the assumed loved one, so it is not yet possible to determine much about the identity of these subjects composing the "we" and the nature of their relationship.

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[22] Translation by Cole Swensen.

The ambiguity continues in the next two stanzas, which provide a description of the various eyes that remain in the poet's memory: "Les uns joyaux volés de leur écrin vivant […] D'autres doux feux ravis encor par Prométhée" ("With some like gems snatched from their living casing […] And others soft fires still held by Prometheus") (lines 4-8). As these lines reveal, there seems to be quite a lot of eyes burning in the poet's memory, so it becomes less likely that the poem's "we" implies a sort of reassuring pact between the poet and a current loved one. While the referents of the "we" remain uncertain, the next stanza in the poem does provide clarification with respect to the nature of these many lost loves. In this stanza, the poetic subject temporarily leaves the plural first person "we" to take up the singular first person "I" in an apostrophe to the shining eyes:

> Constellez à jamais le ciel de ma mémoire
> Inextinguibles yeux de celles que j'aimai
> Rêvez comme des morts, luisez comme des gloires
> Mon cœur sera brillant comme une nuit de Mai.
>
> (Constellate ever my memory's skies
> Dream like the dead and gleam like the day
> To all whom I loved for your endless eyes
> My heart will shine like a night in May.)[23]

As the use of the accentuated pronoun "celles" ("those" – grammatically feminine) indicates, the eyes of the poet's past loves are the eyes of women, and only women. This of course raises several questions with respect to Proust's sexuality and his relation to the lyric "I." I will return to these issues after discussing the remaining stanzas of the poem, where additional readings of the poet's subjectivity continue to emerge in relation to the ambiguity of the pronoun "we" and its referents.

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[23] Translation by Cole Swensen.

This ambiguity becomes particularly destabilizing in stanzas 7-9, which focus on the memory of two individual women. In the seventh stanza, the "we" now appears to encompass the poet and one of these women in a more personal scene, describing an intimate evening that the two spent together:

> Le temps efface tout l'intimité des soirs
> Mes deux mains dans son cou vierge comme la neige
> Ses regards caressants mes nerfs comme un arpège
> Le printemps secouant sur nous ses encensoirs.
>
> (Time erases the closeness of evening
> My hands on her neck as virgin as snow
> Her gaze down my nerves in an arpeggio
> As over us spring sets its censors swinging.)[24]

The eighth stanza then provides a description of the second woman, who had eyes filled with mystery and sadness. By the ninth stanza, however, the reading of "nous" ("us") as the poet referring to himself and a past lover no longer seems plausible. The first line of the stanza finishes up the description of the second woman, before the rest of the stanza returns to a reflection on the various eyes of past lovers in general:

> Et son cœur était vain comme un regard joyeux.
> D'autres comme la mer si changeante et si douce
> Nous égaraient vers l'âme enfouie en ses yeux
> Comme en ces soirs marins où l'inconnu nous pousse.
>
> (And her heart as empty as her look was gay
> Others as soft and shiftless as the sea
> Led us to soul in her eyes astray
> As through a maritime twilight, the unknown leads.)[25]

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[24] Translation by Cole Swensen.
[25] Translation by Cole Swensen.

At this point, the referent of the "nous" ("us") once again becomes less clear – a confusion compounded by the slippery syntax of the two middle lines. The poem's subject no longer seems to be identifying as a lover recalling his relationship with a woman. Rather, this subject seems to be identifying with some other subject in relation *to* a woman. If it is not a woman, then, who is the other subject included with the poet in the pronoun "nous"– a "nous" that was led toward the soul hidden in the sea's eyes and pushed along, like a boat in the wind, by the unknown? Another man, perhaps? Or as the allusion to the driving force of the "inconnu" ("unknown") suggests, another poet?

The next stanza continues the maritime imagery as it describes this "nous" navigating a sea of eyes, driven by desire and forgetful of previous sufferings: "Le désir gonflait nos voiles si rapiécées / Nous partions oublieux des tempêtes passées" ("Desire launching our ragged sails aloft / Unminded of previous storms, we set off") (lines 38-39). And the poem then concludes with the following three stanzas:

> Tant de regards divers, les âmes si pareilles
> Vieux prisonniers des yeux nous sommes bien déçus
> Nous aurions dû rester à dormir sous la treille
> Mais vous seriez parti même eussiez-vous tout su
>
> Pour avoir dans le cœur ces yeux pleins de promesses
> Comme une mer le soir rêveuse de soleil
> Vous avez accompli d'inutiles prouesses
> Pour atteindre au pays de rêve qui, vermeil,
>
> Se lamentait d'extase au-delà des eaux vraies
> Sous l'arche sainte d'un nuage cru prophète
> Mais il est doux d'avoir pour un rêve ces plaies
> Et votre souvenir brille comme une fête.
>
> (The gazes so varied, yet the souls all one.
> Old prisoners of eyes, we were roundly deceived
> We should have stayed under arbors, soundly asleep

Though had you known, you still would have gone

To have such promising eyes in your heart
Like an evening sea dreaming up the sun
You've skillfully practiced your pointless arts
To reach rosy lands of dreams that moan

Beyond the true waters in ecstasy aloud
Below the holy ark of a prophetic cloud
How sweet, instead of dreams, these wounds laid bare
And your memory blazing like country fair.)[26]

Through Proust's use of the past participle "parti" ("gone" – grammatically singular and masculine), the first of these concluding verses definitively reveals the other subject in the "nous" ("we") to be a masculine individual. So, in what way is the poet or the "I" paired with him? As the other lines in the verse indicate, both subjects are disappointed or disillusioned prisoners of the eyes that burn as images in their memories. In this sense, they could be experienced suitors taunted and haunted by the remaining images of past women; they could be two young men who set out in search of love, or in pursuit of their desire, but who returned with only memories of ephemeral encounters.

At the moment that the "nous" ("we") becomes clearer in its referents, however, the second of these stanzas shifts our concentration to the "vous" ("you" – grammatically singular and masculine) established in the previous stanza. In doing so, it implies that the poet is no longer talking about both of them collectively, but only about the other, masculine subject. This other subject alone has accomplished ultimately useless romantic exploits in order to reach the "pays de rêve" ("land of dreams"), since the speaker no longer seems to be including himself in these lines. The implication of a shared experience only returns in the second to last line of the poem, where the impersonal “il” (“it”) of the observation, “Mais il est doux d’avoir pour un rêve ces plaies” (“But it is comforting to have such wounds as a dream”), seems to imply a general truth that the poet himself also understands. But the poem’s last line returns again to the singular pronoun “you,” as it remarks that this other subject’s own memory shines like a festive celebration. In this way, Proust concludes the text with a focus on the other subject’s experience, and not on the collective first-person experience of the “we” that he had been describing over the course of the poem.

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[26] Translation by Cole Swensen.

Given the insistent use of the plural first person throughout the poem, why conclude the text by splitting this collective pronoun into its two composing subjects? And why conclude the text by describing the memory of only the other person, rather than the memory of the “I” mentioned in the poem’s title, “Je contemple souvent le ciel de ma mémoire” (“I Often Contemplate My Memory’s Skies”)? Is there enough of an equivalence between the poet’s memory and the other subject’s memory to merit describing one for the other? Or rather, is there enough of a distinction between each of their memories to require separating the two? Answers to these questions ultimately depend on the nature of the poet’s relation to the other subject included in the “we.” And they ultimately lead to a consideration of how we as readers interpret this plural first person with respect to the text, the author, and the lyric tradition: As the progression of the poem reveals, the poet’s “I” is not functioning in a relation of desire to the corresponding “vous” as love object. It is instead functioning in a relation of *identification* with this “you.” So, what is the nature and extent of this identification? Given the masculine gender of the “vous,” the poet could be identifying with this other subject as a fellow man who also recalls the eyes of the beloved women he has pursued. Or, the poet could be identifying not simply with another man, or with men in general, but more particularly with another poet, or with poets in general – poets who, in accordance with lyric norms, are expected to be heterosexual men. In this sense, the poem takes on another level of signification and becomes not only a poem about self and desire, but simultaneously a poem about the lyric tradition itself.

This additional reading is reinforced through the poem's imagery, themes, and intertextuality. The text does not express very specific individual sentiments or experiences of desire. The love objects are treated in an abstract sense, often in the plural, and the poet's focus on their eyes seems to function more as a poetic metaphor than anything else, especially in their description as gems, clear water, or stars. With respect to the poem's maritime imagery, the text reads at other times like a kind of epic recalling Homer. And at others still, it invokes additional historic poetic traditions, like the medieval trope of *douce souffrance* (sweet suffering) or *mal d'amour* (love sickness) in the second-to-last line. Similarly, regarding more specific instances of intertextuality, certain lines recall well-known expressions or imagery from other poets such as Proust's influential model, Charles Baudelaire. In stanza 8, for example, Proust's otherwise "joyeuse femme" ("joyous woman") has eyes of sorrow "vastes et noirs" ("vast and dark"), recalling Baudelaire's poem, "Harmonie du soir" ("Evening Harmony"), which describes "un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir" ("a gentle heart that hates the vast and dark oblivion") (line 13), and whose last line, "Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir" ("Your memory in me glistens like a monstrance"), reflects on the luminous force of memory, much like Proust's last line, "Et votre souvenir brille comme une fête" ("And your memory glistens like a festive gala"). Through these conventional images and this intertextuality, Proust draws attention to the fact that his poem, like most poetry, is to a certain extent inevitably a citation of other poems. His recuperation of specific, recognizable lines by Baudelaire renders this fact more explicit, and his incorporation of historically poetic themes and imagery reminds us that he is writing within a genre and a tradition that has been formed through the repetition of established norms.

So how does Proust's poetic subject fit into this tradition? In this particular poem, his ambiguous use of the plural first person "we" problematizes the question of poetic subjectivity and its function within such an imitative form and tradition. Writing with a "we," Proust shows that he is including himself, and/or his poetic persona, in a collective poetic subjectivity. But perhaps the separation of this "we" into its discrete composing subjects – the "I" and the "you" – in the final stanzas, points to the limits of this collective experience and memory. The poem's conclusion seems to show a deviation between the first-person subject and the other subject with which it was, until the final two stanzas, identifying. And it is this other individual's subjectivity that is ultimately expressed by the poem, whose concluding lines focus not on the personal experience and personal memory of the poem's "I," as the title would imply, but solely on the experience and memory of this other subject with whom Proust's poetic subject is inconsistently and ambiguously identifying.

In a poem calling to the fore the inevitably imitative nature of the poetic genre and lyric tradition, this conclusion also highlights the similarly imitative nature of poetic subjectivity and the lyric "I." Proust is writing within a tradition constructed through the accumulation of many first-person expressions of self and desire, which form a sort of collective poetic subjectivity. Much like the composition of his collective first person "we," there is a poetic subject that exists already within lyric discourse, which Proust can either identify with or not. But in any case, it is this poetic subject that is ultimately articulated with every use of the lyric "I," and Proust's poetic subjectivity is formed through his repetition of this "I" and in accordance to its established norms. This fact recalls Judith Butler's notion of subjectivity in discourse, a discourse that "precedes and enables the 'I,' and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will" ("Critically Queer" 18). When Proust produces a poetic text, he is writing or speaking with a first-person pronoun that is, according to theses lyric norms, the "I" of a male poet in relation to a female beloved.

So how does one create or articulate a queer subjectivity from within such a tradition? Like the selection of poems above shows, one possibility could be to work the weaknesses in these norms by exploiting the ambiguities and incongruences surrounding the pronoun's idealized transparent nature (in which the "I" refers to the speaker, poet, and author as one and the same). By accentuating the incongruences inevitably present in this idealized norm, an ambiguous use of the first-person pronoun can then exploit such weaknesses in order to facilitate a closeted expression of queer desire. The poetic subject of this desire deviates slightly from tradition, but this deviation could ultimately be explained away, much like other incongruences, as purely figurative representations, as the adoption of imagined perspectives, or as citations of another's declarations, etc. But perhaps by writing more strictly and noticeably *within* this tradition, like he appears to do in this particular poem, Proust can work the weaknesses in the norm in a more subversive way to destabilize the nature and function of normative subjectivity altogether.

Proust most noticeably adopts the conventional lyric "I" in stanza 5, which is the only stanza in which he writes with the singular first person "je," rather than the plural "nous" or the "vous." When he writes in this stanza, "Constellez à jamais le ciel de ma mémoire / Inextinguibles yeux de celles que j'aimai" ("Constellate forever the skies of my memory / Inextinguishable eyes of those that I loved") (lines 17-18), the unavoidably feminine gender of the past beloveds (referred to with the grammatically feminine and plural "celles") inevitably raises the question: “Is this Proust’s ‘I’?” Of course, the primary reason this question presents itself is because such a first-person declaration of love for women seems incongruous with our modern-day conceptions of Proust as a gay subject. As a result, the stanza destabilizes the supposed logic of either lyric subjectivity or gay subjectivity, if not both. If we are to assume any level of lyric correlation between the author and an “I” who claims to have loved many women, we must reexamine not only Proust’s relation to the pronoun “I,” but also his relation to the category of “gay” and our conception of what that means.

With respect to our conception of gay subjectivity, an attempt to make sense of stanza 5 leads to several important considerations, starting very simply with the question: Was Proust gay? Could he have been bi? Could he have been gay at one time and straight at another? If he was gay, does that imply that he could not love women in any way? And if he in fact did *not* love women in any way, could he write as if he did? Perhaps a simpler form of this last question would be: If Proust did not love women in any way, *why* write as if he did? With respect to our conception of lyric subjectivity, this question is most easily answered by the fact that Proust is writing within a lyric tradition whose subject position is that of a male poet expressing desire for a female love object. Proust can either identify with or deviate from this subject, just as he does with the “vous” in the poem’s conclusion. And it is perhaps this act of identification that is shaping his expression of self and desire. As Judith Butler explains, if a performative use of language succeeds, “it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition* or *citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices* (“Critically Queer” 19). For Proust’s poetic subject to be recognized as such, he must appear to write in accordance with the lyric conventions that define it as a coherent male subjectivity in a relation of desire with a female beloved or beloveds.

In appearing to do so, however, Proust inevitably calls into question the Romantic tradition's transparent subject and its supposedly sincere and intimate expression of self and desire. As readers having established Proust as a gay subject, we cannot help but ask if he is being sincere in referencing his love for women, or if he is simply performing an obligatory role. And if he is in fact "simply" imitating a normative poetic subjectivity, does this matter? Or is all poetic subjectivity simply an imitation, a constantly rearticulated performance of norms? Is it possible to produce a truly sincere and intimate lyric expression of one's self and desire? In this sense, Proust's lyric "I" calls into question our conceptions of both gay subjectivity and lyric subjectivity. By working the weaknesses in the norms establishing the lyric "I" as a coherent and transparent subject, Proust succeeds in forging a new, queer trajectory for his poetic subject. This trajectory still exists within the conventions of the lyric, but it deviates enough to make us, as readers, question our conceptions of lyric and gay subjectivities, and in doing so, it opens up a space for queer subjectivity to emerge.

Section 2: The Translated Lyric "I"

In *Histoire des traductions en langue française: XIX*$_{e}$ *siècle* (2012), Christine Lombez notes that the nineteenth century marks a pivotal point in the history of French poetic translation (438). "On y voit émerger de plus en plus nettement une réelle volonté de renouvellement de la part des poètes et des traducteurs, même si ce désir vient encore souvent se heurter aux réalités des traditions et de l'académisme" ("We witness, at this time, the increasingly distinct emergence of a spirit of renewal on the part of poets and translators, even if this interest still often finds itself at odds with traditional and academic practices"), she explains (438). As they moved away from the tradition of imitation, poets of the period turned more and more frequently toward the project of literal and literary translation (349). René de Chateaubriand translated John Milton's *Paradise Lost* into French; Gérard de Nerval produced his translation of Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Faust*, and both Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé became interested in translating the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe. In this section, I focus on three less frequently discussed translator-poets from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Renée Vivien, Pierre Louÿs, and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. Each of these poets produced translated texts that stretch or challenge our conception of translation in different ways. I analyze how their respective use of transcreation, pseudo-translation, and auto-translation works the weaknesses inherent to certain translational norms in a way that reveals the potential of the translated lyric "I" to create space for queer subjectivity.

Renée Vivien and Transcreation

In 1903, Renée Vivien published the first edition of her collection of poems entitled *Sapho*. As the title's subheading indicates, the collection is intended as a "Traduction nouvelle avec le texte grec" ("New Translation with the Greek Text") – in other words, a new translation of Sappho's lyric poetry, accompanied by the fragmentary remains of the Ancient poet's compositions in their original Greek. At the beginning of the collection, Vivien also includes a short biography of Sappho, where she highlights how little we know of the Ancient poet, and provides a few facts gathered from other references regarding Sappho's family members and her departure from the city of Mytilene for Sicily. As for the reason behind this departure, Vivien admits that we know nothing, but makes a point to stipulate that "Ce ne fut assurément point la poursuite de Phaon, comme l'assurent certains auteurs, qui détermina la Tisseuse de violettes à quitter les musiques et les sourires de Mytilène" ("It was assuredly not in pursuit of Phaon, as certain authors would have us believe, that the Weaver of Violets left the smiles and music of Mytilene”) (ix). This is because, Vivien affirms, “Phaon n’est qu’un mythe créé par quelques écrivains d’après la tradition populaire” (“Phaon is nothing other than a myth created by a few in accordance with popular tradition”) (ix). She explains that “Cette erreur grossière a été mise en crédit par plusieurs autres historiens peu soucieux de vérifier l’exactitude de leurs affirmations” (“This most basic mistake has been repeated by various other historians paying little heed to the accuracy of their statements”) (ix-x). Vivien considers it essential to dispel this incorrect aspect of Sappho’s biography because it contributes to what she has termed “la tradition, aussi erronée qu’universelle, de l’amour de Psappha pour Phaon” (“The tradition, as erroneous as it is universal, of Sappho’s love for Phaon”) (x). The tradition that Vivien wants to preserve, of course, is that of Sappho as a lover of women.

The preservation and promotion of this particular tradition could be one of the reasons Vivien chose to translate Sappho’s lyric poetry in the first place. As she explains later in the biography section, our only image of Sappho comes from her surviving verse: “En face de l’insondable nuit qui enveloppe cette mystérieuse beauté, nous ne pouvons que l’entrevoir, la deviner à travers les strophes et les vers qui nous restent d’elle” (“Faced with the immeasurable darkness that surrounds this mysterious beauty, we can only glimpse her, surmise her through the stanzas and lines that remain of her”) (x). It is Sappho’s own words that provide us with our fragmented image of the poet as a woman and lover, and as Vivien concludes regarding these words, “nous n’y trouvons point le moindre frisson tendre de son être vers un homme” (“we do not find in them the slightest flicker of affection toward a man”) (x). So, it was in order to bring the literary fragments of the poet’s queer identity and desire to light, and to continue their transmission to those of her own time and culture, that Vivien took on the project of literary translation.

But in addition to facilitating the transmission of Sappho's queer identity and desire, Vivien's translations of Sappho's verse helped forge a space for her own queer poetic expression within a traditionally masculine and heteronormative lyric tradition. As a woman, lesbian, and poet, Vivien could identify with the figure of Sappho on several levels. Sappho's enduring legacy as a recognized literary figure established a valid western lyric tradition into which Vivien could more easily insert herself and provided an admirable poetic predecessor with which Vivien could identify. This identification has manifested perhaps most clearly in the epithet adopted by literary historian André Billy, who famously referred to Vivien as "Sapho 1900, Sapho cent pour cent" ("Sappho 1900, Sappho one hundred percent") (Albert, *Lesbian Decadence* 36). But it is through the questionable nature of some of her translated lyric texts that Vivien's identification with Sappho unfolds in more subversive ways. These translated texts range from what could be considered "traditional" or "faithful" translations to what seem like purely creative inventions. And the ranging degrees of license and creativity that Vivien employs from one translation to another contributes to her ultimate destabilization of the lyric "I," in which she intertwines and confounds her voice and subjectivity with Sappho's.

The following poem is one of the more conventional translations among Vivien's collection. Frequently referred to as "Fragment 31," it is one of the best-known remnants of Sappho's poems. After Sappho's text, I have included Anne Carson's English translation for reference, followed by Vivien's translation into French:

Fragment 31 (Original by Sappho):

φαίνεταί μοι κῆνος ἴσος θέοισιν
ἔμμεν’ ὤνηρ, ὄττις ἐνάντιός τοι
ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἆδυ φονεί-
σας ὐπακούει

καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ’ ἦ μὰν
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν·
ὠς γὰρ ἔς σ’ ἴδω βρόχε’, ὤς με φώναί-
σ’ οὐδ’ ἒν ἔτ’ εἴκει,

ἀλλά κὰμ μὲν γλῶσσα †ἔαγε†, λέπτον
δ’ αὔτικα χρῷ πῦρ ὐπαδεδρόμηκεν,
ὀππάτεσσι δ’ οὐδ’ ἒν ὄρημμ’, ἐπιρρόμ-
βεισι δ’ ἄκουαι,

κὰδ’ δέ ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ’ ὀλίγω ‘πιδεύης
φαίνομ’ ἔμ’ αὔτᾳ.

ἀλλὰ τὰν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα…

Fragment 31 (Translated by Anne Carson):

He seems to me equal to gods that man
whoever he is who opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing – oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead – or almost
I seem to me.

But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty

Fragment 31 (Translated by Renée Vivien):

Ode à une femme aimée

L’homme fortuné qu’enivre ta présence
Me semble l’égal des Dieux, car il entend
Ruisseler ton rire et rêver ton silence,
    Et moi, sanglotant,

Je frissonne toute, et ma langue est brisée :
Subtile, une flamme a traversé ma chair,
Et ma sueur coule ainsi que la rosée
    Apre de la mer ;

Un bourdonnement remplit de bruits d’orage
Mes oreilles, car je sombre sous l’effort,
Plus pâle que l’herbe, et je vois ton visage
    A travers la mort.

The most immediately noticeable difference between Vivien’s translation and Sappho’s original is that Vivien’s text bears the title, “Ode à une femme aimée” (“Ode to a Beloved Woman”). The syntax of the verses and the order of the descriptions also differ a little from the original, but this is not unusual, especially in poetry, where the consideration of factors such as a consistent rhyme scheme and meter might also shape the translated text. In fact, Vivien’s translation is written in an 11-syllable meter, which is uncommon for French prosody, but reflects the meter in which Sappho frequently wrote – now termed the “Sapphic meter.” In terms of tone, content, and imagery, the translated poem remains relatively similar to the original. And with respect to the question of whose subjectivity it presents – Vivien’s or Sappho’s – the reader would probably understand it to present Sappho’s: these are Sappho’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences, which she has described through the words of her poetic composition in Greek. As translator, Vivien’s part in this poetic act is to provide the equivalent and appropriate French words for conveying Sappho's first-person lyric expression to French speakers. So, although Vivien writes the "I" in "Ode to a Beloved Woman," the "I" belongs to Sappho. Vivien as a subject is "transparent," and Sappho speaks through her by means of this translated lyric "I."

The concept of transparency has long held ground as the guiding principle of conventional translation.[27] Translation theorist Theo Hermans explains that under the regime of transparent translation, "Translators are good translators if and when they have become transparent, invisible, when they have spirited themselves away" ("Translator's Voice" 44). The notion of transparency is valued in this context because "only a translator who speaks 'under erasure' can be trusted not to violate the original" (44). Theorist Brian Harris details the characteristics of such an approach to translation when he describes the corresponding idea of an "honest spokesperson norm" (118). In the domain of translation and interpretation, this norm "requires that people who speak on behalf of others […] re-express the original speakers' ideas and the manner of expressing them as accurately as possible and without significant omissions, and not mix them up with their own ideas and expressions" (118). It is for this reason that we are able to, and tend to, overlook the translator's presence and voice when reading a translation. In response to the question, "whose voice comes to us when we read a translated novel?" for example, Hermans points to common usage as an indication: "We tend to say that we are reading Dostoyevsky," he notes, "even when we are reading not Russian but English or French or Spanish words" ("Translator's Voice" 26). We read a translation with the understanding that it provides us access to the voice, thoughts, experiences, and general subjectivity, not of the translator, but of the original author.

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[27] See Lawrence Venuti. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008, for a discussion of the role of transparency in conceptions of translation.

As closer consideration of this assumption reveals, however, the notion of transparency is an illusion. Hermans remarks that "translated texts – like other texts, only more so – are always, inherently, plural, unstable, de-centered, hybrid. The 'other' voice, the translator's voice, is always there" ("Translation's Other"). As much as the reader might value the idea of an invisible or transparent translator, it remains an ideal that can never be fully realized. So, in order to make this idealistic conception of translation the norm, we as readers willfully maintain the illusion of transparency by systematically, even if unconsciously, overlooking the presence and role of the other voice in the translated text – the voice of the translator.

There are, however, occasional moments where it becomes impossible to ignore this additional voice and the illusion fails. In translated prose, such moments emerge as textual incongruences, involving what Hermans has termed "performative self-contradiction" ("Translator's Voice" 27). He explains that in these instances, "the Translator's self-denial runs into obvious, textually traceable contradictions" (27). This situation occurs, for example, in the final paragraph of René Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* (*Discourse on Method*), when the author is explaining why he wrote the text in French instead of Latin, stating, "Et si j'écris en français, qui est la langue de mon pays, plutôt qu'en latin, qui est celle de mes précepteurs, c'est à cause que […]" ("And if I write in French, which is the language of my country, rather than in Latin, which is that of my tutors, it is because […]") (144-45).[28] With respect to translating this paragraph, Hermans highlights the textual incongruences created by the instance of linguistic self-referentiality, and considers their effects on the reader's response:

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[28] See Jacques Derrida's *Du droit à la philosophie,* particularly pp. 283-342, for his discussion of this same passage in Descartes, which he labels a form of "suicide by translation" (309).

> When the English version has: "And if I write in French … rather than in Latin … it is because …" […], the anomaly of reading an English text which declares, in English, that it is actually in French creates a credibility gap which readers can overcome only by reminding themselves that this is, of course, a translation. But in doing so, those readers also realize that the voice producing the statement cannot possibly belong to Descartes, or to Descartes alone. ("Translator's Voice" 30)

Since the lyric "I' does not usually function within the same narrative context and framework as the first-person pronoun does in prose, many of the examples provided by Derrida and Hermans do not manifest in the same way in translated poetry. But as Vivien's collection of translations demonstrates, her use of the translated lyric "I" also causes the illusion of transparency to fail by making it impossible for the reader to overlook the presence of another voice. Whereas Derrida's and Hermans's respective examples of credibility gaps tend to occur through the use of a seemingly contradictory statement or incongruent word, the credibility gap created by Vivien occurs more slowly over the course of the poetic collection. It manifests in a subtler yet more extensive and subversive way as she works the weaknesses in this norm.

If we are comfortable reading "Ode à une femme aimée" ("Ode to a Beloved Woman") as a representation of Sappho's subjectivity and voice (whether or not this is the case), how does this compare to reading "Ode à l'Aphrodita" ("Ode to Aphrodite"), Vivien's translation of Sappho's "Fragment 1"? In this poem, Sappho addresses Aphrodite, asking her to alleviate the suffering of her unanswered desire, and Aphrodite responds to her, asking how she might help, and whom she can persuade to return Sappho's love.

Fragment 1 (Original by Sappho):

Ποικιλόθρον᾽ ὰθάνατ᾽ ᾽Αφροδιτα,
παῖ Δίοσ, δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε
μή μ᾽ ἄσαισι μήτ᾽ ὀνίαισι δάμνα,
πότνια, θῦμον.

ἀλλά τυίδ᾽ ἔλθ᾽, αἴποτα κἀτέρωτα
τᾶσ ἔμασ αύδωσ αἴοισα πήλγι
ἔκλυεσ πάτροσ δὲ δόμον λίποισα
χρύσιον ἦλθεσ

ἄρμ᾽ ὐποζεύξαια, κάλοι δέ σ᾽ ἆγον
ὤκεεσ στροῦθοι περὶ γᾶσ μελαίνασ
πύκνα δινεῦντεσ πτέῤ ἀπ᾽ ὠράνω
αἴθεροσ διὰ μέσσω.

αἶψα δ᾽ ἐχίκοντο, σὺ δ᾽, ὦ μάσαιρα
μειδιάσαισ᾽ ἀθάνατῳ προσώπῳ,
ἤρἐ ὄττι δηὖτε πέπονθα κὤττι
δἦγτε κάλημι

κὤττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλᾳ θύμῳ, τίνα δηὖτε πείθω
μαῖσ ἄγην ἐσ σὰν φιλότατα τίσ τ, ὦ
Πσάπφ᾽, ἀδίκηει;

καὶ γάρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέωσ διώξει,
αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ ἀλλά δώσει,
αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει ταχέωσ φιλήσει,
κωὐκ ἐθέλοισα.

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλεπᾶν δὲ λῦσον
ἐκ μερίμναν ὄσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι
θῦμοσ ἰμμέρρει τέλεσον, σὐ δ᾽ αὔτα
σύμμαχοσ ἔσσο.

Fragment 1 (Translated by Anne Carson):

Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind,
child of Zeus, who twists lures, I beg you
do not break with hard pains,
O lady, my heart

but come here if ever before

you caught my voice far off
and listening left your father’s
golden house and came,

yoking your car. And fine birds brought you,
quick sparrows over the black earth
whipping their wings down the sky
through midair –

they arrived. But you, O blessed one,
smiled in your deathless face
and asked what (now again) I have suffered and why
(now again) I am calling out

and what I want to happen most of all
in my crazy heart. Whom should I persuade (now again)
to lead you back into her love? Who, O
Sappho, is wronging you?

For if she flees, soon she will pursue.
If she refuses gifts, rather will she give them.
If she does not love, soon she will love
even unwilling.

Come to me now: loose me from hard
care and all my heart longs
to accomplish, accomplish. You
be my ally.

Fragment 1 (Translated by Vivien):

Ode à l’Aphrodita

Accueille, immortelle Aphrodita, Déesse,
Tisseuse de ruse à l’âme d’arc-en-ciel,
Le frémissement, l’orage et la détresse
De mon long appel.

J’ai longtemps rêvé : ne brise pas mon âme
Parmi la stupeur et l’effroi de l’éveil,
Blanche Bienheureuse aux paupières de flamme,
Aux yeux de soleil.

Jadis, entendant ma triste voix lointaine,
Tu vins l’écouter dans la paix des couchants

Où songe la mer, car ta faveur hautaine
Couronne les chants.

Je vis le reflet de tes cheveux splendides
Sur l’or du nuage et la pourpre des eaux,
Ton char attelé de colombes rapides
Et de passereaux.

Et le battement lumineux de leurs ailes
Jetait des clartés sur le sombre univers,
Qui resplendissait de lueurs d’asphodèles
Et de roux éclairs.

Déchaînant les pleurs et l’angoisse des rires,
Tu quittas l’aurore immuable des cieux.
Là-bas surgissait la tempête des lyres
Aux sanglots joyeux.

Et toi, souriant de ton divin visage,
Tu me demandas : « D’où vient l’anxiété
A ton grave front, et quel désir ravage
Ton corps tourmenté ?

« Qui te fait souffrir de l’âpre convoitise ?
Et quelle Piethô, plus blonde que le jour
Aux cheveux d’argent, te trahit et méprise,
Psappha, ton amour ?

« Tu ne sauras plus les langueurs de l’attente.
Celle qui te fuit te suivra pas à pas.
Elle t’ouvrira, comme la Nuit ardente,
L’ombre de ses bras.

« Et tremblante ainsi qu’une esclave confuse,
Offrant des parfums, des présents et des pleurs,
Elle ira vers toi, la vierge qui refuse
Tes fruits et tes fleurs.

« Par un soir brûlant de rubis et d’opales
Elle te dira des mots las et brisés,
Et tu connaîtras ses lèvres nuptiales,
Pâles de baisers. »

With this poem, the most immediate different between Sappho's and Vivien's versions is probably the length: Sappho's is 7 stanzas, or 28 lines, and Vivien's is 11 stanzas, or 44 lines. What accounts for this discrepancy? Is it that the supposedly equivalent French words and expressions are lengthier than the original Greek? Although this would be a relatively simple explanation, it does not seem to be the case here. For fragments longer than a couple lines, Vivien actually provides two French translations, one in sentence or paragraph form, and another in verse form. Her corresponding translation in paragraph form is much closer to the original Greek in terms of length, order, syntax, and imagery. It appears to be during Vivien's formulation of the translation into verse that it expands significantly.

What is the nature of this expansion, and how does it affect the voice and subjectivity represented by its translated lyric "I"? Besides general changes in word order, which could be attributed in part to the accommodation of a rhyme scheme and meter, Vivien's translated verse appears to deviate most in its descriptors of Aphrodite. In stanzas 2 and 3, for example, Vivien's text refers to the goddess as "Blanche Bienheureuse aux paupières de flamme" ("White Cherub with impassioned eyes"), who comes to listen to Sappho "dans la paix des couchants / Où songe la mer" ("in the tranquility of setting suns / Where the sea dreams"), images which are nowhere to be found in Sappho's original text. Stanzas 4 through 6 add additional details to the description of Aphrodite's arrival upon the earth in her chariot, and they even appear to change the tone of this account by including reference to the tears and anguished laughter that Aphrodite causes upon her departure from the heavens. In the next part of the poem, where Aphrodite addresses Sappho directly, Vivien's translation remains generally similar to the original, but still with a good amount of poetic license in its additional details and images. The final significant difference appears in the last stanza. In the original text, Aphrodite's comforting message ends, and Sappho’s voice returns to conclude the poem by asking the goddess to be her ally in all things love-related. In Vivien’s translation, however, the poem ends with Aphrodite’s assurance that Sappho will experience the kiss of her beloved; the original final lines are eliminated, and Sappho’s voice does not return to conclude the poem.

If Vivien’s translation-expansion of Sappho’s “Fragment 1” were simply a case of adding four additional stanzas to the original seven, it might still be possible (although the reader would have to have some knowledge of the original) to read certain stanzas as “Sappho’s” and the others as “Vivien’s.” But Vivien’s expansion is not as linear or clean-cut as this; she has expanded the poem from within by deleting certain aspects, adding significantly more, and providing a much looser recreation of Sappho’s original lyric expression overall. The length discrepancy, combined with our inability to easily identify and attribute the modified parts to Vivien, creates a credibility gap, and leaves us with an uneasy feeling toward the translation. The credibility gap invokes a degree of distrust regarding the translation’s so-called “accuracy” or “faithfulness” by calling into question the supposed transparency of Vivien as translator. As readers, we are forced to wonder, “who is actually speaking through this lyric ‘I’?” Vivien’s presence behind the translated lyric “I” cannot be overlooked as she intertwines and confuses her voice with Sappho’s.

Of course, Vivien is translating poetic “fragments,” which inevitably invite some degree of expansion or completion, whether conscious or unconscious, on behalf of the translator and reader. But just how much expansion is acceptable in a translation? For short fragments, like the following text, can Vivien’s version still be considered a translation? And can the translated lyric “I” still be understood ideally to represent Sappho’s voice?

Fragment 160 (Original by Sappho):

. . . . . . τάδε νῦν ἐταίραις
ταὶς ἔμαις τέρπνα κάλως ἀείσω

Fragment 160 (Translated by Carson):

these things now for my companions
I shall sing beautifully

Fragment 160 (Translated by Vivien):

Voici maintenant ce que je chanterai bellement
afin de plaire à mes maîtresses.

Atthis aux cheveux de crépuscule, blonde
Et lasse, Eranna, qui dans l'or des couchants
Ranimes l'ardeur de la lyre profonde
Et des nobles chants,

Euneika trop belle et Gurinnô trop tendre,
Anactoria, qui passais autrefois,
Lorsque je mourais de te voir et d'entendre
Ton rire et ta voix,

Dika, dont les mains souples tissent les roses,
Et qui viens offrir aux Déesses les fleurs
Neigeant du pommier, ingénument décloses,
Parfums et pâleurs,

Pour vous j'ai rythmé les sons et les paroles,
Pour vous j'ai pleuré les larmes du désir,
J'ai vu près de vous les ardentes corolles
Du soir défleurir.

Triste, j'ai blâmé l'importune hirondelle ;
Par vous j'ai connu l'amer et doux Erôs,
Par votre beauté je devins immortelle,
Vierges de Lesbôs.

In this translation, Sappho's original fragment occupies the position of epigraph to a poem of five stanzas. But in what way do these five stanzas constitute part of the translation? Are they an addition to the original fragment? Or an expansion or elaboration? The best explanation might view them as an inspired invention, on the part of Vivien, who used Sappho's fragment as a starting point for her own poetic creation, which she then incorporated into the translation. It appears that, in this "transcreation," Vivien has taken license to imagine what Sappho intended to sing to her companions and to give voice to this lyric "I" of the original fragment through an additional twenty lines of French verse.

Who is actually speaking through the lyric "I" of this translated text? In some ways, it still appears to be Sappho, given the specific references to her companions as addressees, and the general similarity in language, images, and references between this text and Sappho's other poems. But we as readers cannot possibly overlook Vivien's voice in such a translation. We know that Vivien must be the author of the five stanzas, for which there is no corresponding source text in the original Greek fragment. Even if we are to compromise and attribute the lyric "I" to Sappho, but a Sappho of Vivien's imagination and creation, incongruences regarding the supposed moment of enunciation call into question the time and place from which this Sappho appears to speak. Is the speaker of the five stanzas addressing her companions in the present, or from a future perspective, looking back? The first three stanzas create some confusion in this respect, as they alternate between past and present tenses. But stanzas 4 and 5, with their lists of acts carried out in the first person, are written entirely in the past tense, and the second to last line, "Par votre beauté je devins immortelle" ("Through your beauty I became immortal"), establishes an interesting point of enunciation as retrospect. Is this something that the Greek Sappho, as speaker of the original fragment, would have said? Or is this a statement that can only result from retrospect, in reference to an enduring poetic legacy of over 2000 years? In the second case, a different Sappho must be speaking – a Sappho of the modern era, a “Sappho 1900,” whose voice is inseparable from Vivien’s as creator and performer of this poetic identity.

In her translation of Fragment 160, Vivien is not so much enabling Sappho to speak through her as she is allowing herself to speak through Sappho. She has appropriated Sappho’s voice, and is using her own words and language to produce a textual representation of what she considers to be the Greek poet’s subjectivity. When we stop to think about it, however, we realize that this is, in a way, the process underlying any translation. Vivien has simply stretched this process to its limit, to where the assumed “accuracy” or “faithfulness” of a representation is thrown into question. As a result, it becomes impossible for the reader to overlook Vivien’s voice as poetic subject alongside, or even in place of, Sappho’s. With such inconsistency and confusion regarding who is actually speaking through the translated lyric “I,” Vivien’s texts cause the illusion of transparency to fail. By stretching the definition of translation to its breaking point, her “transcreations” reveal the weaknesses in translation’s transparency norm. And in so doing, they create space for a queer subjectivity to emerge.

This space opens up at the intersection of two domains – translation and gender – both of which are structured by similar ideologies. The ideology structuring dominant notions of translation enforces the transparency norm as a guiding principle because this norm maintains the illusion of a distinct and binary relation between author and translator, original and translation. As Hermans remarks, to abandon this norm “would be to upset established hierarchies, to deny the primacy and inviolability of the original, to stress the intertextual transformative streak in all writing, to assert the plurivocality of discourse. And to let in plural voices means destabilizing and decentring the speaking subject” (“Translator’s Voice” 44). Vivien’s destabilization of the translated lyric “I” results from this very process. And by calling into question the idealistic notion of author/poet as a centered and unified speaking subject, distinct from and superior to the translator, Vivien's transcreations also call into question the heteronormative ideologies shaping such a concept.

In "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation" (1988) Lori Chamberlain discusses the ways in which we conceptualize translation through metaphors of sex and gender, and she explores the reasons behind this conceptualization. She suggests that the connection between the two realms results primarily from the way that society values production over reproduction. As a result, Chamberlain explains, "what proclaims itself to be an aesthetic problem is represented in terms of sex, family, and the state, and what is consistently at issue is power" (465). The ideologies constructing the literary hierarchies between author and translator, original and translation, are the same ideologies constructing the social hierarchies of heteronormativity and its gendered power relations. Hermans provides a detailed breakdown of these hierarchies: Referring to translation, he states that its relation to original writing has historically been expressed in terms of "stereotyped oppositions such as those between creative versus derivative work, primary versus secondary, unique versus repeatable, art versus craft, authority versus obedience, freedom versus constraint, speaking in one's own name versus speaking for someone else" ("Translation and Normativity" 64). And, "in case we imagine that these are after all natural and necessary hierarchies," he adds, "it will be useful to remember that our culture has often construed gender distinctions in terms of strikingly similar oppositions of creative versus reproductive, original versus derivative, active versus passive, dominant versus subservient" (64). Like Chamberlain, Hermans points to the reasons behind such similarities, stating that the connection between the two realms "is not just that the historical discourse on translation is sexist in casting translation in the role of maidservant, faithful and obedient wife, or '*belle* *infidèle.*'" Rather, "it is that translation has been hedged in by means of hierarchies strongly reminiscent of those employed to maintain sexual power relations," that is, the hierarchies most central to the ideology of heteronormativity (64).

Given the parallel ideologies linking sex and gender hierarchies to conceptions of translation, does subverting one set of hierarchies in turn subvert the other? If translation is construed, most generally, in terms of femininity and reproduction, and original compositions in terms of masculinity and production, what happens when what is presented as a translation is actually an original composition? This is the case with Pierre Louÿs's book of translated poems, *Les chansons de Bilitis* (*The Songs of Bilitis*) (1895). While Vivien stretched the definition of transparent translation to reveal the weaknesses in the norm that separates original and translation, author and translator, Pierre Louÿs, by deceptively presenting original compositions as translations, *works* these weaknesses in the norm to invert the hierarchical binaries central to both ideologies.

Pierre Louÿs and Pseudo-translation

The first edition of Louÿs's collected translations appeared in 1895. Its title page reads "*Les chansons de Bilitis : Traduites du grec pour la première fois par P.L."* ("*The Songs of Bilitis: Translated from Greek for the First Time by P. L.*"). Preceding the translated texts is a brief biography section, entitled "Vie de Bilitis" ("Life of Bilitis"), in which Louÿs explains the circumstances of the poems' discovery and gives some details about the life of this Ancient poet, Bilitis. "Bilitis naquit au commencement du sixième siècle avant notre ère, dans un village de montages situé sur les bords du Mélas, vers l'orient de la Pamphylie" ("Bilitis was born at the beginning of the 6th Century B.C. in a mountain village bordering Melas, to the east of Pamphylia"), he states (31). After recounting her early childhood in Pamphylia, Louÿs describes her departure for Lesbos, where she lived among female musicians and developed a lesbian relationship with a girl named Mnasidika. Bilitis apparently encountered Sappho during this time, about which Louÿs conjectures: “Sans doute ce fut cette femme admirable qui apprit à la petite Pamphylienne l’art de chanter en phrases rythmées, et de conserver à la postérité le souvenir des êtres chers” (“It was most likely this admirable woman who taught the young Pamphylian the art of singing in metered verse, and the art of preserving for posterity the memory of cherished ones”) (33). After the biography section, Louÿs details how a German professor and archeologist by the name of M. G. Heim discovered the ancient tomb of Bilitis, in which were preserved the written traces of the poet’s compositions: “M. Heim y pénétra par un puits étroit comblé de terre, au fond duquel il rencontra une porte murée qu’il fallut démolir. Le caveau spacieux et bas, pavé de dalles de calcaire, avait quatre murs recouverts par des plaques d’amphibolite noire, où étaient gravées en capitales primitives toutes les chansons qu’on va lire” (“M. Heim entered through a narrow, caved-in shaft, at the bottom of which he found a sealed door that he had to break through. The spacious, low-ceilinged vault, paved with limestone slabs, had four walls of black amphibolite plaques, on which were engraved in crude capitalized lettering all of the songs that we are about to read”) (36). Louÿs then presents the French translations of these poems, and in subsequent editions through 1898, includes a bibliography referencing other translated versions and scholarly works related to the poetic texts. This bibliography includes such entries as the professor G. Heim’s “Bilitis’ Sämtliche Lieder, zum ersten Male herausgegeben und mit einem Wörterbuche versehen” (“Complete Songs of Bilitis, first published and provided with a dictionary”), published in Leipzig in 1894, or “Quatre chansons de Bilitis, traduites en suédois par Gustav Uddgren” (“Four Songs of Bilitis, translated into Swedish by Gustav Uddgren”), published in Stockholm in 1897.

The subversive nature of this collection of translations, however, results from the fact that the translated poems, along with the biography, and much of the bibliography, are all false. Bilitis never existed. Louÿs invented her character and life story, and his translations of her poems are actually his own poetic inventions. His literary hoax fooled much of the public, including quite a few historians and scholars of Ancient Greece.[29] This kind of translation trickery belongs to the category of "pseudo-translations," which theorist Gideon Toury defines as "texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts in other languages ever having existed" (40). While pseudo-translations are typically treated as marginal curiosities, Toury notes, they can in fact be quite informative. He devotes a section of his book, *Descriptive Translation Studies and beyond*, to a brief discussion of the cultural significance of such literary hoaxes. They raise questions, for example, "as to why a disguised mode of presentation was selected, to begin with, and why it was this (presumed) language, or textual tradition, that was picked up as a 'source,' as well as what it was that made the public fall for it for a longer or a shorter period of time" (40).

With respect to Pierre Louÿs's *Chansons de Bilitis* (*Songs of Bilitis*), one might conjecture that a disguised mode of presentation was selected in order to facilitate an otherwise censorable or questionable expression of queer desire and identity. Louÿs appears to consider such a possibility when writing to his brother: "Et même je ne signerai *Bilitis* que de mes initiales, parce que la seconde partie est d'une morale très peu normale et m'attirerait certainement des observations au cas où le volume aurait du succès" ("I also plan to sign *Bilitis* with only my initials, because the second part is of such different morals that it would surely cost me some reprimands were the collection to have any degree of success") (*Correspondance croisée* 1:258). As Toury remarks, "the way censorship is applied to translation has often been much more lenient. One reason for this difference is precisely the fact that the presumed non-domestic origin of translations makes them look less menacing; another is that there seems to be no way of actually going after the 'absent' author, who should presumably take most of the blame" (42). It is "a way of hiding behind a pseudonym […] with the added value of possibly benefiting from the status assigned to translations at large, or, more likely, to a certain translational tradition, in the domestic culture" (42). The culture and writings of Ancient Greece, with its esteemed philosophical and literary figures and its socially condoned homosexual practices, provide French poets at the turn of the twentieth century a valued tradition to recuperate and rework when exploring literary representations of sexual inversion. Writing again to his brother, Louÿs comments on this tradition, stating: "Je trouve seulement qu'on répand aujourd'hui des idées morales absurdes, et j'essaye de donner en exemple celles d'une époque plus grande que la nôtre parce qu'elles me paraissent être une condition nécessaire à la production des belles choses" ("I just think that today we have such absurd conceptions of morals, and I am trying to give an example of morals from an era more civilized than our own, since they seem to indicate, in my opinion, a necessary condition for the production of beauty") (*Correspondance croisée* 1:361).

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[29] See Jean-Paul Goujon's editorial notes to *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, particularly pp. 320-322, for selected correspondence between Louÿs and two of these scholars.

As for what made the public fall for Louÿs's pseudo-translations, it is likely a combination of several factors, such as the public's association of Ancient Greece with "freer sexual morals," Louÿs's impressive scholarly research of existing Ancient source texts, and his manipulation of the translational and literary conventions that shape the public's approach to such texts. It is the unique tone of his presentation, however, that contributes to text's popularity and novelty. In a letter to his brother on December 22, 1897, Louÿs discusses the nature of *The Songs of Bilitis* and comments on what he considers to be the novelty of his representation of a lesbian subject:

> Je crois justement que l'originalité du livre vient de ce que la question pudeur n'est jamais posée. En particulier, je crois que la *seconde* partie semblera très nouvelle. Jusqu'ici, les lesbiennes étaient toujours représentées comme des femmes fatales (Balzac, Musset, Baudelaire, Rops) ou vicieuses (Zola, Mendès, et auprès d'eux cent autres moindres). Même Mlle de Maupin, qui n'a rien de satanique, n'est pourtant pas une femme ordinaire. « C'est la première fois » (je parle comme Landouzy) qu'on écrit une *idylle* sur ce sujet-là. (*Correspondance croisée* 1:525)
>
> (I actually believe that the originality of the book stems from the fact that the question of modesty never comes up. In particular, I believe that the *second* part will seem very modern. So far, lesbians have always been represented as *femmes fatales* (Balzac, Musset, Baudelaire, Rops) or licentious women (Zola, Mendès, and a hundred others not worth mentioning). Even Mademoiselle de Maupin, who is in no way fiendish, is still not a regular woman. "This is the first time" (I'm imitating Landouzy) that an *idyll* has been written about this subject.)

This difference in tone can be seen in the following poem, entitled "Le Baiser" ("The Kiss"), which was taken from the second of the three sections comprising Louÿs's translation. This second section is entitled "Elégies à Mytilène" ("Elegies at Mytilene"), and it corresponds to the period of Bilitis's life in which she adopts a lesbian lifestyle on the Isle of Lesbos. In the poem, Bilitis is addressing her lover, Mnasidika, with a passionate description of her intended sensual acts:

> Le Baiser
>
> Je baiserai d'un bout à l'autre les longues ailes noires de ta nuque, ô doux oiseau, colombe prise, dont le cœur bondit sous ma main.
>
> Je prendrai ta bouche dans ma bouche comme un enfant prend le sein de sa mère. Frissonne ! … car le baiser pénètre profondément et suffirait à l'amour.
>
> Je promènerai ma langue légère sur tes bras, autour de ton cou, et je ferai tourner sur tes côtes chatouilleuses la caresse étirante des ongles.

> Écoute bruire en ton oreille toute la rumeur de la mer … Mnasidika ! ton regard me fait mal. J'enfermerai dans mon baiser tes paupières brûlantes comme des lèvres.

> (I shall kiss from end to end the long black wings spreading from your neck, oh, gentle bird, captive dove whose heart throbs wild beneath my hand!
>
> I shall take your mouth into my mouth as the child takes its mother's breast. Tremble! … for the kiss sinks deep and should suffice for love.
>
> I shall trail my light tongue along your arms and round your neck, and I shall drag the long drawn kiss of my nails along your tender sides.
>
> Hear roaring in your ear all the murmur of the sea … Mnasidika! the expression of your eyes makes me ill. I'll clasp within my kiss your lids which burn as warmly as your lips.)[30]

The tone of the poem appears to conform, generally speaking, to Louÿs's characterization. But another significant factor enabling Louÿs to deviate from his contemporaries is the point of view from which the texts are written. By framing his poems as translations, Louÿs is able to write directly from the first-person perspective, as opposed to the more objectifying third-person depictions characterizing much of the period's lesbian-themed literature. In "Le Baiser" ("The Kiss"), the anaphoric repetition of this first-person pronoun establishes the lesbian figure as the subject, not the object, of the poem. The description of a sensual scene is viewed through Bilitis's subjectivity, from the perspective of her desires, her feelings, and her thoughts. And while it does consist of a rather erotic description of sensual acts and actions, the fact that each of the first-person verbs is conjugated in the future perfect tense presents these actions in their more internalized and subjective form – that of the subject's intentions. Louÿs therefore situates the sensual acts as interior desires, experienced and voiced by Bilitis herself, in place of a purely detached and somewhat voyeuristic description of an erotic love scene. This is not to say that his *Songs of Bilitis* avoid the male gaze and an eroticizing depiction of lesbianism, but simply that, framed as pseudo-translations, the poems can nonetheless incorporate a higher degree of female and lesbian subjectivity.[31] And when read in the context of all 155 poems, this subjectivity gains authenticity through its progressive development over the course of the poetic collection, which covers diverse aspects of Bilitis's life from childhood to old age, and is not limited to scenes of love-making in the bedroom.

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[30] Translation by Alvah C. Bessie.

In response to the question, "Who is speaking through this translated lyric 'I'?" the uninformed reader who approaches the text as a genuine translation would most likely answer, "Bilitis." She is speaking in the first person as she recounts her personal experiences or expresses her thoughts and feelings. In trusting Louÿs to be a faithful – or transparent – translator, this reader would acknowledge his voice only as a vessel of transmission reproducing Bilitis's poetry through the equivalent words in French. For the reader informed of the hoax, however, the answer is not so simple. We know that it is actually Louÿs behind the lyric "I," and not as translator reproducing Bilitis's words in French, but as poet-author and original producer of the texts. Having lost her status as poet-author, Bilitis now occupies a position approximating a first-person narrator, or perhaps more appropriately for the context of lyric poetry, that of a fictive poet-speaker. Depending on the reader's knowledge, then, the lyric "I" of *Les chansons de Bilitis* (*The Songs of Bilitis*) embodies up to four different voices at once – that of Louÿs as author, Louÿs as translator, Bilitis as author, and Bilitis as speaker. And the interchangeability of these four voices, in accordance with the different contextual presentations of the text, creates the possibility of subverting the hierarchical positions assigned to them.

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[31] See Chapter 2 of Lawrence Venuti's *The Scandals of Translation*, in which he demonstrates that the male gaze and patriarchal perspective still reveal themselves through Louÿs's pseudo-translated poems.

Upon learning that the translations are in fact pseudo-translations, readers must change their approach to the text. The translation becomes the original. The translator becomes the author. And the hierarchical values that have been assigned to these binaries are suddenly called into question. Must they also now be switched accordingly? Do the texts now deserve a higher valuation as original productions, as opposed to derivative reproductions? Does Louÿs now merit a higher valuation as author, as opposed to translator? What does this change imply with respect to readers' original valuation? Was it wrong? Does it matter? Given the often frustrated or indignant reactions of readers upon learning the true nature of the translations, it does in fact seem to matter. Louÿs recounts one such instance in another letter to his brother in June of 1901. His friend tells him that crowds of people have been coming to the Louvre museum to see "le portrait de Bilitis" ("the portrait of Bilitis") – the image that served as inspiration for the frontispiece of the book's second edition. When an employee of the museum, talking to one lady in particular, lets slip the questionable existence of Bilitis, the lady is not happy: "[…] voilà une femme rouge de colère" ("now here is a woman steaming with anger"), his friend recounts; "'C'est une indignité !'" ("'This is a disgrace!'"), she declares, "'On trompe le public! Je me plaindrai !'" ("'They are misleading the public! I shall lodge a complaint!'") (*Correspondance croisée* 2:851).

Her indignation points to the troubling nature of such revelations and to the queering effect that they entail. They force us, as readers, to re-evaluate the text and to recognize that our initial valuation was "wrong." We feel "mislead" because we had considered the original to be a translation, the author to be a translator. And we had therefore assigned the corresponding hierarchical values to the wrong categories – to a fictive Bilitis as author, rather than to Louÿs, and to non-existent Ancient source texts, rather than to modern French poetic compositions. The "wrongness" of our initial reading reveals two things: First, that what we consider to be essential, natural, and inherently distinct binary categories – (masculine) author and (feminine) translator, (masculine) original and (feminine) translation – are in fact completely interchangeable and determined by context. And second, that our ability to assign hierarchical value to the appropriate category can easily be called into question.

Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and Auto-translation

In her first collection of literary works, *Elégies, Marie, et romances* (*Elegies, Marie, and Ballads*), published in 1819, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore includes two poems, side by side, entitled "Chanson créole" ("Creole Song") and "Même romance" ("Same Ballad"). The first, "Creole Song," is written in a French-Creole hybrid, and the second, "Same Ballad," in standard French. They both present the voice of an impatient lover who is eager for a sleeping beloved to awaken so that the two can enjoy each other's company:

> "Chanson créole"
>
> N'a plus pouvoir dormir tout près toi dans cabane,
> Sentir l'air parfumé courir sur bouche à toi,
> Gagner plaisir qui doux passé mangé banane,
> Parfum là semblé feu qui brûler cœur à moi.
> Moi vlé z'éveiller toi.
>
> Baï moi baiser si doux, n'oser prend'li moi-même,
> Guetter réveil à toi … long-temps trop moi languir.
> Tourné côté cœur moi, rend-li bonheur suprême,
> Mirez l'aurore aller qui près toi va pâlir.
> Long-temps trop moi languir.
>
> Veni sous bananiers nous va trouvé z'ombrage ;
> Petits oiseaux chanter pendant nous fait l'amour.

Soleil est jaloux moi, li caché sous nuage,
Mais trouvé dans yeux toi l'éclat qui passé jour.
Veni faire l'amour.

Non, non, toi plus dormir, partager vive flame,
Baisers toi semblé miel cueilli sur bouquet fleurs.
Cœur à toi soupirer, veni chercher mon ame ;
Prends-li sur bouche à moi, li courir dans mes pleurs.
Moi mourir sous des fleurs.

"Même romance"

Sur ce lit de roseaux puis-je dormir encore ?
Je sens l'air embaumé courir autour de toi.
Ta bouche est une fleur dont le parfum dévore.
Approche, ô mon trésor, et ne brûle que moi.
Éveille, éveille-toi !

Mais ce souffle d'amour, ce baiser que j'envie,
Sur tes lèvres encor je n'ose le ravir ;
Accordé par ton cœur, il doublera ma vie.
Ton sommeil se prolonge, et tu me fais mourir.
Je n'ose le ravir !

Viens ; sous les bananiers nous trouverons l'ombrage ;
Les oiseaux vont chanter en voyant notre amour.
Le soleil est jaloux, il est sous un nuage ;
Et c'est dans tes beaux yeux que je cherche le jour.
Viens donc faire l'amour !

Non, non, tu ne dors plus, tu partages ma flamme.
Tes baisers sont le miel que nous donnent les fleurs :
Ton cœur a soupiré, viens-tu chercher mon ame ?
Elle erre sur ma bouche et veut sécher tes pleurs.
Cache-moi sous des fleurs !

(Same Ballad

On this bed of reeds can I sleep much longer?
I smell the fragrant air as it dances around you.
Your mouth is a flower consumed by its scent.
Come close, my darling, and inflame your lover.
Awaken from your slumber!

> But this breath of love, this kiss that I await,
> To steal it from your lips, I dare not try
> When offered willingly, it will lengthen my life.
> Yet your sleep persists, and I think I might die.
> I dare not try!
>
> Come now; we'll seek shade among the banana trees;
> The birds will sing upon seeing our love.
> The sun is jealous, behind a cloud it hides;
> And the daylight I seek, I find instead in your eyes.
> So come, now, let's make love!
>
> You'll sleep no more, you'll share my flame.
> Your kisses are sweet like the honey from flowers:
> Your heart just sighed, do you search for my soul?
> It lingers on my lips and waits to dry your tears.
> Hide me in a bed of flowers!)

While not entirely identical, the second text is similar to the first in terms of perspective, tone, and content. The implied similarity between the two texts is most evident, however, in their titles. By naming the second poem simply "Même romance" ("Same Ballad"), Desbordes-Valmore assigns to it the status of a copy, implying that it can be read as an equivalent to the first – the "same" poem, with the only significant difference presumably being that it is in standard French.

This equivalence is maintained in subsequent editions of *Élégies, Marie et romances*. In the 1820 edition, the two texts appear side by side again, and with the slightly modified titles of "Le réveil créole" ("The Creole Awakening") and "La même romance" ("The Same Ballad"). And in the 1822 edition, Desbordes-Valmore explicitly assigns the status of "translation" to the poem's standard French version, with the new title, "Le réveil : Traduction" ("The Awakening: Translation"). But if we are to approach the two texts in terms of "original" and "translation," an important question arises: Whom, exactly, is Desbordes-Valmore translating? The first two editions provide no indication as to the original author of the Creole text. And in later editions, the Creole text disappears altogether – “Le réveil : Traduction” (“The Awakening: Translation”) appears alone, unaccompanied by its corresponding French-Creole hybrid, upon which the translation is presumably based.

The only contextual information that editor Marc Bertrand is able to provide regarding the poem is that “*Le réveil créole* a été évidemment dicté à Marceline par le souvenir des quelques mois passés à la Guadeloupe” (“*The Creole Awakening* was clearly inspired by the few months Marceline spent in Guadeloupe”) (*Œuvres Poétiques* 2:772). This stay in the Antilles, which appears to have inspired the poem, provides some possible explanations for the lack of precision regarding the source of the Creole text. Desbordes-Valmore stayed on the island of Guadeloupe from May 1802 to around September 1802, when it was a slave-based colony of France. Given the hierarchical structure central to French colonialism, in which the only legitimate subjectivity recognized is that of the French colonizer, the independence and subjectivity of the colonized and/or enslaved population must be systematically devalued or overlooked. This deliberate construction and imposition of a dominant French subjectivity has an effect on what voices are represented and acknowledged through literary works. As Régis Antoine concludes in *La littérature franco-antillaise : Haïti, Guadeloupe et Martinique* (*Franco-Antillean Literature: Haiti, Guadeloupe, and Martinique*) (1992), “il n’y aura longtemps en ces territoires qu’une voix reconnue : la voix coloniale” (“For years to come, only one type of voice will be acknowledged in these territories: the colonial voice”) (13). This fact renders it ineffective, in his opinion, to try to identify authors outside the privileged class of the colonial era. If the author of “Chanson créole” were a member of the colonized class, then, it is possible that Desbordes-Valmore did not find it necessary to identify this individual or attribute authorial credit.

Another possible explanation for the unnamed author of the Creole version is that there is in fact no "author" at all. That is, there is no individual poetic subject who functions as an independent and conscious producer of "Chanson créole." In "Polyphonie sociale dans la poésie créole de Saint-Domingue (Haïti)" ("Social Polyphony in the Creole Poetry of Saint-Domingue (Haiti)") (2005), Deborah Jenson considers the issue of authorship within Creole societies. She acknowledges that while scholars such as Régis Antoine, Élodie Jourdain, and Édouard Glissant recognize the near impossibility of identifying individuals of the colonized classes and crediting them as original producers of the poems, this does not mean that we should attribute authorship, by default, to those of the colonizing class who publish the poems. In acknowledging the Creole colonial culture of production as "polyphonique, dialogique, et littéralement métissée ou en voie de métissage" ("polyphonic, dialogic, and literally miscegenetic or in the process of miscegenation"), Jenson points to the presence of a "littérature ambiante" ("ambient literature"). She explains that this ambient literature results from "l'omniprésence dans la vie sociale coloniale […] d'une oraliture poétique abondante générée par la classe des esclaves ou des femmes « de couleur » dans leur dialogue avec leurs maîtresses blanches" ("the omnipresence, in colonial social life […] of a rich poetic orality generated by the slave class or by women of color as they converse with their white mistresses") (188). In this environment of racial and social mixing, colonizers are exposed to traditional or well-known poetry as it is sung and shared by slaves or Creole women of color. As a result, it is possible that "Chanson créole" is a song that Desbordes-Valmore heard frequently during her time in Saint-Barthelemy or Guadeloupe, and that she decided to transcribe, translate, and publish in order to share it with French readers in the *Métropole*.

If either of these two possibilities is the case, it raises certain questions regarding modern, Euro-centric, and heteronormative conceptions of poetic authorship. By approaching “Chanson créole” as a well-known Creole song, pulled from the ambient oral literature of the colonial setting, for example, we must acknowledge that there is no individual “poet-author,” and no “original” text. Rather, the many voices that speak through the poem’s lyric “I” participate in a type of collective authorship and can contribute their own original modifications through variations in performance. This type of authorship continually both reproduces and produces the literary work every time it is performed, eroding the separation between author and speaker, production and reproduction. Similarly, if normative conceptions of authorship define the author as an individual, coherent, and conscious producer of an original text, how does this account for the attribution of authorship to a specific European colonizer, even in the absence of an identifiable author from the colonized class? In “Polyphonie sociale,” for example, Jenson calls into question the authorship of Duvivier de la Mahautière, a European colonizer who published a Creole poem entitled “Lisette quitté la plaine” (“Lisette Has Left the Plains”): “Personne n’a jamais décrit le colon Duvivier de la Mahautière comme un homme de lettres en proie au souffle poétique” (“No-one has ever described the colonist Duvivier de la Mahautière as a literary man with a proclivity for lyricism”), she remarks, highlighting his lack of literary creativity and skill and questioning the originality of his publication (178). Even in the absence of an identifiable author from the colonized class, an individual of the colonizing class who transcribes and/or publishes Creole texts does not necessarily possess any normative “authorial” qualities, at least in the domain of literature.

While these two possibilities call into question normative conceptions of authorship, there is a third possibility, which troubles our conceptions of translation, as well: that Desbordes-

Valmore produced not only the translated version of the poem but also the original Creole version. Unlike the Colonist Duvivier de la Mahautière, Desbordes-Valmore *was* in fact a "[femme] de lettres en proie au souffle poétique" ("a literary [woman] with a proclivity for lyricism") whose literary skills and creativity rendered her quite capable of composing the French-Creole hybrid, "Chanson créole." Indeed, as Marc Bertrand remarks in his editorial notes, certain letters from Desbordes-Valmore's correspondence show that she appreciated the beauty of the Creole language and knew how to speak it (2:772-73). She was also a reader of the Creole poet, Évariste de Parny, whose 1787 *Chansons madécasses* are French pseudo-translations of songs allegedly composed and performed by inhabitants of Madagascar.[32] And archive material reveals that Desbordes-Valmore initially produced a manuscript version of "Chanson créole" that differs slightly from the published versions. Both the manuscript and published versions are composed in alexandrine, the characteristically French, twelve-syllable meter. Given such details, it is quite possible that "Chanson créole" is an original Romantic composition, rather than the transcription of an existing Creole song.[33]

In the case that Desbordes-Valmore is the author of both poems, how does their paired presentation, as their content and titles imply, of "original" and "translation" affect the stability of the lyric "I" and our understanding of the texts? Returning to the question of whom exactly Desbordes-Valmore is translating, the answer becomes, in this case, "herself." But this possible case of "auto-translation" raises several additional questions, the first being simply: *can* one translate oneself? If so, what does this entail with respect to our conceptions of translation and conceptions of authorial subjectivity? Should we now conceive of Desbordes-Valmore’s poetic subjectivity in terms of two different subjectivities, both separated by and determined by language? And what does it entail with respect to questions of poetic voice and the lyric “I”? Is the voice behind “Chanson créole” different from the voice behind “Même romance”? Is the lyric “I” of the Creole text the same “I” as the “I” of the standard French text, despite the difference in language? What voices and subjectivities are now embodied in the translated lyric “I” of “Même romance”?

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[32] See the introduction to *Selected Poetry and Prose of Évariste Parny*, edited by Françoise Lionnet.

[33] For a description of the manuscript version, see Marc Bertrand's editorial notes in *Oeuvres poétiques*, p. 772.

These questions lead back to Theo Hermans’s discussion of the voice of the translator and the idealized notion of transparent translation. By asking who is speaking through the translated “I,” Hermans encourages the reader to see past the illusion of transparency to consider the presence of the translator’s voice and acknowledge the plurivocality of the translated first-person pronoun. Likewise, the possibility of Desbordes-Valmore’s auto-translation highlights the plurivocality of the poem’s translated lyric “I,” but in much more unstable terms: The ambiguity surrounding the authorial origins of “Chanson créole” already somewhat destabilizes the Creole poem’s lyric “I,” which must hold several possible voices and subjectivities at once: First, we are likely to acknowledge that the lyric “I” embodies the voice of the poem’s speaker, but this speaker remains ambiguous in terms of gender, class, and race. There are no gendered uses of grammatical or lexical constructions in either the French-Creole hybrid or the standard French version, and the poet’s use of Creole cannot be assumed to indicate a particular class or race. As Françoise Lionnet explains, in “contemporary Mauritius and Trinidad, where British colonial policies have been more influential, only people of mixed African ancestry are defined as Creole,” whereas in “the French overseas departments of the Caribbean and Reunion, by contrast, the word applies to all descendants of French settlers and servile populations (both white and black)" (Lionnet xiv). Similarly, with respect to the poet-author, there are many possible sources for the creative voice behind the poem's lyric "I." As the discussion has shown, these possibilities range from the voice of an unknown or unacknowledged poet of the colonized class, to the voice of Desbordes-Valmore herself as poet, or, in the case of an ambient oral literary production, to the voice of any number of individuals performing the poem as both speaker and poet simultaneously. In the translated version, "Même romance," the already unstable lyric "I" of "Chanson créole" must also contend with the additional voice of the translator, which is combined with this unspecifiable number of other voices and subjectivities. And in the case of auto-translation, specifically, the translated lyric "I" is destabilized in a particularly troubling way because it produces an ambiguous combination of the translator's voice with the author's voice, each of which is presumed to originate from a different subjectivity. Among the unspecifiable number of voices and subjectivities now embodied in the translated lyric "I" of "Même romance" lies the possible combination of Desbordes-Valmore's voice as "translator" with her voice as "author."

This particular manifestation of the auto-translated lyric "I"'s plurivocality troubles normative conceptions of Desbordes-Valmore as a unified, stable, and coherent poetic subject. And with respect to the norms governing our conceptions of translation and authorship, it also destabilizes their supposedly distinct and hierarchical relation. Is it possible to maintain a clear distinction between poet-author and translator when their respective voices and subjectivities belong to the same individual? In order to circumvent this uncertainty, we could turn to the question of language difference, translation's *raison d'être*, to help reinforce or delineate the distinction. But in the case of "Chanson créole" and "Même romance," this language difference also breaks down upon closer examination. "Chanson créole" is written in a French-Creole hybrid, first of all. And further, Creole itself is a hybrid language. The distinction between the languages of both poems is as unclear as the distinction between poet and translator.

The destabilization of binary relations that results from cases of auto-translation extends to other, conceptually related binaries as well, such as the relation between foreign and domestic, same and different, self and other. But does this rippling destabilization of supposedly distinct categories extend to the gender and sex binaries of heteronormativity? Since Desbordes-Valmore's two poems do not treat gender or sexuality in a direct way, they do not produce an immediately noticeable effect on the ideologies supporting heteronormativity. But, given the correlation between the gendered hierarchies of heteronormativity and the derivatively gendered conceptualization of translation, as Chamberlain and Hermans have shown above, a certain queering effect is nonetheless possible.

The space for queerness that opens up in the destabilized translated lyric "I" of Desbordes-Valmore's "Même romance" builds upon the various destabilizations effected by Renée Vivien and Pierre Louÿs: Vivien's transcreations highlight the weaknesses of the transparency norm by pushing to its breaking point the illusory nature of the distinction between author and translator, original and translation. And Louÿs's pseudo-translations work these weaknesses, in their own deceptive way, to call into question the essentialist nature of such illusory distinctions. By effectively inverting the hierarchical positions of poet and translator, Louÿs's pseudo-translated lyric "I" reveals their non-essential and interchangeable nature. Desbordes-Valmore's possible use of auto-translation, however, does not rely on trickery or deceit to queer our readings of the texts. The ambiguity surrounding the authorial origins of "Chanson créole" creates the possibility that Desbordes-Valmore is in fact translating herself. In this case, the auto-translated lyric “I” of “Même romance” does more than invert the gendered binary relations between author and translator; it collapses them.

While the collapse of these distinctions may not lead to the immediate collapse of the larger, heteronormative ideology informing them, it does open up a possible space for queer subjectivity. As Chamberlain and Hermans have shown, the constructed distinctions between author and translator, original and translation (along with many other conceptually related categories) are manifestations of the larger, gendered hierarchies through which we conceptualize the heteronormative world, such as the distinction between male and female, production and reproduction, original and derivative, etc. And so, with every binary opposition that is called into question by the destabilized lyric “I” of Desbordes-Valmore’s two poems, the heteronormative ideology manifested by these distinctions is itself destabilized, little by little. As each manifestation of these heteronormative distinctions collapses within the translated lyric “I,” it contributes to the overall erosion of heteronormative conceptions of poetic subjectivity. And in doing so, it opens, in the cracks or weaknesses that result from this erosion, a space for queer subjectivity to emerge.

As Desbordes-Valmore’s poems demonstrate, queerness can manifest even in a text devoid of queer subject matter, particularly in the context of translation and its various subversions. While this section explores the influences of heteronormativity on the domain of translation, and the ways in which the destabilization of the translated “I” creates a space for queer subjectivity to take hold, the final section of the chapter turns to the more explicit connections between the lyric “I” and heteronormative discourse. These connections are formed in the context of the love lyric paradigm and tradition.

Section 3: The Love Lyric “I”

While Arthur Rimbaud does not come immediately to mind in discussions of the love lyric tradition, which is the main contextual focus for this section, his conceptualization of the self and the first-person pronoun in relation to language provides a useful point of departure for approaching destabilizations of the lyric “I” within the specific structure of the love lyric. By analyzing Rimbaud’s declaration that “JE est un autre” (“I is another”) in relation to Paul Verlaine’s particular use of a plural, feminine first-person pronoun, and Renée Vivien’s use of a first-person pronoun that embodies both masculine and feminine genders simultaneously, this section explores the ways in which these poets’ respective destabilizations of the lyric “I” function to queer the love lyric tradition, creating a space for queer subjectivity to emerge in a literary domain that is firmly intertwined, historically and structurally, with heteronormative constructions of identity and desire.

Arthur Rimbaud’s “I” as Another

Between the months of April and May of 1873, Rimbaud produced the poetic collection now entitled *Une saison en enfer* (*A Season in Hell*). The “I” is noticeably present throughout the text. But the pronoun functions in a particularly unusual way in the collection’s second section, entitled *Délires I: Vierge folle* (*Delirium I: The Foolish Virgin*). Rimbaud presents the text in the form of an emotional confession by the “vierge folle” (“foolish virgin”), who recounts the sorrows and sufferings she has experienced on account of her relationship with “l’époux infernal” (“the infernal husband”). Criticism has generally agreed upon an autobiographical interpretation of the text, reading in it a description of the relationship between Verlaine – as the foolish virgin, and Rimbaud – as the infernal spouse.[34] But it has also acknowledged that this autobiographical approach to the text, and to the collection as a whole, is at times an uneasy one. As Danielle Bandelier explains in *Se dire et se taire: L'écriture d'*Une saison en enfer *d'Arthur Rimbaud* (*To Speak and to Silence: The Writing of* A Season in Hell *by Arthur Rimbaud*) (1988): "rien n'empêche de considérer cette œuvre comme autobiographique, la parenté de contenu et de point de vue avec les œuvres de ce genre étant évidente. Cependant, tout ce qui pourrait permettre d'affirmer cette appartenance, de lever le doute, est systématiquement tu – en ce qui concerne le pacte autobiographique – ou faussé – en ce qui concerne les « signaux » du genre" ("there is nothing to prevent us from reading this text autobiographically, its subject-matter and point of view being clearly similar to other works of this genre. However, anything that could serve to confirm this categorization, to remove any remaining doubt, is systematically left out – with respect to the autobiographical pact – or falsified – with respect to autobiographical 'indicators'") (27).[35] It is clear that *Délires I* does not satisfy all of Philippe LeJeune's conditions regarding the life-related content that it addresses, but it poses problems for the definition of autobiography on a narrative level as well, since its characteristic first person perspective is skewed.

Rimbaud's voice as author-narrator appears in the opening sentence of the text as he declares: "Écoutons la confession d'un compagnon d'enfer" ("Let's listen to the confessions of a comrade from hell") (102). In this declaration, he includes himself in the plural first-person subject of "écoutons" ("let's listen"). But immediately following this sentence, he gives his speaking position over to this “comrade from hell” (the title’s “foolish virgin”), who emphatically begins:

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[34] See Danielle Bandelier, *Se Dire et se taire: L'Écriture d'*Une Saison en enfer *d'Arthur Rimbaud*, Éditions de la Baconnière, 1988, particularly pages 124-26, for a discussion of this question.

[35] See Philippe LeJeune. *Le Pacte autobiographique*. Seuil, 1975, particularly Ch. 1.

> Ô divin Époux, mon Seigneur, ne refusez pas la confession de la plus triste de vos servantes. Je suis perdue. Je suis soûle. Je suis impure. Quelle vie !
>
> Pardon, divin Seigneur, pardon ! Ah ! pardon ! Que de larmes ! Et que de larmes encore plus tard, j’espère !
>
> Plus tard, je connaîtrai le divin Époux ! Je suis née soumise à Lui. – L’autre peut me battre maintenant ! (102)
>
> (O divine Husband, my Lord, do not turn a deaf ear to the confession of the most pitiful of your servants. I am lost. I am drunk. I am impure. What a life!
>
> Pardon, divine Lord, pardon! Ah! pardon! Such tears! And such tears to come later on, I hope!
>
> Later on, I will meet the divine Husband! I was born His subject. The other one can beat me now!)

The “je” (“I”) in these lines is spoken not by Rimbaud, but by another – the foolish virgin, whose first-person discourse comprises the remainder of the text. Rimbaud, as the infernal husband, appears only after the foolish virgin’s multiple repetitions of “I,” and is referred to simply as “l’autre” (“the other one:) in her declaration, “L’autre peut me battre maintenant !” (“The other one can beat me now!”).

A few lines later, the foolish virgin eventually arrives at the heart of her confession, announcing:

> Enfin, faisons cette confidence, quitte à la répéter vingt autres fois, - aussi morte, aussi insignifiante !
>
> Je suis esclave de l’Époux infernal, celui qui a perdu les vierges folles. C’est bien ce démon-là. Ce n’est pas un spectre, ce n’est pas un fantôme. Mais moi qui ai perdu la sagesse, qui suis damnée et morte au monde, - on ne me tuera pas ! Comment vous le décrire ! Je ne sais même plus parler. Je suis en deuil, je pleure, j’ai peur. Un peu de fraîcheur, Seigneur, si vous voulez, si vous voulez bien ! (102-03)
>
> (In short, I’ll give my confession, at the risk of repeating it twenty times over, - just as lifeless, just as insignificant!

> I am slave to the infernal Husband, he who led astray the foolish virgins. None other than that very demon. He is not a ghost, he is not a phantom. But I, having lost my senses, damned and dead to the world, - I will survive! How to describe him to you! Words fails me completely. I am mourning, I am crying, and I am fearful. I need some air, Lord, if you would be so kind!)

She confesses that the source of her suffering is her dependence on the infernal husband, who is not a phantom, nor a ghost, but a living demon. Over the course of the ensuing paragraphs, a description of this infernal husband slowly takes shape, revealing many details that appear to correspond with what we know about Rimbaud as a historical figure. As the author of the text, however, Rimbaud performs a sort of narrative de-centering in this description of himself. Not only is his self-depiction displaced into the character of the infernal husband; it also undergoes a degree of narrative refraction as it is presented through the perspective and "I" of the foolish virgin. She describes diverse aspects of his personality, behaviors, and opinions, revealing that "Il feignait d'être éclairé sur tout, commerce, art, médecine" ("he claimed to be well-versed in everything, business, art, medicine"), for example, or recognizing that "il pouvait être un sérieux danger dans la société" ("he could pose a serious threat to society"), or wondering why "il voulait tant s'évader de la réalité" ("he so wanted to escape reality") (103-104). Sometimes the account is affectionate or nostalgic, like when she confesses: "Je nous voyais comme deux bons enfants, libres de se promener dans le Paradis de tristesse" ("I pictured us as two blameless children, free to wander in the Paradise of sadness") (104). But these details are usually qualified with an acknowledgment of his underlying diabolism: "Sa douceur aussi est mortelle" ("His sweetness, as well, is lethal"), the foolish virgin warns (105).

So where is Rimbaud as speaking subject in all of this? Even as the author-narrator of the autobiographical text, he manages to minimize the manifestations of his own subjectivity and voice. His presence as author-narrator in the introductory sentence, "Écoutons les confessions d’un compagnon d’enfer” (“Let’s listen to the confessions of a comrade from hell”), is only evident in the imperative’s invisible but implied “nous” (“we”). And in addition to this avoidance of an identifiable “I,” he manages to avoid speaking altogether beyond this one sentence, which states his intention to listen, rather than to talk. Positioned as listener alongside the other subjects (perhaps us as readers) of the “écoutons” (“let’s listen”), he appears more as a passive witness to this description of himself than an active and deliberate producer of it.

The infernal husband is not depicted in third person throughout the *entire* text, however. At times, the foolish virgin quotes him, allowing him to speak in first person through an instance of direct discourse. Sometimes she introduces this discourse with statements such as, “Il dit: « Je n’aime pas les femmes. L’amour est à réinventer, on le sait […] »” (“He says: ‘I dislike women. We all know that love needs reinventing […]’”) (103). Other times, she simply quotes him directly, relying on the quotation marks surrounding his “je” (“I”) to differentiate it from hers: “« Je suis de race lointaine […] »” (“‘I am from an ancient race’”), “« Jamais je ne travaillerai […] »” (“‘I will never work’”), etc. (103). As these narrative structures and punctuation serve to remind us, however, this “I” is a borrowed “I.” The foolish virgin is still the speaking subject in this confession, during which she is occasionally lending the first-person pronoun to the infernal husband. When he speaks in first person in the text, he is forced to speak through the “je” (“I”) produced and already circumscribed by the discourse of the foolish virgin. Of course, we must also not forget that just as the foolish virgin is ventriloquizing Rimbaud as the infernal husband, Rimbaud as the author of the text is ventriloquizing the foolish virgin. Every time someone speaks in this text, they are speaking through the “je” (“I”) of another.

For the infernal husband, “I” is another; for the foolish virgin, “I” is another; for Rimbaud also, then, is “I” another? If we are to consider the larger, encompassing discourses from within which Rimbaud as author of the text is himself obliged to speak, the answer is, in a sense, yes: The foolish virgin concludes, rather anti-climatically, the description of her relationship with the infernal husband in her summary remark: “Drôle de ménage !” (“Strange household!”) (106). But the connotations of this final image – the “ménage” as household with husband and wife – point to the circumscribing heteronormative discourse from within which Rimbaud writes. He presents himself and Verlaine in terms of a married couple (reinforced by the imagery of the “époux” (“husband”) and “vierge” (“virgin”)), and more specifically, in terms of a heterosexual married couple. While the foolish virgin may be hysterical and married to a demon who poses a serious threat to society, it is nonetheless a conventionally appropriate pairing of man and woman. Verlaine’s character is feminine and speaks with a grammatically feminine “je,” perhaps so that it might more efficiently and convincingly depict the nature of Verlaine and Rimbaud’s intimate relationship to nineteenth century readers. Or perhaps Verlaine’s character is a woman and Rimbaud’s a man because that is the only way in which heteronormativity identifies and legitimizes a household or couple in nineteenth century France.[36]

The question of discourse and its constraining nature on the speaking subject also provides the basis for Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. In “Critically Queer,” she explains why the “I” that we use to express ourselves is never fully our own. Part of the reason is that “where there is an ‘I’ who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that ‘I’ and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will" (18). This discursive determinacy is embodied in parallel fashion in the narrative layers of *Delirium I*, where the infernal husband must speak through an "I" that is already circumscribed and determined by the discourse of the foolish virgin's confession. And just as the foolish virgin must speak through the "I" that is produced by Rimbaud as author, in a similar manner, Rimbaud must speak through an "I" that is circumscribed and determined by its own encompassing discourses.

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[36] Several other discourses also shape Rimbaud’s subjectivity and self-expression, from the literary discourses of Romanticism, post-Romanticism, and Symbolism, to the religious discourses of Catholicism and Christianity. I will confine my discussion to heteronormative discourse because it corresponds most closely with the love lyric tradition.

As Butler explains, "The 'I' is thus a citation of the place of the 'I' in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates" (18). But she also highlights that "This not owning of one's words is there from the start […] since speaking is always in some ways the speaking of a stranger through and as oneself, the melancholic reiteration of a language that one never chose, that one does not find as an instrument to be used, but which one is, as it were, used by, expropriated in, as a continuing of the 'one' and the 'we,' the ambivalent condition of the power that binds" (29). Such a perspective closely parallels Rimbaud's corollary to the notion that *JE est un autre* ("I is another"). In his letter to Georges Izambard on 13 May 1871, he explains that, "Il est faux de dire : Je pense. On devrait dire : On me pense" ("It is untrue to say: I think. One should say: I am thought") (249). Just as one does not use the language one speaks, but rather is used *by* it, as its object, not subject, one is also not the subject or agent of one's thoughts, but rather, is subject *to* them. It is perhaps for this reason that Rimbaud appears to maintain little control over his poetic thoughts, enabling him to experience the act of thinking more "objectively": "j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée : je la regarde, je l'écoute : je lance un coup d'archet : la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs, ou vient d'un bond sur la scène" ("I am witness to my thought's unfolding: I watch it, I listen to it: I pull on the strings with the bow: the symphony stirs in the pit, or leaps up onto the stage") (250). After his metaphorical bow stroke, he stands back, ready to see what symphony comes of it.

If one never fully owns or controls one's thoughts or one's words, including the prized "I" of self-expression, to what extent can one's subjectivity be self-determined and freely expressed? Butler believes that, when a baby is born into the world, it is subjected to an immediate and continuous gendering, which begins with the initial requisite declaration, "It's a girl!" This declaration constitutes a performative use of language, in Butler's theory, because it does not simply label an already existing girl subject, but rather begins to form the subject as a "girl." It is the start of an ongoing and unending process of "girling," which will establish the newborn baby as an identifiable and legitimate subject in the world. "This is a 'girl,'" Butler explains, "who is compelled to 'cite' the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject" ("Critically Queer" 23). In other words, she must continue to perform her gender through various compulsory citations of "femininity" in order to be recognized as a viable subject in society. In this sense, "Gender is performative insofar as it is the *effect* of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized *under constraint*. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization. There is no subject who precedes or enacts this repetition of norms" (21). If there is no subject who precedes or enacts this repetition of norms, and if this repetition is rendered compulsory through various social constraints, then self-determination and free expression of one's "individual subjectivity" appear to be quite limited, if not impossible.

This is not necessarily the case, however. It may still be possible, from within this compulsory repetition of norms, to create space for the formation of a queer subjectivity. Butler remarks that the very constraints of this “compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms” are in fact also “the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged” (22). “If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities,” she states in *Gender Trouble*, “then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?” (32). Whatever this subversive repetition may be, it must take place *within* the constraints of gender performativity in order to be most effective, since the performative nature of gender leaves no room for a viable subject as agent outside of its compulsory repetition of norms. The subject must continue to repeat the gender norms but may do so in an unexpected or deviant way. Agency “is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition,” Butler states (*Gender Trouble* 145). And it is through this varied form of repetition that the norms are “resignified,” as they gain additional interpretations and perhaps even lose their initial significations. In this sense, performativity can also be read as “the unanticipated resignifiability of highly invested terms” (“Critically Queer” 28). Its restrictive nature, with its compulsory repetition of norms, is at the same time the source of its possible queering. This queering does not throw off the confines of such norms altogether, but works within them, to resignify them, in the hope that they might gain additional, queer, interpretations or significations.

I propose an examination of the French “Love Lyric” through the lens of Butler’s gender performativity since the genre is closely entwined with heteronormative discourse and since it is a poetic tradition that involves its own compulsory repetition of norms. The love lyric has arguably one of the most conventionalized literary structures, and it forms part of a long-standing lyric tradition that can be traced back to the Middle Ages. In this sense, it holds within itself significant potential for a resignification of norms, performed by poets who repeat its conventions in subversive or misleading ways.

Paul Verlaine's Feminine "I"

The love lyric can be traced back to the twelfth century *troubadours* of southern France and the thirteenth century *trouvères* of northern France, whose songs exalted the values of *fin'amor,* more commonly known today as "courtly love" (Kay et al. 41). The contemporary success of these songs, as well as their lasting effect on modern literature and cultural conceptions of love, is significant. "Even though few of these poets' names are familiar to modern readers […], and many indeed were anonymous," Sarah Kay acknowledges, "the scenario of the love-struck troubadour serenading his lady, or tales of lover-heroes such as Lancelot and Tristan, remain well-known cultural reference points" (16). There were also *trobairitz,* female authors of courtly love songs, most numerous in the region of Occitania between the mid twelfth and mid thirteenth centuries, but societal structure and social expectations ultimately led to a predominantly male tradition. Kay explains that the masculine bias of Medieval literary culture resulted from the period's largely gendered access to education, as well as the question of who had the right to speak or sing in public, a right almost exclusively reserved for men (26). Since these songs were usually performed in the court or in public by their authors, this left little room for women's voices and authorship.

The largely masculinist perspective of the courtly love tradition has had lasting effects on western representations of femininity, masculinity, and love relations. And as Kay explains, the figure of the lady, as the absent focus of this literary genre, does not necessarily present a realistic image of women, their desires, or their behaviors. "*Fin' amor* […] is an imaginary corrective to the marriages dictated by dynastic and territorial interest which were the norm for aristocratic society throughout the Middle Ages and beyond," she explains (41). Nevertheless, the literary tradition's growing popularity lead to the rapid diffusion of courtly love literature throughout Europe, where the masculinist perspective of literary courtliness became increasingly present in "moral and political reality" as well (41). As a result, the woman, as a mostly silent object of desire who is praised (or condemned) by the male poet lover, as subject of this desire, remains a recognizable trope in modern-day culture. "These innovative fictions are not only the forebears of much modern literature," Kay concludes, "they have also enduringly shaped our experience of love, desire, and gender" (16).

In addition to this thematic influence, the courtly love song has also had an enduring *structural* influence on the modern period's love lyric, particularly with respect to the concept of the lyric "I" and its relation to the lyric "you." As editor Dominique Rabaté confirms in his critical anthology, *Figures du sujet lyrique* (*Figures of the Lyric Subject*), the notion of the lyric "I" originates from the centrality of the author as composer and performer in courtly love songs, a role that becomes increasingly central to lyric poetry over the centuries: "L'histoire de la poésie occidentale semble se confondre avec la croissance, l'extension que prend au fil des siècles ce type de discours poétique fondé originairement sur l'oralité et la présence de plus en plus insistante d'un sujet d'énonciation qui l'organise" ("The history of Western poetry seems to intersect with the growth and extension, over the course of centuries, of a poetic discourse originally founded on the notion of orality and on an increasingly present speaking subject as organizer of the text") (5). In the love lyric structure in particular, this lyric "I" is established in rather strict relation to a lyric "you," often in the form of an apostrophe. As Yves Vadé remarks in "L'émergence du sujet lyrique à l'époque romantique" ("The Emergence of the Lyric Subject in the Romantic Era"), "L'apostrophe est chose commune dans la poésie lyrique. Dans la poésie amoureuse en particulier, rien de plus habituel que de nommer la femme aimée (par son nom ou par un pseudonyme) et de s'adresser directement à elle" ("The use of apostrophe is common in lyric poetry, and in love lyric poetry in particular. It has become customary to name the beloved woman (either by her own name or a pseudonym) and to speak to her directly") (18). This dynamic forms the basis of a structural paradigm which, by opposing the pronouns "I" and "you," likewise opposes their associated positions of subject and object, speaker and listener, lover and beloved, male and female, while simultaneously aligning the "I" with the categories of "male," "lover," "speaker," and "subject" of the discourse, and the "you" with the categories of "female," "beloved," "addressee," and "object" of the discourse:

I	you
male	female
subject	object
poet	addressee
speaker	listener
lover	beloved

But what if one or more of these poetic roles does not align with the love lyric's conventional paradigm? For example, what if the "I" were not male, but female, or what if it were positioned on the same side of the paradigm as the lyric "you," rather than in opposition to it? These variations on the conventional love lyric structure are enacted by Verlaine in the fourth of his six poems comprising the "Ariettes oubliées" ("Forgotten Airs") section of his collection *Romances sans paroles* (*Ballads without Words*). The text was likely written at some point between 1872 and 1873, around the same time that Rimbaud is thought to have written *Une saison en enfer* (*A Season in Hell*). Does it dialogue with this text? If Verlaine is addressing Rimbaud in the texts, then perhaps, but the addressee is unclear. While some critics believe that

Verlaine is addressing Rimbaud, others believe that he is addressing his wife, Mathilde.[37] In any case, the very fact that such disagreement exists can be attributed in part to Verlaine's manipulation of specific love lyric conventions. Had he abided by the conventional paradigm, we could assume, as readers, that the "je" is masculine and most likely refers to Verlaine himself, and that his addressee is a feminine object of desire, such as his young wife, Mathilde. As the text reveals, however, such a conventional reading is not possible:

> Il faut, voyez-vous, nous pardonner les choses.
> De cette façon nous serons bien heureuses,
> Et si notre vie a des instants moroses,
> Du moins nous serons, n'est-ce pas ? deux pleureuses.
>
> O que nous mêlions, âmes sœurs que nous sommes,
> A nos vœux confus la douceur puérile
> De cheminer loin des femmes et des hommes,
> Dans le frais oubli de ce qui nous exile.
>
> Soyons deux enfants, soyons deux jeunes filles
> Éprises de rien et de tout étonnées,
> Qui s'en vont pâlir sous les chastes charmilles
> Sans même savoir qu'elles sont pardonnées.[38]
>
> (We must, you see, forgive ourselves for this.
> Only then we'll be truly cheerful,
> And if our life should ever lack in bliss,
> Together, at least, we'll be tearful.
>
> As sister souls, O let us blend
> With our tangled vows the childlike style
> Of wandering far from both women and men,
> In the sweet oblivion of our virgin exile.

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[37] For a concise overview of critics' various stances on this question, see Daniel Bergez, "Incertitude et vacuité du moi dans les 'Ariettes oubliés' de Verlaine." *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, vol. 82, no. 3, pp. 412-23, particularly pp. 418-19.

[38] "Il faut, voyez-vous, nous pardonner les choses." *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, edited by Yves-Gérard Le Dantec. Gallimard, 1954, p. 123.

> Let us be two young children, let us be two young girls
> Enamored by nothing and by everything smitten,
> Who grow pale in the bower as its leafy shade unfurls
> Without even knowing that they are forgiven.)

The absence, in the poem, of the subject pronouns “je” (“I”) and “tu” (“you”) is further marked by the quantity of *other* pronouns in use, such as the “il” (“it”), “vous” (“you” – plural/formal) and “nous” (“us”) of the first line alone. This opening line establishes an immediate ambiguity with respect to who is talking, to whom, and the relation between the two. It begins with an expression of necessity, “il faut” (“it is necessary”), whose characteristically vague impersonal “il” (“it”) refers to no one in particular. The necessity in question, however, pertains to both the “vous” (“you” – plural/formal) and the “nous” (“us”) that follow. And how are we to interpret these two pronouns? Are they simply the plural equivalents of the lyric “tu” and “je” respectively? Or does this “vous” (“you” – plural/formal) represent an additional subject, or subjects, separate from the subjects of the “nous” (“we”) who are to be forgiven? And regarding this “nous” (“we”), does it combine both the lyric “je” and “tu”? Or, does it contain the “je” and previously mentioned “vous” (“you” – plural/formal), or perhaps the “je” and another, unspecified subject? And of course, what exactly is it that needs to be pardoned?

None of these questions can be answered completely or immediately, but the poem as a whole does offer some clarifications. The rest of the first stanza is spoken entirely through the subject “nous” (“we”) and it seems likely that this “we” refers to the conventional lyric “I” and lyric “you,” given their hope of future happiness together, and the passing reference to “notre vie” (“our life”). And, if there must be “des instants moroses” (“somber moments”), at least the subjects in question will experience them together, as “deux pleureuses” (“two weeping women”). As this designation reveals in its grammatically feminine plural ending, which pairs it with that of “heureuses” (“happy”), two lines before, both the “I” and the “you” in this text must be feminine. Writing with an implied feminine “I” then, and writing in its plural form, “we,” Verlaine subverts several levels of the love lyric paradigm: First, he subverts the supposed alignment that places “I” on the “masculine” side of the paradigm; second, he collapses the supposed gender division between speaker and listener, and third, he calls into question the grammatical opposition between subject and object. Both the lyric “I” and the lyric “you” are subjects in this text, functioning through the pronoun “we,” and, endowed with their feminine genders, they appear more in a relation of assimilation than of differentiation.

The first line of the second stanza, with its subjunctive expression of desire, “O que nous mêlions, âmes sœurs que nous sommes” (“O that we might combine, sister souls that we are”), descriptively reinforces this inclination towards coalescence with its verb “mêler” (“to combine”). And the image of “âmes sœurs” (“sister souls”) points to a degree of affinity and congruence that functions on a more profound, spiritual or intellectual level. As the stanza continues, however, it becomes clear that it is not the subjects who are merging with each other. Rather, as the following two lines reveal, the two subjects wish to combine their “vœux confus” (“confused vows”) with the “douceur puérile / De cheminer loin des femmes et des hommes” (“childlike sweetness / Of wandering far from women and men”). But what are these “vœux” (“vows”), and in what sense are they “confus” (“confused”)? The ambiguity of the terms provides several possible interpretations: “vœux” perhaps first recalls the notion of wedding vows, while it also refers, in a more general sense, to any kind of resolution or expression of commitment. And the term “confus” has at least three general definitions: The “vœux” can be “confus” in the sense that the speakers are embarrassed or ill at ease; they can be “confus” in the sense that they are muffled, faint, or indistinct; and they can be “confus” in the sense that they are chaotic, disordered, or muddled, much like the levels of the love lyric paradigm that the text is simultaneously destabilizing.

And what about the desire to combine these “confused vows” with the “childlike sweetness of wandering far from women and men”? Such an image conceptually depicts the subjects’ persuasion away from a state of categorical distinction, especially in terms of society’s gender and sexuality. The “childlike sweetness” of such an experience recalls the pleasure, innocence, or naturalness often associated with childhood, as well as the somewhat forbidden joy of distancing oneself from adults and their society. And it is perhaps not from people, in general, that the subjects are distancing themselves; the speaker wants to wander far from “women and men,” in particular, and to do so, as the final line of the stanza reveals, “in the sweet oblivion” of the two subjects’ exile. In other words, perhaps the speaker desires to combine with these “confused vows” the sweet joy of being far from women and men, of wandering freely, forgotten by the compulsory gender categorizations that exile these two subjects from the social structure.

The line recalls a particular phrase from Rimbaud’s *Délires I,* in which the “foolish virgin” reflects upon the bitter-sweet aspect of her relationship with the “infernal husband,” stating, “Je nous voyais comme deux bons enfants, libres de se promener dans le Paradis de tristesse” (“I pictured us as two blameless children, free to wander in the Paradise of sadness”) (*Œuvres complètes* 104). This intertextual correlation is reinforced by the following stanza of the poem, which begins with the speaker’s imperative declaration to *be* two such children: “Soyons deux enfants, soyons deux jeunes filles” (“Let’s be two children, let’s be two young girls”), the speaker concludes in the third stanza (line 9). And the declaration completes a series of identifications manifested by the verb “to be” throughout the text. In the first stanza, the verb appears in the future indicative with the promise, “nous serons bien heureuses” (“we will be truly happy”), and “nous serons […] deux pleureuses” (“we will be […] two weeping women”). In the second stanza, it appears in the present indicative, with the expression, “âmes sœurs que nous sommes” (“Sister souls that we are”). And in the third stanza, it manifests in the form of a plural imperative, “soyons deux enfants, soyons deux jeunes filles” (“let’s be two children, let’s be two young girls”). These different manifestations of the verb “to be” parallel the overarching argument of the text, which begins with the poem’s opening expression of necessity, “Il faut” (“It is necessary”): While the first verse expresses a future happiness, and the second expresses a desire in the subjunctive, the third expresses a call to action in the imperative. In order to be “truly content” in the future, as the sister souls that they are, the subjects decide to identify as two young girls, or rather, to *be* two young girls.

The last stanza continues with a description of these girls, “éprises de rien et de tout étonnées / Qui s’en vont pâlir sous les chastes charmilles” (“Enamored by nothing and by everything amazed / Who go off to pale under the chaste bowers”). The chiasmic depiction of them as “enamored by nothing and by everything amazed,” provides a familiar image of young children moving incessantly from one object of interest to another. But the image of their running along “to pale under the chaste bowers” is a little less clear, particularly with its use of the verb “pâlir” (“to pale”). Why would otherwise happy little girls turn pale once in the shady seclusion of the chaste bower? Perhaps the green shadiness simply subdues their colors, or perhaps they experience some kind of strong emotion like fear, pain, or the “sweet suffering” of love. The text ends with an equally ambiguous line, which recalls the pardon mentioned at the beginning of the poem: The young girls run off, growing pale in the shade of the bower, “sans même savoir qu’elles sont pardonnées” (“without even knowing that they are forgiven”). And with these words concluding the text, the initial question remains unanswered: Forgiven for what? And by whom? And more particularly in this last stanza, what does it mean if the girls are unaware of this forgiveness? Is that a good thing or a bad thing, a sign of a carefree attitude or a somewhat tragic situation? Perhaps, in tone with the poem's continuous inclination toward a state of coalescence, it is neither one nor the other, but a little of both: In their "Paradis de tristesse" ("Paradise of sadness"), the two subjects are amazed in one moment and grow pale in the next; they will be "bien heureuses" ("truly happy") but also "deux pleureuses" ("two weeping women"); they are "éprises de rien et de tout étonnées" ("enamored by nothing and by everything amazed").

This continuous push toward forms of coalescence and amalgamation manifests on other levels of the poem as well. With respect to the poem's thematic content, the speaker references "nos voeux confus" ("our confused vows") and expresses the desire to mix them, in turn, with the "douceur puérile de cheminer loin des femmes et des hommes" ("the childlike sweetness of wandering far from women and men"). As mentioned above, this desire could be read in a larger context, as a desire to distance oneself from the hierarchical distinctions that organize society into its binary and gendered structure, and that exile the poetic subjects from this conventional social order. On a textual level, Verlaine as poet is striving to accomplish a similar amalgamation. He is mixing with his own impressionistic "confused vows" the sweet joy of distancing himself from similarly conventional, but poetic, distinctions: The "je" and the "tu" do not exist as separate entities in this poem, as the love lyric paradigm would have it, but are combined into the subject, "nous" ("we"). They also share the same gender, muddying the masculine/feminine sides of the paradigm; and finally, the subject's decision to be two young girls, and its reflection in the grammatical elements of the text, destabilizes the speaker's alignment with the masculine-lover-poet-"I" side of the paradigm.

The declaration “soyons deux jeunes filles” (“let us be two young girls”) is an unusual imperative in its literal sense, because it calls for a seemingly impossible act – to simply “be” another identity. As Butler has shown with respect to the constraining nature of discourse, the possibility for self-determination and free expression in terms of gender identity is extremely limited. Of course, in the poetic context, the imperative can be read figuratively, and such self-identification and self-determination can, temporarily, take place through language. In “L’adresse lyrique” (“Lyric Address”), Joëlle de Sermet remarks on the lyric subject’s construction, which takes place in and by the poem:

> […] le sujet lyrique, emporté par le dynamisme de la fictionnalisation, n’est jamais achevé, et même qu’il n’*est* pas. Le sujet lyrique, loin de s’exprimer comme un sujet déjà constitué que le poème représenterait ou exprimerait, est en perpétuelle constitution dans une genèse constamment renouvelée par le poème, et hors duquel il n’existe pas. Le sujet lyrique se crée dans et par le poème, qui a valeur performative. (63)
>
> ([…] the lyric subject, animated by the dynamics of fictionalization, is never a finished product; it never simply *is*. The lyric subject, far from speaking as an already-constituted subject that is represented or expressed through the poem, is constantly in the process of formation, a process continually renewed by the poetic act, and outside of which it does not exist. The lyric subject creates itself in and by the poem, which has a performative quality.)

Described in this way, the poetic text functions as performatively as gender with respect to the poetic subject that it constructs. And it appears to be through this performative process that Verlaine’s poetic subjects are able to “be” two young girls. Their feminine identity is constructed through the text. It is represented by a feminine lexicon (weeping women, sister souls, two young girls, etc.) and by feminine grammatical markers. And it is further reinforced on a poetic level, with the text’s use of only “feminine” rhymes, subverting the conventional alternation with “masculine” line endings. The poem’s meter, as well, is “feminine” in the sense that it is an 11-syllable meter, identical to that brought back into practice by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, after having been adopted by Sappho centuries before and subsequently named the “Sapphic” meter.

This use of textual, linguistic, and poetic conventions to construct an image of femininity constitutes a performative use of language, but at the same time, it also constitutes a subversive repetition of poetic norms. Verlaine’s variations on the conventional rhyme scheme, meter, and lexicon of the poem work in conjunction with his variations on the structure and organization of the love lyric paradigm. And it is through these subversions of convention that Verlaine is able to create space for a different subjectivity to emerge. The text is still recognizable as a love lyric poem through its subject-matter, structure, lexicon, and prosody, but the repeated conventions that enable such recognition vary slightly from the norm: most significantly, the implied lyric “I” no longer signals an identification with masculinity, and it no longer assumes a position of difference in relation to the lyric “you.” These small variations significantly destabilize the love lyric paradigm and render it unable to signify in the conventional way.

Given the figurative nature of the subject’s imperative declaration to be two young girls, and given the textual construction of these feminine subjects, the resignification of norms that Verlaine enacts is confined to the text itself and to the duration of the poem. The feminine subjects do not exist outside the text. Their construction is only possible through the text’s imperative declaration, its destabilization of the love lyric paradigm, and its subversive repetition of certain poetic and grammatical conventions. But the limited nature of this queering effect offers a possible reading regarding the central question of the text – the question of forgiveness. Just as the resignification of norms is limited to the duration of the poem, so, it appears, is the need for forgiveness. The first line of the poem establishes this forgiveness as necessary for the girls’ future happiness (“Il faut, voyez-vous, nous pardonner les choses” (“We must, you see, forgive ourselves for this”)), but the last line of the text establishes a situation where it is no longer necessary (the girls are now “pardonnées” (“forgiven”)). Perhaps the wrongs to be forgiven did not pertain to a past dispute, but to a certain subversion of convention, that is, to the pairing of two young girls in a heteronormative society of “women and men,” or to the combination of an “I” with a “you” in the love lyric paradigm.

Renée Vivien’s Androgynous “I”

While Verlaine’s “Ariette oubliée IV” (“Forgotten Air IV”) succeeds in collapsing certain layers of the love lyric paradigm, the following poem by Renée Vivien reveals how this queering effect might extend beyond the limits of the text. By means of its lyric “I,” which embodies two sexes at once, the poem not only subverts the structure of the love lyric paradigm; it also succeeds in queering the reader’s reception of the text, as well as queering the larger, lyric tradition and heteronormative paradigm within which the text exists. The poem is entitled “La double ambiguïté” (“Double Ambiguity”), and it was published as part of Vivien’s 1903 collection, *Échos et reflets* (*Echoes and Reflections*). Like many of the texts in this collection, it celebrates the ambivalence of dusk, the ephemeral moment between day and night, where light is dimming and sensuality awakening:

> La double ambiguïté
>
> J’écoute avidement tes paroles dans l’ombre…
> Je goûte les langueurs et les parfums du lit
> Et la complicité des ténèbres, où sombre
> La Pléiade d’or que Sélanna pâlit.
>
> Tu souris, déployant ta chevelure blonde,
> Et le sommeil répand des pétales d’azur.
> La musique s’éteint. La nuit glisse sur l’onde
> Harmonieusement, ainsi qu’un cygne obscur.

Ma bouche a possédé ta bouche féminine
Et mon être a frémi sous tes baisers d’amant,
Car je suis l’Être Double, et mon âme androgyne
Adore en toi la vierge et le prince charmant.

(Double Ambiguity

I avidly listen to your words in the twilight…
I savor the languor and the fragrant linens
And the collusion of night, in whose darkened heavens
The Pleiades twinkle faintly, imbued in moonlight.

You smile as you let down your disheveled coiffure,
And sleepiness unfolds its petals of azure.
The music dies out. The day is almost gone,
And night glides in like a silent black swan.

My mouth possessed your feminine lips
My body quivered in receipt of your courtship,
And my androgynous soul – For I am the Double Being –
Adores in you the damsel as much as the prince charming.)

In contrast to the impersonal “il” (“it”) that begins Verlaine’s poem, Vivien’s text immediately establishes the speaker through the first-person pronoun of “J’écoute” (“I listen”). The addressee is also clearly established through the “Tu souris” (“You smile”) at the beginning of the second stanza. Despite this clear distinction between the lyric “I” and “you,” however, the poem still succeeds in cultivating a sense of ambiguity. Like dusk – the moment of transition and overlap between day and night, the first stanza similarly combines images of light and dark. The speaker savors the collusion of darkness, whose pale moonlight makes the stars seem faint. And as Vivien’s use of the term “complicité” (“complicity”) highlights, this darkness has an appealing quality to it: It is “dans l’ombre” (“in the shadows”) that the speaker listens avidly to the words of the addressee and savors the “langueurs” (“languor”) and the “parfums du lit” (“scents of the bed”). The lexicon of these two lines also creates a degree of synesthetic ambiguity: “J’écoute avidement tes paroles dans l’ombre” (“I listen avidly to your words in the shadows”) depicts the speaker as listening with a sort of sensual thirst to the words of the addressee. This image is reinforced by the expression “Je goûte,” in the following line, signifying both a figurative “savoring” and a more literal “tasting” of the dreaminess and scents of the bed.

In addition to this ambiguous combination of sensual experiences, the poetic subject also combines varying degrees of agency and passivity. The transitive verbs beginning the first two lines are conventionally conjugated in the first-person singular, with the speaker as their subject, but in referring to sensory experiences, they simultaneously highlight the speaker’s more receptive role, and invert the qualities conventionally associated with the lyric “I” and “you.” As the first line reveals, the speaker is not speaking in this moment, but *listening*, and the addressee is not listening, but *speaking*. This combination and inversion of agency and passivity continues in the second stanza, in which the “I” appears to step back and to “cède l’initiative” (“concede its agency”), in Mallarméan terms, to a variety of other subjects: “Tu souris” (“you smile”), “le sommeil répand” (“sleepiness spreads”), “La musique s’éteint” (“The music dies out”), and “la nuit glisse sur l’onde” (“night glides in”). The stanza concludes by comparing the night’s silent arrival to a swan gliding smoothly and effortlessly through still water.

But why is this swan “obscur” (“dark”)? It could be another instance of Vivien’s ambivalence between light and dark, where the characteristic whiteness of the swan is replaced with a contrasting, but equally appealing, blackness. The fact that it is a black *swan* in particular, however, attributes additional meaning to the image. As Jaan Puhvel explains in his philological study, “The Origin of Etruscan tusna (“Swan”),” “Words for ‘swan’ are frequently akin to terms for whiteness; collocations like *niveos cycnos, candidior cycnis* (Vergil), and *albus olor* (Ovid) were poetic commonplace, while conversely a *niger cycnus* to the Romans was the quintessential *rara avis in terris* (Juvenal 6.165)" (209). In later centuries, the "black swan" was adopted as an expression of impossibility, given the presumption that only white swans existed (209). And after Europeans eventual discovered the existence of black swans, the expression came to serve as a metaphor for the weaknesses of a system of thought based on inductive reasoning and empirical observation. John Stuart Mill appears to be the first to use the black swan as an example of this problem (Taleb 311). In his philosophical work, *A System of Logic* (1843), he states that, "To an inhabitant of Central Africa, fifty years ago, no fact probably appeared to rest on more uniform experience than this, that all human beings are black. To Europeans, not many years ago, the proposition, All swans are white, appeared an equally unequivocal instance of uniformity in the course of nature. Further experience has proved to both that they were mistaken" (226). As a result of this error in judgement, until the discovery of white men and black swans, "mankind believed in a uniformity of the course of nature where no such uniformity really existed" (226).

Through her image of the dark swan, Vivien incorporates into the poem a metaphor that recalls the possibility of variance in nature. As Mill explains below, the metaphor of the black swan underlines nature's combinations of unexpected and supposedly distinct phenomena:

> The course of nature, in truth, is not only uniform, it is also infinitely various. Some phenomena are always seen to recur in the very same combinations in which we met with them at first; others seem altogether capricious; while some, which we had been accustomed to regard as bound down exclusively to a particular set of combinations, we unexpectedly find detached from some of the elements with which we had hitherto found them conjoined, and united to others of quite a contrary description. (226)

Such an unexpected combination appears in the last stanza of Vivien's poem, in which the speaker switches to past tense to recount what has occurred since the night's swan-like entrance:

“Ma bouche a possédé ta bouche feminine” (“My mouth possessed your feminine mouth”), states the speaker to the addressee, “Et mon être a frémi sous tes baisers d’amant” (“And my being quivered under your suitor kisses”). Here, the subject pronouns “I” and “you” disappear as the subjects are deconstructed into their composite parts – each subject’s “bouche” (“mouth”), the speaker’s “être” (“being”), and the addressee’s “baisers d’amant” (“suitor kisses”). It is not the speaker who possessed the addressee; it is the speaker’s lips that possessed the addressee’s “bouche féminine” (“feminine mouth”). But if the addressee’s mouth is “feminine,” why does it give the speaker its “baisers d’amant” (“suitor kisses”)? And if the speaker’s mouth is the one who possessed the addressee’s, why was it the speaker’s being that trembled under the addressee’s kisses?

Vivien answers these questions in the last two lines of the poem, whose “Car” (“Because”) introduces the text’s conclusion: “Car je suis l’Etre Double, et mon âme androgyne / Adore en toi la vierge et le prince charmant” (“For I am the Double Being, and my androgynous soul / Adores in you the virgin and the prince charming”). This Double Being combines within it both masculine and feminine subjectivities. And this ambiguity is doubled by the composition of the addressee, who likewise combines both the female virgin and the male prince charming. Whereas Verlaine’s combination of subjectivities involved the pairing of two similarly gendered subjects (“je” and “tu”) into the plural subject, “nous,” Vivien’s involves the combination of two supposedly distinct and contrary subjectivities (masculine and feminine) within the one “je” and the one “tu.” As a result, Vivien’s Double Being functions in the same way as the metaphorical black swan: The love lyric paradigm, which, to take Mills words, “we had been accustomed to regard as bound down exclusively to a particular set of combinations,” has been shown to exist otherwise, where the masculinity normally bound to the lyric “I” and the femininity normally bound to the lyric “you” have been unexpectedly detached from their respective pronouns and positions, and reorganized to form different and unforeseen combinations

In *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2010), Nassim Taleb defines an event as a Black Swan if it meets the following three criteria: First, it is an “outlier” in that “it lies outside the realm of regular expectations”; second, “it carries an extreme impact”; and third, “in spite of its outlier status, human nature makes us concoct explanations for its occurrence *after* the fact, making it explainable and predictable” (xvii-xviii). Vivien’s Double Being appears to function similarly within the text: Something unforeseen takes place in the obscurity of the blank space between the second and third stanzas, and Vivien’s description of this event thoroughly destabilizes the lyric paradigm, as well as the belief system reinforced by heteronormativity. Looking back, the Double Being’s existence can be explained in retrospect when we consider the text’s ambivalence between contrary phenomena, such as light and dark, the subjects’ combinations of agency and passivity, and the ambiguity regarding each subject’s gender.

In addition, this “cygne obscur” (“dark swan”) functions as a “*signe* obscur” (“obscure sign”), where the androgyny of the subjects must be deciphered with respect to the ambiguity of the text as a whole. And it is the obscurity of the poem’s signs that leads to the ambiguity of the poem’s signification. Beyond her ambiguously gendered lexicon, Vivien does not use a single adjective or noun whose grammatical markers would reveal a masculine or feminine gender for either the speaker or addressee. In this sense, the androgyny of the lyric “I” and lyric “you” manifests on a linguistic, as well as thematic, level.

But what function could such androgyny or duplicity be serving? Perhaps it is a literary representation of the author’s queer sexuality in terms of Karl Ulrich’s concept of “sexual inversion,” a common theory for homosexuality at the turn of the century. Rather than conceiving of the possibility of attraction between similar genders, this theory explains homosexuality as a kind of double being, or hermaphroditism of the soul, as Foucault has called it (59). Or, perhaps the duplicity of the lyric "I" is a reflection of the text's supposed double authorship. The collection, *Échos et reflets* (*Echoes and Reflections*), which contains "La double ambiguïté" ("Double Ambiguity"), was actually signed by Paule Riversdale, the collective pseudonym for Renée Vivien and Hélène de Zuylen de Nyevelt. Hélène de Zuylen was Vivien's lover at the time, and the two collaborated on several texts. As Jean-Paul Goujon states in his editorial note to "La double ambiguïté ("Double Ambiguity"), however, he finds little evidence of collaboration in this text or in others of the collection. "Disons, pour résumer" que la quasi-totalité des poèmes d'*Échos et reflets* doit, sans grand risque d'erreur, être restituée à Vivien" ("In short, almost all of the poems in *Echoes and Reflections* can safely be attributed to Vivien"), he concludes (499).

Or perhaps this double subjectivity is already at play in love lyric poems, and Vivien is simply expanding an inherent androgyny that resides at the heart of the love lyric tradition. In "L'adresse lyrique" ("Lyric Address"), Joëlle de Sermet concludes that the love lyric poem is a "pure projection métaphorique de l'espace subjectif qui se scinde en sujet et objet" ("purely metaphorical projection of the subjective position, which is split between subject and object"), and that it functions "comme une tentative désespérée pour s'arracher au piège du solipsisme tout en se délivrant dans un « tu » qui n'est pas un *alter ego* vers lequel on s'élance mais une hypostase du « je »" ("as a desperate attempt to avoid solipsism by rendering itself through a 'you' that is not an *alter ego* but rather a substitution for the 'I'") (93). This trace of the lyric "I" within the lyric "you" stems from the fact that the love object is ultimately the creation of the poetic subject itself. And much like the discursively produced poetic subject, this poetic object is also created through the subject's conventional reiteration of the pronoun "you" over the course of the love lyric tradition. In *Queer/Early/Modern* (2006) Carla Freccero considers the queerness of such a dynamic between the lyric "I" and lyric "you" in the context of Petrarchan love lyric poetry. She remarks that, on account of the poetic object's similarly discursive production, "Laura comes to resemble, not so much an 'other' object of desire, but a kind of Petrarch in drag" (22). Laura is the literary creation of Petrarch, and as a result, the feminine subjectivity of the lyric "you" is ultimately shaped through the masculine subjectivity of the lyric "I." For this reason, Freccero concludes, the Petrarchan tradition's "explicit construction of a presumptively heterosexual desiring subject […] turns out to be strangely queer" (6-7).

Vivien incorporates into the linguistic and thematic layers of "La double ambiguïté" ("Double Ambiguity") this hidden queerness that lies at the heart of the lyric tradition's "I-you" relation. And as such, the resulting androgyny of the lyric "I" and lyric "you" can be exploited as an effective means of queering the reader's reception of the text. The ambiguous gender of both the pronouns "I" and "you" in Vivien's poem leaves the reader without any indication as to the gender of the speaking subject or its relation to the love object. Just as gender identification and desire are dependent and mutually exclusive, according to the heteronormative paradigm, so the love lyric structure depends on the subject's identification in order to determine the object's identification. Challenging the assumption of even one of these categories throws into question its relation to the others. This ambiguity in turn destabilizes the reader's reception of the text, since the reader is forced to choose between several interpretive approaches: A reading based solely on conventions of the love lyric tradition, for example, would assume a masculine "I" in a relation of desire with a feminine "you." A biographical reading, however, working under the tradition's heterosexual assumption, would switch the interpretation to a female "I" and therefore a male “you.” While knowledge of the author’s sexuality might further alter such a biographical reading to a female “I” and female “you,” etc. With such a variety of possible readings, none of which can be confirmed or excluded through either the thematic or linguistic aspects of the poem, the reader is faced with a choice. The necessary choice concerning which discursive context to use renders the reader conscious of the process involved in constructing a gendered subject through the discursive context of the poem. If the reader wishes to avoid such a heavily signified choice, the only form of reading that remains is a queer reading of indeterminacy and multiplicity.

Given the variety of possible readings for this poem, it might also be interesting to consider the question of reader identification as a factor influencing approaches to the text. In other words, could such an indeterminate lyric “I” prompt different interpretations for different readers? Would a modern reader, with a twenty-first century understanding of queer sexuality read this text differently from a reader at the turn of the twentieth century? Might a male reader approach it differently from a female reader? A queer reader from a heteronormative reader? A trans* or non-binary reader from a cisgender reader, etc.? These questions extend beyond the scope of this text, but they point to areas of possible investigation regarding the relation between reader and lyric “I,” the notion of reader identification, as well as historical and cultural impacts on reader reception.

In any case, however, by collapsing the paradigmatic relations between the lyric “I” and the lyric “you,” between subject and object, male and female, self and other, Paul Verlaine and Renée Vivien destabilize the foundational structure of the love lyric poem. Literary historian François Rigolot comments on the prevalence of this structural convention in today’s culture. He remarks that when reading a love lyric poem, “les publics masculin et féminin (lecteurs, auditeurs et futurs poètes) s'attendent à ce que le poème mette en scène un Amant, que cet Amant parle à la première personne de sa situation amoureuse, et que ce soit une Dame qui incarne l'objet de son désir" ("masculine and feminine audiences […] expect that the poem will depict a Lover, that this lover will speak in first-person about his romantic situation, and that it will be a Lady who embodies the object of his desire") (304). And he further remarks that, "Il ne sera pas déraisonnable de poser qu'en règle générale le discours amoureux s'organise autour de modèles thématiques et formels établis depuis longtemps, en théorie et en pratique, par la tradition essentiellement masculine de la *fin'amor*" ("It would not be unreasonable to conclude, as a general rule, that love discourse is shaped by longstanding thematic and formal models that were constructed, in theory and in practice, by the essentially masculine tradition of *fin'amor*") (303-04). The love lyric structure has shaped Western love discourse for centuries. And by destabilizing the lyric "I" and the love lyric paradigm in this way, these poets have enabled the queering not only of the love lyric tradition, but also of a major participant in the discursive production of heterosexual love and heteronormative life.

Conclusion

From Marceline Desbordes-Valmore to Renée Vivien, the lyric "I" undergoes a variety of manipulations over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is refracted, split, doubled, and obscured. But with its resulting destabilization comes its potential for the creation of queer subjectivities. By working the weaknesses in its norms, the above poets have succeeded in forging a new trajectory in discourse, one that deviates slightly from the compulsory repetition of norms and creates space within such discourse for a deviant, queer subjectivity to form. This process of destabilization is neither straightforward nor linear, and it requires a particularly performative use of the first-person pronoun. As Butler specifies, a performative use of language only “works” to the extent that “*it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized” (“Critically Queer” 19). The examples discussed in this chapter do just this. By writing with a heterosexual lyric “I,” Proust draws on the constitutive conventions of the lyric to queer modern-day conceptions of gay subjectivity and Romantic conceptions of poetic subjectivity. Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Pierre Louÿs, and Renée Vivien likewise use the conventions of translation’s transparent lyric “I” to their advantage, while subverting them in the process. And the same can be said of Renée Vivien’s and Paul Verlaine’s participation in the love lyric tradition. Their subversive use of the love lyric “I” destabilizes the love lyric structure from within, collapsing aspects of the love lyric paradigm and queering the reductive heteronormative relations of identification and desire that the love lyric tradition has helped to construct.

CHAPTER 3: THE POETIC LINE

A line of poetry is more than a syntactical arrangement of words; with these words come their denotative meanings and connotative associations, their syllable count, rhythmic qualities, timbre, and rhyming possibilities, as well as their material quality and disposition on the page. All of these elements contribute to our interpretation of the poetic line, and over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, poets exploit and manipulate their signifying potential in a variety of ways. This chapter will approach the poetic line from a semantic, metric, and visual perspective. It will examine the ways in which the poetic line can express, both verbally and non-verbally, a poem's queer subject matter or a poet's queer identity. It will explore how the period's "crisis of verse" facilitates the emergence of purely literary forms of queerness. And it will consider how visualizations of the heteronormative paradigm might correspond to poets' experimental presentations of the poetic line upon the page. In this way, the chapter aims to analyze how certain poets' exploitations and manipulations of the poetic line's signifying elements relate to expressions, manifestations, and conceptualizations of queerness.

Section 1: Signifying the Poetic Line

Given its many signifying elements, the poetic line produces meaning in a variety of ways, thereby rendering it particularly well suited to expressing different forms of queerness. The often highly figurative and connotative language of lyric poetry, for example, enables the poetic line to produce two levels of meaning – explicit and implicit. And by exploiting the nature of its implicit meaning production, the poet can blur the line between speech and silence, or between what is said and what is not said. How might this process facilitate closeted expressions of queerness? And can queerness be expressed through non-verbal elements as well, such as meter, rhyme scheme, or form? If so, what kind of interpretive issues are raised by such a process? And finally, certain signifying elements can be manipulated in such a way that meaning production is entirely thwarted. How might such a cultivation of meaninglessness relate to notions of queer negativity?

Queer Connotations in Marcel Proust

The beginning of Chapter 2 briefly touched upon Marcel Proust's adolescent poem entitled "Pédérastie," which appears to reveal, rather openly, a first-person declaration of queer desire:

> "Pédérastie"
>
> Si j'avais un gros sac d'argent d'or ou de cuivre
> Avec un peu de nerf aux reins lèvres ou mains
> Laissant ma vanité – cheval, sénat ou livre,
> Je m'enfuirais là-bas, ce soir ou demain
>
> Au gazon framboisé – émeraude ou carmin ! –
> Sans rustiques ennuis, guêpes, rosée ou givre
> Je voudrais à jamais coucher, aimer ou vivre
> Avec un tiède enfant, Jacques, Pierre ou Firmin.
>
> Arrière le mépris timide des Prud'hommes !
> Pigeons, neigez ! Chantez, ormeaux ! blondissez, pommes !
> Je veux jusqu'à mourir aspirer son parfum !
>
> Sous l'or des soleils roux, sous la nacre des lunes
> Je veux … m'évanouir et me croire défunt
> Loin du funèbre glas des Vertus importunes !
>
> (Pederasty
>
> If I had money from a boundless mint
> and sinew enough in hands, lips, loins,
> I'd shun the vanity of politics and print,
> and leave – tomorrow? No, *tonight*! – for lawns
>
> luminous with artificial green
> (*without* the rustic flaws of frost and vermin),

where I'd forever be sleeping with one
warm child or other: François, Firmin? …

For what is *manly mockery* to me?
Let Sodom's apples burn, acre by acre,
I'd savor still the sweat of those sweet limbs!

Beneath a solar gold, a lunar nacre,
I'd … *languish* (an *ars moriendi* of my own),
deaf to the knell of dreary Decency!)[39]

This expression of queer desire appears to be most explicit in the poem's second stanza, where the male poet announces, "Je voudrais à jamais coucher, aimer ou vivre / Avec un tiède enfant, Jacques, Pierre ou Firmin" ("I would like to forever love or live / With a warm-bodied boy, a Jacques, Pierre or Firmin"). Upon closer examination, however, the explicitness of the statement is tempered by its use of the conditional tense. The poet's desire is contingent upon the hypothetical situation described in the first stanza: If he had a large sum of money, etc., he would escape to a rustic retreat and live forever with a young boy. Since the use of the imperfect tense implies that these conditions are not currently a reality for the poet, neither is his contingent desire to lead such a life.

It is not until the poem's third stanza that the conditional "je voudrais" ("I would like") becomes the more direct "je veux" ("I want"). Here, the poet is expressing what he desires at the moment, regardless of the situation. However, as the verb tense switches to the more affirmative present indicative, the surrounding language becomes much more figurative. Whereas in the first and second stanzas the poet plainly expresses a hypothetical desire, in the third stanza he commands pigeons to snow, elm trees to sing, and apples to brown. How exactly are we to read this line? In what sense can pigeons snow and elm trees sing? Is there some implied reference in such images?

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[39] Translation by Richard Howard.

Richard Howard, a translator of Marcel Proust and Charles Baudelaire, sees in these lines a reference to Sodom. In his English translation of the tercet, he writes:

> For what is *manly mockery* to me?
> Let Sodom's apples burn, acre by acre,
> I'd savor still the sweat of those sweet limbs!

Where Proust refers to the "mépris timide des Prud'hommes" ("timid disdain of Gentlemen"), Howard sees a form of "*manly mockery*"; where Proust calls on pigeons to snow, elms trees to sing, and apples to brown, Howard reads a resigned call for Sodom to burn; and where the poet wants, until the point of death, to inhale "son parfum" ("his scent"), Howard interprets a passionate resolve to savor "the sweat of those sweet limbs." If Proust's evocation of snowing pigeons, singing elm trees, and browning apples does in fact refer to the force of his homosexual desire overcoming the wrathful and fiery destruction of Sodom, as the translated version implies, then such an articulation of queer passion is admittedly not immediately evident.

As the apparent discrepancies between Proust's and Howard's versions reveal, a passionate declaration of same-sex desire can be simultaneously read and not read through the stanza's figurative language. Howard does not read in Proust's mention of pigeons, elm trees, and apples a description of a calm, country setting. Or if he does, he does not *only* read such a description. Howard's translation highlights not so much the denotative nature of Proust's words as it does their connotative nature, perhaps associating browning apples with heat and fire, snowing pigeons with falling ash, and elm trees with the acreage of Sodom's orchards. In any case, Howard sees in these poetic lines a hidden, queer sense. This hidden sense only manifests on the figurative level of the poetic line, remaining latent on the level of its more literal meanings. In this sense, the poetic lines of the third stanza facilitate an articulation of queerness that might not be able to manifest explicitly to the same degree.

By facilitating the implicit articulation of queerness, the stanza's highly figurative language blurs the line between speech and silence, between what is "said" and what is "not said." The elusiveness of this line is central to the nature and functioning of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick considers a defining feature of the gay experience – the closet. "In the vicinity of the closet," she remarks, "even what *counts* as a speech act is problematized on a perfectly routine basis" (3). She recalls Michel Foucault's assertion that "Il n'y a pas à faire de partage binaire entre ce qu'on dit et ce qu'on ne dit pas" ("It is not a question of establishing a binary relation between what one says and what one does not say"), and that "Il faudrait essayer de determiner les différentes manières de ne pas les dire" ("We should be trying to determine the different ways of not saying things") since "Il n'y a pas un, mais des silences" ("there is not silence, but rather, silences") (38-39). These ways of *not* saying something are as integral to discourse as the ways of saying something. Sedgwick proposes that "closetedness" relies in particular on such an interplay between said and not said, since it is "a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (3). In the vicinity of the closet, queerness manifests as a silence whose nature is determined more by what is *not* explicitly said in discourse, than by what is said. The highly connotative language of the poetic line, which also pulls its significance as much, if not more, from what is *not* explicitly said, seems particularly well suited to the articulation of such closeted queerness.

Closetedness is a silence that gains its shape differentially from the discourse that surrounds it. But it is by no means a void. It is a space of latency, whose concealed and amorphous queerness exists in a sort of negative or concave space, shaped from without by the many ways of not saying something. Where exactly is this space to be found with respect to the poetic line? Its locus depends on our conception of, and approach to, "queer texts": In the climactic third stanza of Proust's poem, a latent queerness emerges from the figurative language, manifesting not through a labelling and denotative use of discourse, but rather, in the space opened up by what is not explicitly said. But how does one localize this latent queerness, given the difficulty of localizing that which is not said? Does it reside in the poetic line itself? in Howard's reading of the line? in our reading of Howard's poetic line? Or somewhere else? In other words, does the reader of the poem unveil a latent queerness or *constitute* it? Does queerness lie in the eye of the beholder, so to speak? Perhaps it is more a question of "residing" versus "manifesting," where if a latent queerness resides in a poetic text, it manifests in the reader's interpretation of the text. In either case, what exactly is required of the reader to access this latent queer signification? And how might this process of unveiling or constituting a poem's queerness differ from reader to reader? These questions extend beyond the scope of the current chapter, but they point to areas of further discussion regarding where, in the poetic act, queerness resides and manifests, and whether the author or the reader is more "responsible" for a text's queerness.

Queer Impressions in Renée Vivien and Paul Verlaine

What about non-verbal aspects of the poetic line, such as its rhyme scheme, meter, or form? How might these elements signify queerness? In *The Gendered Lyric* (1999), Gretchen Schultz examines the ways in which gender is inscribed into the poetic tropes and forms characteristic of nineteenth century French lyric poetry. With respect to Charles Baudelaire, in particular, she considers the feminine-masculine binary to govern a variety of relations seen throughout his poetry, “including those shared by dispersal and concentration, irregularity and regularity, body and mind, pleasure and work, dependence and autonomy, merger and identity” (188). To illustrate gender’s centrality to the dualist structures of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), she points to Baudelaire’s opening statement in *Mon cœur mis à nu* (*My Heart Laid Bare*): “De la vaporisation et de la centralisation du *Moi*. Tout est là” (“Of the vaporization and centralization of the *Ego*. Everything is there”) (qtd. in Schultz 188). And she turns to his sonnet, “La musique” (“Music”), whose lines alternate between a 12-syllable meter and a 5-syllable meter, to analyze the unfolding of this aphorism through the metrical structure of the text.

La musique souvent me prend comme une mer !
        Vers ma pâle étoile,
Sous un plafond de brume ou dans un vaste éther
        Je mets à la voile ;

La poitrine en avant et les poumons gonflés
        Comme de la toile,
J’escalade le dos des flots amoncelés
        Que la nuit me voile ;

Je sens vibrer en moi toutes les passions
        D’un vaisseau qui souffre ;
Le bon vent, la tempête et ses convulsions

        Sur l’immense gouffre
Me bercent. D’autres fois, calme plat, grand miroir
        De mon désespoir !

(Music will often take me like the sea!
        When clouds are low
Or in clear ether, I, towards my pale star,
        Set sail and go;

With chest thrust forward and with lungs puffed out
    My sails are tight;
I climb the backs of all the heaped-up waves
    As day turns night;

Throbbing within me are the passions of
    A suffering ship;
The mild breeze, or the tempest and its throes

    On the abyss
Rock me. At other times, dead calm, the glass
    Of hopelessness.)[40]

"This sonnet," Schultz proposes, "confronts the opposition of vaporization and centralization on the levels of rhythm, subjectivity, and thematic structure" (195). Regarding the rhythmic element, this opposition unfolds in the poem's alternation between the "notoriously 'regular'" 12-syllable meter (the alexandrine) and the "oddly irregular" 5-syllable meter (the pentasyllable) (196). "Insofar as the abstraction of meter can carry meaning," Schultz remarks, "the alexandrine signifies tradition and order in French poetry," whereas the contrasting pentasyllable "has no specific tradition in the history of French verse" (196-97). The pentasyllable also creates the effect of deforming the alexandrine's regularity by its being one syllable short of a hemistich, subverting the reader's conditioned expectation of 6-syllable groupings (197). For this reason, Schultz reads in Baudelaire's use of the alexandrine a representation of regularity and constraint, and in his use of the pentasyllable, one of irregular spontaneity and diffusion, characteristics aligning with Baudelaire's centralization and vaporization of the subject, and with its overarching masculine-feminine duality. Such a reading leads Schultz to conclude that this alternation between two meters functions as a gender-coded use of prosody, associating the alexandrine with masculine attributes and the pentasyllable with feminine ones.

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[40] Translation by James McGowan.

If prosodic elements can signify gender in this way, could they signify queerness in a similar manner? If so, what might this look like? Renée Vivien's "Sonnet féminin" ("Feminine Sonnet"), published in 1902, offers a possible example. The poem is written in the strictest of fixed forms – the sonnet, and in the most traditional of meters – the alexandrine. But with respect to the rhyme scheme, it flaunts a cardinal rule of French versification – the alternation of feminine and masculine rhymes:

Ta voix a la langueur des lyres lesbiennes,
L'anxiété des chants et des odes saphiques,
Et tu sais le secret d'accablantes musiques
Où pleure le soupir d'unions anciennes.

Les Aèdes fervents et les Musiciennes
T'enseignèrent l'ampleur des strophes érotiques
Qui versent dans la nuit leurs ardentes suppliques,
Ton âme a recueilli les nudités païennes.

Tu sembles écouter l'écho des harmonies ;
Bleus de ce bleu divin des clartés infinies,
Tes yeux ont le reflet du ciel de Mytilène.

Les fleurs ont parfumé tes étranges mains creuses ;
De ton corps monte, ainsi qu'une légère haleine,
La blanche volupté des vierges amoureuses.

(Your voice is as languid as the lesbian lyres,
As the excited air of sapphic melodies and odes,
And you know well the secret of their entrancing modes
Through which the sighs of ancient unions expire.

The devoted Poets, with their consorted Musicians
Instilled in you the expanse of sensual verse
Which serenades, at night, its burning requests,
In your soul dwells the candor of all these pagan women.

You seem to listen now to the echo of their chants,
And as blue as the divine blue of infinite light,
Your eyes reflect the azure of Mytilene's heavens above.

Flowers have perfumed your alluring, bare hands:
From your body arises, like a warm, gentle breath,
The lily-white pleasure of virgins in love.)

The traditional gendering of the sonnet's rhymes depends on whether the last syllable of the poetic line contains an "e muet" (silent "e"). If it does, the rhyme is labelled "feminine," and if it does not, it is labelled "masculine." All of the rhymes in "Sonnet féminin" are therefore feminine, meaning Vivien has systematically disobeyed a centuries-old rule. In his *Petit traité de versification française* (*Short Treatise on French Prosody*), first published in 1908, Maurice Grammont remarks that "Cette règle d'alternance, qui est à vrai dire la plus importante des règles classiques concernant la rime, a été observée jusqu'à nos jours" ("This rule of alternation, which is, quite frankly, the most important of classical rules concerning a poem's rhyme, has been observed to this day") (36). The principle of alternating between so-called masculine and feminine rhymes began as early as the fourteenth century, and it was prescribed and adopted as standard practice in the seventeenth century. Lyric convention continued this practice until the middle of the nineteenth century, when it was undermined by poets such as Théodore de Banville in his 1866 *Les Exilés* (*The Exiles*) or Charles Baudelaire in "A une mendiante rousse" ("To a Red-Haired Beggar Girl"), and by Symbolism's *vers libristes* (*The Riches of Rhyme* 44-45).

Grammont proposes, however, that an alternative distinction be established between masculine and feminine rhymes since in modern French, the silent "e" is no longer pronounced at the end of the line like it is in the line's interior, leaving no strict phonetic difference between a masculine rhyme and a feminine one:

> […] cette alternance était très réelle et très nette à l'époque où l'on prononçait tous les *e* à la fin des mots ; mais aujourd'hui on n'en prononce plus aucun à la pause ; […] En sorte qu'il n'y a plus la moindre différence sensible pour la finale entre *fanfare* et *hasard* ; entre *un dé* et *une idée*. Si donc on veut conserver l'alternance, et il y a tout avantage à n'y renoncer qu'exceptionnellement et en vue d'effets particuliers, il ne faut pas prendre garde à l'orthographe, puisqu'elle ne répond plus à la prononciation. (105-06)
>
> ([…] this alternation was very real and very clear when the "e" was pronounced at the end of words; but today it is no longer pronounced at the line's pause; […] As a result, there is no longer the slightest noticeable difference in the ending of *fanfare* and *hasard*; between *un dé* and *une idée*. If, then, one wishes to preserve this alternation, and there is every reason to forego this feature only in exceptional circumstances and when seeking a particular effect, one must not pay attention to spelling, since it no longer corresponds with pronunciation.)

Many poets and critics, however, continue to allege an impression of difference between the two, often associating feminine rhymes with a degree of softness and masculine rhymes with a degree of abruptness. In his 1861 Sapphic poem, "Érinna," for example, Théodore de Banville writes:

> Et j'ai rimé cette ode en rimes féminines
> Pour que l'impression en restât plus poignante,
> Et, par le souvenir des chastes héroïnes,
> Laissât dans plus d'un cœur sa blessure saignante (lines 89-92)
>
> (And I wrote this ode in feminine rhymes
> So that its impression is all the more stark,
> And, by the recollection of chaste heroines,
> Leave its bleeding wound in many a heart)

Similarly, in *The Riches of Rhyme: Studies in French Verse* (1988), Clive Scott asserts that the silent "e" at the end of a poetic line "lengthens the preceding accentuated vowel, or the voice's dwelling on it" (47). And when this "e" is preceded by a consonant, Scott describes its effect as giving "resonance" to that consonant and creating the impression of "a dying echo or prolongation of sound" (47).

Is this effect perceptible through the accumulation of feminine rhymes in Vivien's "Sonnet féminin"? In the opening lines of the poem, Vivien describes her addressee's voice as having the languid quality of "lyres lesbiennes" ("lesbian lyres"), a descriptor which, through the prolonged [*i*] in "lyres" and prolonged [*n*] in "lesbiennes," carries its own languid quality. And like the "soupir d'unions anciennes" ("sigh of ancient unions") of the line's rhyming pair, the last line of the stanza similarly enacts the phonetic prolongation of a sigh. With these languorous impressions manifesting phonetically throughout the text's exclusively feminine line endings, the poem as a whole assumes the quality of a "dying echo." And this quality is developed thematically, as well, over the course of the sonnet: the apostrophized love object knows not the fullness of the ambient melodies, but their secret – their whispered repetition (line 3); the love object appears to listen not to the harmonies of the Ancient stanzas, but to the *echo* of such harmonies (line 9); the addressee's eyes hold not the blueness of the sky, but its reflection (line 11); and the love object's bare, alluring hands hold only the residual fragrance of the flowers that they once contained (line 12). Through its combination of phonetic and thematic "echoes," the poem as a whole resonates with the sounds, sights, and scents of its Ancient setting.

These vestiges and resonations are central to the queerness of Vivien's poetic production, which draws from the historical intersection of lesbianism and lyricism. In the sonnet's first stanza, the use of exclusively feminine rhymes reinforces this association. Rather than alternating between the sonorities of masculine and feminine rhymes, the line endings all resonate together, highlighting the mutual affiliation of their rhyming words – "lesbiennes," "anciennes," "saphiques," and "musiques." Their collective grouping ties lesbianism with Sapphism and lyricism, both of which are tied to the historical, cultural, and literary contexts of Antiquity. And

“Sonnet féminin” continues the tradition as both a literal and literary echo, a resonation of this Ancient Sapphic lyric production.

But could the poem’s exclusively feminine rhymes signify queerness in another way? In “De quelques discours sur l’e muet” (“A Selection of Writings on the Silent *e*”), Christine Planté comments on the conceptualization of “isosexual” and “homosexual” rhymes:

> En poésie, quand on assiste, dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle, à la crise du système édifié au XVIe siècle, les atteintes à la règle d’alternance des rimes révèlent une conscience aigüe chez certain(e)s poètes de ses implications symboliques, et tout un jeu avec les rôles et la morale sexuels. C’est alors qu’on pourrait parler de rimes *homosexuelles*, plutôt qu’*isosexuelles*, dont l’emploi apparaît d’abord dans des évocations poétiques de Sappho. (56)
>
> (In poetry, when we witness, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the faltering of a system constructed in the sixteenth century, certain poets’ deliberate disregard for the rule of alternation reveals a keen awareness of its symbolic implications and its interplay with sexual roles and morals. It is in this context that we can speak of *homosexual*, rather than *isosexual*, rhymes, which initially appear in Sappho’s poetic evocations.)

By conceiving of rhymes as “homosexual,” Planté is not only attributing a gendered signification to their lack or inclusion of an “silent “e”; she is also attributing a sexualized signification to their organization into a rhyme scheme. In this sense, a subversion of the traditional alternation between masculine and feminine rhymes signifies a queer rhyme scheme. With the elimination of masculine rhymes from the text, this rhyme scheme removes the distinction of gender from its rhyme groupings, an organization that can be read as a symbolic representation of female same-sex relations.

But such readings, which metaphorically inscribe a poem’s queerness into its formal elements, pose certain interpretive problems. Verlaine’s inverted sonnet, “Sappho,” provides an example. This sonnet is the last of a series of six poems composing Verlaine’s “Les Amies” (“The Female Companions”) section of *Parallèlement* (*In Parallel*) (1889). All six texts address the trope of female homoeroticism and are written in exclusively feminine rhymes. In this sixth sonnet, however, Verlaine also manipulates the order of its stanzas by putting its tercets before its quatrains:

> Furieuse, les yeux caves et les seins roides,
> Sappho, que la langueur de son désir irrite,
> Comme une louve court le long des grèves froides,
>
> Elle songe à Phaon, oublieuse du Rite,
> Et, voyant à ce point ses larmes dédaignées,
> Arrache ses cheveux immenses par poignées ;
>
> Puis elle évoque, en des remords sans accalmies,
> Ces temps où rayonnait, pure, la jeune gloire
> De ses amours chantés en vers que la mémoire
> De l'âme va redire aux vierges endormies :
>
> Et voilà qu'elle abat ses paupières blêmies
> Et saute dans la mer où l'appelle la Moire, -
> Tandis qu'au ciel éclate, incendiant l'eau noire,
> La pâle Séléné qui venge les Amies.
>
> (Intense, eyes sunken and breasts taut,
> Sappho, driven by languorous desire,
> Like a she-wolf haunts the frozen shore.
>
> She dreams of Phaon, forgetful of the lyre,
> And, finding that her tears are still disdained
> Tears her long hair in handfuls once again;
>
> Then she evokes, with endless remorse,
> The days when youth's fire shed its purity
> Over verse singing love, soul's memory
> Repeats to slumbering virgins evermore:
>
> And see how her pallid eyelids shudder,
> Leaping to the waves, called by the Fates –
> While that dark sea Selene illuminates,
> The pale Selene who avenges Lovers.)[41]

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[41] Verlaine, Paul. *Selected Poems in Translation*, translated by A. S. Kline. London: Poetry in Translation, 2010, p. 129.

One could argue that this "inverted" structure of the sonnet reflects the "inverted" sexuality of Sappho, much in the same way as its exclusively feminine rhymes recall the exclusively feminine sensual unions of *les amies*. But since the sonnet's form is not conceptualized in the same, gendered way as its rhymes, additional associations must be made for such a reading to take place. Specifically, we must think of Sappho's possible lesbianism in terms of "sexual inversion" in order for the sonnet's structural inversion to gain a metaphorically queer significance.[42] Did Verlaine have such a theory in mind when writing this sonnet? Or is it an association attributed to the text after the fact, either by Verlaine's contemporary readers, or by modern-day scholars? In other words, whose associations are we to consider as productive of such queerness? Verlaine's or the readers'? And given the now outdated conception of homosexuality as a form of inversion, does the poem's structure still signify queerness? Or was its queerness more salient in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when such a theory was more prevalent? These questions point to a general uncertainty regarding how the poem's queerness changes with respect to the historical context in which it is written and read.

A further problem with such a reading lies in the apparent facility of interpretive justifications and in the contradictory or inconsistent nature of its applications. In *"Femmes damnées": Saphisme et poésie (1846-1889)* (2012) Myriam Robic comments on Verlaine's use of inverted sonnets, remarking that "Cette inversion que l'on retrouve dans d'autres recueils ou manuscrits verlainiens […] donne lieu à diverses interprétations en lien avec l'homosexualité" ("This inversion, which we find in other collections or manuscripts by Verlaine […] leads to diverse interpretations related to homosexuality") (135). She quotes Steve Murphy, who has also concluded that "Tous les premiers sonnets renversés patents de Verlaine évoquent, indirectement ou frontalement, l’homosexualité” (“All of Verlaine’s early inverted sonnets evoke homosexuality, whether indirectly or head-on”) (qtd. in Robic 135). In 2006, however, Nicole Albert, in her article “Du Sonnet féminin au sonnet saphique: Poétisation de la lesbienne chez quelques auteurs fin-de-siècle,” pointed out that this sixth sonnet addresses Sappho’s heterosexual love for Phaon: “Bien qu’elle se confonde avec *Les Amies* […], la dixième muse est présentée comme « oublieuse du Rite »” (“Even though she is grouped with *Les Amies* […], the tenth muse is presented as ‘forgetful of the Rite’”) (300). Albert considers the sonnet’s inversion to reflect *this* particular trope: “l’ordre traditionnel des strophes a été interverti (3/3/4/4) afin de traduire le retournement sexuel de l’héroïne. Au renversement des quatrains et tercets s’ajoute le renversement sinon des thèmes, du moins de l’atmosphère qui régnait dans les cinq pièces précédentes” (“the traditional order of the stanzas has been inverted (3/3/4/4) in order to convey the heroine’s reversed queer sexuality. The reversal of the quatrains and tercets is accompanied by a reversal, if not in thematic content, at least in the atmosphere depicted by the five preceding texts”) (301). In this sense, the sonnet’s inverted form reflects not Sappho’s homosexuality, but her heterosexuality. It is to be read not as a subversion of heterosexual norms, but as a subversion of the homosexual norms established in the previous five poems of *Les Amies*. Myriam Robic disagrees with this interpretation, stating that “La technique du sonnet inversé se rapporte plus volontiers, dans ce cadre, à la trahison du Rite lesbien considéré comme une véritable religion : intervertir quatrains et tercets transforme ainsi métaphoriquement Sapho en Judas” (“In this context, the technique of the inverted sonnet has more to do with the betrayal of the lesbian Rite, which is considered a veritable religion: the inversion of quatrains and tercets therefore metaphorically transforms Sappho into Judas”) (137-38). In this sense, the sonnet’s inverted form is a reflection of *religious* subversion rather sexual subversion. How can the sonnet's inversion signify both homosexuality and heterosexuality, as well as something other than sexuality all together?

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[42] See Karl Ulrich's *The Riddle of Man-Manly Love* for an explanation of this theory.

It is not just this particular text that poses interpretive problems. The same issue plays out on a larger scale, extending to Verlaine's own queer sexuality and to the poem's intertextual relation to similarly subversive forms. "En outre, pourrait-on voir dans ce sonnet inversé l'inversion sexuelle du poète ?" ("Furthermore, could one see in this inverted sonnet the sexual inversion of its poet?"), asks Robic (138). She refers again to Steve Murphy's comments regarding the text and its author. He sees in Verlaine's use of formal inversion and exclusively feminine rhymes an intertextual connection with Charles Baudelaire's manipulation of such prosodic elements. In his own use of the inverted sonnet, "Bien loin d'ici" ("Very Far from France"), which was first published in 1864 and then in the third edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire enacts a similar subversion of stanza order and rhyme schemes: Murphy reads in Verlaine's use of these same techniques in "Sappho" an effort to disguise his own queer sexuality by presenting his text as an intertextual reference to Baudelaire's purely formal subversions:

> Le marquage intertextuel est si voyant qu'il nous semble servir presque d'alibi, dédouanant Verlaine de tout fantasme personnel en faisant apparaître ce sonnet – et les autres *Amies* – comme un exercice de style, subversif aux yeux de la loi, profondément respectueux cependant d'un autre ordre, poétique. Il se peut ainsi que l'indiscrétion que l'on pouvait reprocher à de tels emprunts – mais en s'affichant, l'indiscrétion s'annule – serve avant tout à contrer l'idée d'un investissement psychique personnel d'un poète homosexuel dans une poésie de l'homosexualité féminine. (Qtd. in Robic 138)
>
> (The intertextual branding is so conspicuous that it almost seems to serve as an alibi, clearing Verlaine of any personal fantasies by making this sonnet – and the others of *Les Amies* – seem like an exercise in style, subversive in the eyes of the law, but sincerely respectful of a different, poetic, order. In this way, the indiscretion represented by such borrowed techniques […] serves primarily to counter the possibility of a homosexual poet's psychological investment in a poetic work about feminine homosexuality.)

In other words, Verlaine’s use of the inverted sonnet issues from his personal investment in homosexuality, which he wishes to conceal through the sonnet’s intertextual connection to Baudelaire’s use of formal subversion, which appears to arise without reference to homosexuality.

This rather convoluted reading of Verlaine’s use of formal subversion leads to questions of essentialization. Even when Verlaine is apparently trying to avoid letting his homosexuality show through the text, it appears that his homosexuality is “showing” through the text. Why does the formal inversion of “Bien loin d’ici” not relate to Baudelaire’s sexuality, while the formal inversion of “Sappho” appears to stem directly from Verlaine’s? Robic also questions Murphy’s argument, but not its essentializing component. She proposes that Verlaine establishes an intertextual connection with “Bien loin d’ici” because Baudelaire’s text *does* relate to queerness: “Mais revient-il à Verlaine le mérite du recours stratégique au sonnet renversé pour aborder, explicitement ou implicitement, la question de l’homosexualité masculine et féminine ? Le sonnet « Bien loin d’ici » a-t-il un quelconque rapport avec le sujet saphique dans l’esprit de Baudelaire à tel point que la forme inaugure le sujet ?” (“But can Verlaine be credited with a strategic use of the inverted sonnet in order to approach, explicitly or implicitly, the question of masculine and feminine homosexuality? Does the sonnet “Bien loin d’ici” convey for Baudelaire the notion of Sapphism to the extent that its form inaugurates its subject?”) (140). She challenges Murphy’s claim that “Bien loin d’ici” is an example of purely formal subversion without underlying impressions of queer sexuality. And in order to do this, she links the poem’s trope of prostitution to Sappho, and Sappho to sexual inversion.

This also rather convoluted interpretation of the text does lessen, to a degree, Murphy’s essentializing reading of Verlaine. By proposing an equally queer reading of Baudelaire’s text, Robic moves beyond interpretations founded on the poet's perceived sexual orientation. But in the same way that Murphy's argument treats the formal subversions of "Sappho" as a reflection of Verlaine's queer identity, Robic's argument treats the formal subversions of "Bien loin d'ici" as a reflection of Baudelaire's queer subject-matter. In each of these approaches to reading queerness in the formal aspects of a text, there must first exist a queer identity or subject-matter that such aspects "inaugurate," as Robic terms it. In this sense, queerness manifests in the form of an impression. This impression is to be understood less in the sense of an "inclination" or "inkling," and more in the sense of an "imprint" – a noticeable mark on the poetic line, materializing in its non-verbal components such as its meter, rhyme scheme, or form.

While it can be enlightening to consider how the poetic line might signify beyond the word and its meanings to include the meter and its meanings, the rhyme and its meanings, and the form and its meanings, such readings are ultimately metaphorical. As such, they pose certain interpretive problems. First, we must consider the context that enables these elements to signify in such a way and recognize that their queerness changes according to the historical period, culture, or language in which the poem is written and read. But more important, we must take into consideration the source of such queer impressions. The more they are attributed to intentional manipulations on the part of the author to reflect a certain queer identity or subject-matter, the more biographical or self-justifying the reading becomes. And the more these "impressions" are viewed as unintentional marks of the author's queerness, the more essentializing the reading becomes. For this reason, I believe we should move beyond, if not away from, conceptions of queer poetry that stem solely from the queerness of its author or the queerness of its subject-matter. While it is interesting to see how queerness can be inscribed in a text, this type of queer reading only ever views the poem as a reflection of queerness, or as a material on which an external queerness is imprinted. The rest of the chapter, however, aims to analyze poetic texts as sources of queerness in and of themselves, beginning with this section's final poem, Stéphane Mallarmé's "Sonnet en -x" ("Sonnet in -x").

Queer Negations in Stéphane Mallarmé

Whereas the queerness of Proust's sonnet manifested in its implicit meaning, and the queerness of Vivien's and Verlaine's sonnets manifested in their non-verbal meanings, the queerness of Mallarmé's "Sonnet en -x" ("Sonnet in -x") manifests in its lack of meaning. In a letter to Henri Cazalis on July 18, 1868, Mallarmé discusses the initial version of this sonnet, which he describes as a "sonnet nul et se réfléchissant de toutes les façons" ("a nullified sonnet reflecting upon itself in every way") (*Œuvres Complètes* 1:732). This section analyzes the poem with respect to these two defining characteristics – nothingness and reflection – in order to understand the ways in which it cultivates meaninglessness, and in order to explore how this process relates to queerness.

> Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx,
> L'Angoisse, ce minuit, soutient, lampadophore,
> Maint rêve vespéral brûlé par le Phénix
> Que ne recueille pas de cinéraire amphore
>
> Sur les crédences, au salon vide : nul ptyx
> Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore,
> (Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx
> Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore.)
>
> Mais proche la croisée au nord vacante, un or
> Agonise selon peut-être le décor
> Des licornes ruant du feu contre une nixe,
>
> Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor
> Que, dans l'oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe
> De scintillations sitôt le septuor.

(Her pure nails on high displaying their onyx,
The lampbearer, Anguish, at midnight sustains
Those vesperal dreams that are burnt by the Phoenix
And which no funeral amphora contains

On the credenzas in the empty room: no ptyx,
Abolished shell whose resonance remains
(For the Master has gone to draw tears from the Styx
With this sole object that Nothingness attains).

But in the vacant north, adjacent to the window panes,
A dying shaft of gold illuminates as it wanes
A nix sheathed in sparks that a unicorn kicks.

Though she in the oblivion that the mirror frames
Lies nude and defunct, there rains
The scintillations of the one-and-six.)[43]

The text's "nothingness" manifests initially through various absences. In the first line, "Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx" ("Her pure nails raised high displaying their onyx"), it is the referent of the possessive adjective "ses" ("her") that is missing. To whose nails is the poet referring? The use of the third-person possessive adjective normally requires a pre-established referent, but it is not until afterward, in the next line, that this referent becomes clear: the pure onyx nails belong to "l'Angoisse" ("Anguish"). This Anguish, like a statuesque lamp holder, holds up the evening's many dreams, which are burned by the Phoenix. But the urn, which would normally collect the ashes of these dreams, is also missing. And as the following stanza reveals, it is one of many absent objects not populating the "salon vide" ("empty room") of the poem's setting. The most conspicuous of these absences is to be found (or not found) on the mantle, upon which there is, Mallarmé states, "nul ptyx" ("no ptyx"). The "Maître" ("Master"), who is also absent, has taken this object with him to draw tears from the river Styx.

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[43] Translation by Henry Weinfield.

The *ptyx*, “objet dont le Néant s’honore” (“honorary object of the Void”), is the most central of the sonnet’s absences, with its nullity manifesting not only thematically (its absence from the room) and syntactically (the line’s reference to “*nul* ptyx” (“*no* ptyx”)), but also semantically (the word’s lack of definition). Many scholars have tried their hand at proposing a possible signification for this word, but as Ellen Burt reminds us in “Mallarmé’s ‘Sonnet en -yx’: The Ambiguities of Speculation” (1977), “the *ptyx* is first of all a group of letters that means nothing,” since the word does not exist in French (72).[44] As she notes, the subsequent line, “Aboli bibelot d’inanité sonore” (abolished novelty of sonorous inanity), which is to be read in apposition to *ptyx*, comments further on its futility as a signifying word (72). Mallarmé himself confirms this purely material and meaningless quality when he writes in a letter to Lefébure on May 3, 1868: “[…] comme il se pourrait […] que […] je fisse un sonnet, et que je n’ai que trois rimes en *ix*, concertez-vous pour m’envoyer le sens réel du mot *ptyx*, ou m’assurer qu’il n’existe dans aucune langue, ce que je préfé[re]rais de beaucoup afin de me donner le charme de le créer par la magie de la rime” (“As it seems […] that […] I am writing a sonnet, and that I have only three rhymes in *-x*, devote your efforts to sending me the true meaning of the word *ptyx*, or to assuring me that it does not exist in any language, which I would prefer by far, so that I can give myself the pleasure of having created it by the magic of rhyme”) (*Œuvres Complètes* 1:728-29). He would prefer that the word *not*, in fact, have any meaning in any language.

But what would be the purpose and the significance of such a word? Perhaps its value lies, like Mallarmé implies above, in its having been created from nothing, through the magic of rhyme. Perhaps, as critics’ readings have demonstrated, its value lies in its limitless potential for meaning. Or perhaps, through its lack of assigned meaning, the word epitomizes the nullity of the poem as a whole. In any case, a word without a corresponding meaning thoroughly destabilizes our conception of the linguistic sign. In Saussurian terms, "ptyx" is a *signifiant* (signifier) without a *signifié* (signified) – a broken, or incomplete, linguistic sign. Its process of signification has been subverted by this lack of meaning, leaving the word "ptyx" to signify nothing other than "ptyx." As Bertrand Marchal remarks in his editorial notes, "ptyx" is "un mot qui est son propre référent" ("a word that serves as its own referent") (*Œuvres complètes* 1:1190). With no external meaning to which it can refer, the word must, in a sense, fall back in on itself, becoming its own referent in a form of semantic self-reflection.

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[44] For a concise overview of the most prominent critical interpretations, see Ellen Burt, “Mallarmé’s ‘Sonnet en -yx’: The Ambiguities of Speculation,” *Yale French Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1, 1977, p. 71.

This process of reflection ripples throughout the text, manifesting most noticeably in the sonnet's tercets, where it occurs on various levels of the poetic line. It is seen in the phonetic and visual elements of line 9, for example. As Deirdre Reynolds remarks in "Mallarmé et la transformation esthétique du langage" ("Mallarmé and the Aesthetic Transformation of Language") (1990), "les « or » du deuxième hémistiche reflètent lettre à lettre les « ro » du premier: 'Mais p*ro*che la c*ro*isée au n*or*d vacante, un *or*'" ("the *or*'s of the second hemistich reflect, letter for letter, the *ro*'s of the first: 'Mais p*ro*che la c*ro*isée au n*or*d vacante, un *or*'") (214). This "or" ("gold") undergoes another form of reflection in the following line, as it "agonizes" in accordance with the décor. The etymology of this verb, deriving from the Greek masculine noun *agon,* designates an assemblage, often of two inverted or opposing parts (Miller 195). This meeting of opposites takes place in the third line of the tercet, "Des licornes ruant du feu contre une nixe" ("bucking unicorns kicking fire at a nymph"), where the combat between the unicorns and the nymph involves the symbolic opposition of fire and water.

In the final stanza of the sonnet, the concept of reflection is reinforced by the poem's thematic content, through the presence of a mirror in the empty room:

> Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor
> Que, dans l'oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe
> De scintillations sitôt le septuor.
>
> (She, naked and lifeless in the mirror,
> Even though in its framed oblivion are fixed,
> By their sparkling twinkle, the Seven Sisters.)

Perhaps this "Elle" ("She"), reflected naked and lifeless in the mirror, refers not to the nymph of the preceding tercet, as scholars have tended to read it, but instead, to "l'Angoisse," the personified Anguish of the first quatrain. Taking the form of a statuesque lampstand, her still, nude figure is framed in the mirror, along with the faint shimmer of a grouping of seven stars. In this way, it is both the "lampadophore" ("lampstand") and the "septuor" ("septet") that shine together in the mirror. The poem, as a whole, folds back on itself, with its final image appearing alongside its initial image. The poem's line of symmetry is established between the sonnet's quatrains and its tercets, hinging upon the conjunction "Mais" ("But"), in line 7, a conjunction that marks a reversal of direction, the beginning of a counter statement.

So, while the first two stanzas establish various forms of absence, the final two stanzas reflect back upon this absence to form a "sonnet nul et se réfléchissant de toutes les façons" ("a nullified sonnet reflecting upon itself in every way"). This combination of absence and reflection is encapsulated in the very letter that renders the sonnet's rhyme scheme so remarkable – the "x." Perfectly symmetrical in all directions, the letter reflects upon itself vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. And as the primary symbolic designation for an unknown quantity or variable, it also marks the absence of a relevant piece of information. In the case of “ptyx,” for example, it might indicate the word’s unknown or undetermined meaning (“ptyx” = *x*).

How does this lack of meaning relate to queerness? Queer theorist Lee Edelman valorizes meaninglessness as a central component of his notion of queer negativity. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), he revisits the stigmatic association of queerness with non-reproductivity and its supposed resistance to society’s organizing principle of communal relations and reproductive futurism. He argues that “rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse, this ascription of negativity to the queer, we might […] do better to consider accepting and even embracing it” (4). In this sense, “Far from partaking of this narrative movement toward a viable political future, far from perpetuating the fantasy of meaning’s eventual realization, the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form” (4). Its resistance to “meaning’s eventual realization” is to be understood in Lacanian terms, where the political social order can be compared to the Lacanian Symbolic. As Edelman states:

> […] politics may function as the framework within which we experience social reality, but only insofar as it compels us to experience that reality in the form of a fantasy: the fantasy, precisely, of form as such, of an order, an organization, that assures the stability of our identities as subjects and the coherence of the Imaginary totalizations through which those identities appear to us in recognizable form. (7)

It is through language that we construct and conceptualize this social reality. And for this reason, Edelman explains, “Only the mediation of the signifier allows us to *articulate* those Imaginary relations, though always at the price of introducing the distance that precludes their realization: the distance inherent in the chain of ceaseless deferrals and substitutions to which language as a system of differences necessarily gives birth” (8).

By embracing its association with negativity, queerness does not participate in the reproduction of the social order and its reliance upon the signifying function of language. In this sense, Edelman explains, the queer can be aligned with the death drive, which is “opposed to every form of social viability” (9). He notes that while the drives, in general, are intractable and “unassimilable to the logic of interpretation or the demands of meaning production,” the death drive, in particular, “holds the place of what meaning misses in much the same way that the signifier preserves at the heart of the signifying order the empty and arbitrary letter” (9). Through its alignment with the death drive, queerness functions in a similar manner. Rather than striving to close the inevitable gap in meaning created by the differential nature of language, queerness inhabits this space of meaninglessness. In doing so, “queerness exposes the obliquity of our relation to what we experience in and as social reality, alerting us to the fantasies structurally necessary in order to sustain it and engaging those fantasies through the figural logics, the linguistic structures, that shape them” (7). For this reason, in order to subvert the reproduction of such a reality, queerness must embrace its negativity by relinquishing the drive toward reproductive futurism and by “de-idealizing the metaphorics of meaning on which heteroreproduction takes its stand” (27).

Mallarmé’s “Sonnet in -x,” through its cultivation of meaninglessness, enacts such a process. As Mallarme himself proclaims, it is a “sonnet nul” (“nullified sonnet”), whose many levels of self-reflection subvert its narrative movement toward some external meaning by causing it to continuously fold back upon itself. This process of semantic self-reflection is epitomized in the central image of the text – “nul ptyx” (“no ptyx”) – an absent entity with an absent meaning. A signifier without a corresponding signified, the word “ptyx” subverts the conventional direction of linguistic signification: unable to connect with an external referent, it can only fall back upon itself, and in doing so, become its own referent. Edelman asserts that in order to subvert the idealization of reproductive futurism, “queer theory must always insist on its connection to the vicissitudes of the sign, to the tension between the signifier’s collapse into the letter’s cadaverous materiality and its participation in a system of reference wherein it generates meaning itself” (7). The word “ptyx” plays on this very tension, with its lack of meaning highlighting the often-overlooked instability and insufficiency of language as a signifying system. Like the death drive and queer negativity itself, the word remains “unassimilable to the logic of interpretation” (9). And like the sonnet as a whole, it cultivates meaninglessness in a way that embraces the impossibility of every truly and fully representing reality through language.

Mallarmé appears acutely aware of this impossibility: “On n’écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur” (“One does not write, luminously, against a dark background”), he remarks in “L’action restreinte” (“Action Restrained”), “l’alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s’indique, ébauché ou interrompu” (“the alphabet of the stars, alone, presents as such, outlined or suspended”) (*Œuvres Complètes* 2: 215). Unable to produce such a cosmic language, “L’homme poursuit noir sur blanc” (“Man proceeds in black on white”), limited by the materiality of language and its inevitable shortcomings (2: 215). Through a literary enactment of queer negativity, however, “Sonnet in -x” cultivates the inevitable gap in meaning that results from the material quality of the signifier and the differential nature of language as a whole. And although the poem, as a text, is written “black on white,” its final reflection provides a glimpse of this more stellar form of writing. Behind the lampstand’s reflected image in the mirror appears the shimmering reflection of a constellation. Recalling the brightest part of Ursa Major – the Big Dipper, or the Pleiades constellation and its poetic associations, this grouping of seven stars also recalls, as Alain

Chestier has notably pointed out, the sonnet's seven rhymes (48). With the seven stars corresponding to the seven rhymes of the "Sonnet in -x," the poem's concluding reflection is a cosmic representation of the text itself. Framed in the mirror's reflection as a constellation shining against the midnight sky, this cosmic image of the sonnet is, however, that of a text written "luminously, against a dark background," in its own sort of "alphabet of the stars."

As such, perhaps "Sonnet in -x" can be read as a form of writing that transgresses the limits of language, approaching what Mallarmé has called *l'œuvre pure* (the pure literary work). In *Crise de vers* (*Crisis of Verse*), he explains that "L'œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poëte, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés ; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l'ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase" ("The pure literary work entails the elocutory disappearance of the poet, who concedes his initiative to the words themselves, mobilized by the friction of their irregularity; these words light up from their reciprocal reflections like a virtual streak of fire against precious stones, replacing the perceptible breath of the poet with the ancient murmur of the lyric or the individual, enthusiastic flow of the phrase") (*Œuvres Complètes* 2: 211). In this pure literary work, the poet steps back, leaving the poetic lines and their composing words to correspond and signify among themselves. They light up on account of their reciprocal reflections, much like the reflected lines and words of "Sonnet in -x." And their resulting shimmer, "like a streak of fire against precious stones," recalls the concluding image of the sonnet: accompanying the reflection of the constellation is that of the statuesque lampstand holding up the evening's burning dreams, whose flames shine against her onyx fingers. With the

Master conspicuously absent from the empty room, these two images of the text are left to reflect endlessly upon themselves, much like the structure, lines, and words of the poem itself.

If “Sonnet in x” does in fact approach Mallarmé’s conception of “the pure literary work,” it is perhaps, in part, through its queerness. Rather than striving to fill the gap in meaning created by the inevitable inadequacy of language, Mallarmé steps back, allowing the poem to animate and perpetuate itself from within. Its endless solipsism and self-reflection create a “nullified sonnet reflecting upon itself in every way,” which embraces a form of nothingness and meaninglessness in what can be considered a literary enactment of queer negativity.

Section 2: Versifying the Poetic Line

The previous section looked at different ways of reading queerness in a poem. It considered the poetic line’s various signifying elements and their role in transmitting the poem’s queer subject-matter or in imprinting the author’s queer sexuality onto the materiality of the text. But it also considered a form of queerness that existed irrespective of the poem’s content or the poet’s identity. This final consideration moved beyond viewing the poetic line solely as an instrument of transmission for a queer subject-matter or identity. Rather, it viewed the poetic line as potentially productive of queerness, in and of itself. This section continues such a conceptualization of the poetic line’s queerness, but on a larger scale. It considers the poetic line’s evolution over the course of the century and examines the potential queerness of its various metric manifestations, ranging from Victor Hugo’s “dislocated alexandrine,” to Marie Krysinska’s free verse, to Charles Baudelaire’s prose poems.

By separating the poetic line from the sexuality of the poem’s author or the sexual nature of the poem’s subject-matter, this section aims to create a purely literary context in which to analyze the nature and underlying mechanisms of queerness. What exactly makes something queer? And what exactly constitutes an act of queering? Given its etymological origins in the notion of difference, for example, is "queer" simply that which deviates from the norm? If so, how far must it deviate? Or if non-conformity is not enough to establish queerness, what other factors ought to be considered? And how does queerness relate to instances of poetic innovation or the notion of poetic *modernité*? By examining large-scale metric manipulations of the poetic line over the course of the century, this section attempts to answer such questions about the nature of queerness in general. And in doing so, it aims to provide an initial framework of issues to consider when exploring the notion of *literary* queerness in particular.

Victor Hugo and the Dislocated Alexandrine

In 1856, Victor Hugo published the poem "Quelques mots à un autre" ("In Response to Another") in *Les Contemplations* (*The Contemplations*). Written in 1834, the poem is framed as a response to those critics who are unsettled by the "looser" nature of his poetic line. As the opening line of the poem reveals, Hugo does not reject such a characterization; rather, he embraces it as a natural consequence of his time:

> On y revient ; il faut y revenir moi-même.
> Ce qu'on attaque en moi, c'est mon temps, et je l'aime. (lines 1-2)
>
> (It has come up again; so I return to it myself.
> What they criticize me for is just a product of my time.)

His critics compare the formal looseness of his poetic lines to inappropriately or insufficiently clothed women:

> Vous me criez : « Comment, Monsieur ! qu'est-ce que c'est ?
> La stance va nu-pieds ! le drame est sans corset !
> La muse jette au vent sa robe d'innocence !
> Et l'art crève la règle et dit : « C'est la croissance ! » » (lines 15-18)

> (You howl at me: “Really, sir! What on Earth is this?
> The stanza is barefoot! The drama’s without corset!
> The muse throws to the wind her robe of innocence!
> And art devours its rules and claims: ‘This is progress!’”)

And the last of these lines reveals the crux of his critics’ objections: in the name of progress, art is destroying its rules. In response to this artistic innovation, Hugo’s objectors declare:

> « Que veulent ces affreux novateurs ? ça des vers ?
> Devant leurs livres noirs, la nuit, dans l’ombre ouverts,
> Les lectrices ont peur au fond de leurs alcôves.
> Le Pinde entend rugir leurs rimes bêtes fauves,
> Et frémit. Par leur faute aujourd’hui tout est mort ;
> L’alexandrin saisit la césure, et la mord ;
> Comme le sanglier dans l’herbe et dans la sauge,
> Au beau milieu du vers l’enjambement patauge ; (lines 39-46)
>
> (“Do these awful innovators call this verse?
> At night, in the dim light, before their opened black books,
> Young women are scared, as they read in their nooks.
> The Pindus hears their wild, beastly rhymes roar,
> And it shudders. By their hand, poetry is no more;
> The alexandrine seizes and devours its cesura
> Like the wild boar among the grass and the sage,
> In the middle of the line the enjambment wades;)

Hugo and his fellow innovative poets have led poetry, as we know it, to its death. Like a savage animal, the alexandrine has attacked its cesura, and like wild boars, the poem’s enjambments plod heavily in the middle of the line. In the eyes of Hugo’s critics, these transgressions are enough to constitute a revolutionary act:

> Et m’écrasant avec tous les noms qu’on vénère,
> Vous lâchez le grand mot : Révolutionnaire. (lines 33-34)
>
> (And throwing out name after name – each legendary,
> As an insult, you label me: Revolutionary.)

Mimicking the tone of his critics, Hugo agrees: “Je suis le ténébreux par qui tout dégénère” (“I am the mystic figure by whom all is debased”) (line 9). He presents himself as responsible for the decadence of the poetic line, particularly in terms of its versification. And he concludes in a similarly exaggerated fashion, “Tout est perdu! le vers vague sans muselière !” (“All is lost! The line wanders, unconstrained!”) (line 77).

But is Hugo’s poetic line really roaming around freely without constraints? Does he agree with his critics’ accusations of poetic degeneracy? Or is he mocking what he considers to be their exaggerated outrage? Michèle Aquien notes in “Victor Hugo et l’architecture du vers” (“Victor Hugo and the Architecture of the Line”) (2002) that Hugo is, in fact, “très respectueux des règles de décompte et de marquage syllabique à la césure” (“very respectful of the line’s syllable count and syllabic placement of the cesura”) (33). While the poet may claim in line 44 that “l’alexandrin saisit la césure et la mord” (“the alexandrine seizes its cesura and bites it”), the cesura remains practically untouched. It is not displaced, nor is it ever positioned in the middle of a word (Cornulier 81). What Hugo *does* change with respect to the alexandrine is the relation between the line’s metrical and syntactical organizations. As Aquien explains “c’est que l’articulation syntaxique de ses vers est décalée” (“it’s that the syntactical rhythm of his lines is out of sync”) (33). While this effect is particularly noticeable, according to Aquien, in the poems of *La Légende des Siècles* (*The Legend of the Ages*), it can also be seen in the poems of *Les Contemplations* (*The Contemplations*). In this particular poem, for example, Hugo writes in line 11: “Vous aussi, vous m’avez vu tout jeune, et voici” (“You too knew me when I was young, and yet”), in which an auxiliary verb (“avez”) and its past participle (“vu”) straddle the cesura. Similarly, line 122 has its syntactical pause after “d’hier” but its cesura before it: “Vous êtes un ancien d’hier. Libre et sans voiles” (“You are yesterday’s news. Free and sans robe”).

While lines such as these might not appear particularly subversive to the modern reader, Hugo’s contemporaries are taken aback. His alexandrine has destabilized their conception of the poetic line: “Qu’est-ce que c’est ?” (“What is this?”), they exclaim in line 15, and “ça des vers?” (“they call this verse?”), in line 39. In *La Fabrique du vers* (*The Making of the Line*) (2009), Guillaume Peureux addresses such a discrepancy between modern and contemporary reader responses. He points out that “Un lecteur contemporain d’Hugo, rompu à la forme 6-6 du vers de douze syllabes, est dans un rapport de très forte attente à l’égard des vers qu’il lit” (“A reader of Hugo’s time, well-versed in the 6-6 structure of the 12-syllable line, has strong expectations regarding the lines that he reads”) (24-25). “Un lecteur d’aujourd’hui” (“A modern-day reader”), however, “qui a développé d’autres compétences et est différemment sollicité, perçoit moins aisément les équivalences et anomalies métriques que ne le faisaient des lecteurs lettrés d’il y a cent cinquante ans” (“who has developed other abilities and is called upon in different ways, is not as able to notice metrical relations and anomalies as were readers a hundred and fifty years ago”) (19). For this reason, the perceived effect of Hugo’s manipulations is lessened for the modern reader but heightened for the contemporary one.

This discrepancy in reader response highlights the evolving nature of reader reception, and the need to take such evolution into consideration when analyzing the potential queerness of the poetic line. It is not enough to ask, “Is Hugo’s dislocated alexandrine queer?” One must also ask, “Queer with respect to what?” – That is, with respect to the alexandrine as Hugo’s contemporaries know it? Or with respect to the alexandrine as modern readers know it? Because each group “knows” a different definition of this poetic line. With respect to the alexandrine as we know it today, Hugo’s dislocated alexandrine is not particularly queer. This is because we are accustomed to reading a much more unstable version of the poetic line in terms of its internal structure. As Jacques Roubaud explains in *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre* (*The Old Age of Alexander*) (1998), "Après [Hugo], et de son vivant déjà, les limites entre lesquelles il maintient son bouleversement du modèle classique sont franchies dans plusieurs directions non nécessairement compatibles de « desserrement »" ("After Hugo, and even during his lifetime, the limits that confined his disruption of the classical model are transgressed in various ways, and not necessarily in accordance with a form of 'loosening'") (107). After Hugo's initial "loosening," the alexandrine continues to change; its twelve syllables are arranged in various ways and its cesura is liberated from its central position between six-syllable hemistiches. Hugo's structural modifications, however, are more limited in scope. Aquien remarks that above all, Hugo's dislocated alexandrine does not alter the centrality of the cesura, the "clé de voûte" ("cornerstone") of the poetic line (33). As such, this metrical architecture allows Hugo "d'instiller des variations rythmiques qui […] font entendre d'autres rythmes, liés à une fragmentation du vers, à l'intérieur de ce qu'est alors l'alexandrin, c'est-à-dire toujours et profondément un 6/6" ("to instill rhythmical variations that […] bring out different rhythms, which can be linked to a fragmentation of the poetic line, but which take place within the overall structure of the alexandrine – a line that retains, and profoundly so, its 6-6 structure") (33).

In this sense, Hugo does not challenge the alexandrine in terms of its use as a standard meter for the poetic line. In fact, his abundant poetic and theatrical production may even serve to reinforce it. But through his stylized repetition of its norms over the course of his literary production, Hugo creates a "looser" form of rhythmic expression, one that is not bound by the presumed alignment of meter and syntax. Much like Butler's subversive repetition of gender norms, Hugo's metrical modifications do not destroy, eliminate, or altogether transgress the 12-syllable line; rather, they work *with* it, as a norm, repeating it in a stylistically subversive way.

For Hugo's contemporaries, this dislocated alexandrine has a queering effect. It highlights and undoes the poetically constructed correlation between two aspects of the poetic line – its meter and syntax, in much the same way as Butler's subversive repetition of gender norms highlights and subverts the socially constructed correlation between sex and gender.

Marie Krysinska and Free Verse

In 1882, Marie Krysinska published her third poem, "Symphonie en gris" ("Symphony in Gray") in *Le Chat noir*, dedicating it to the founder of the Chat Noir cabaret, Rodolphe Salis. The text is unconventional in its prosody, with longer lines of differing syllable counts, no strophic divisions, and line groupings that do not rhyme. Krysinska republished the poem in her collection, *Rythmes pittoresques* (*Picturesque Rhythms*), in 1890 with a slightly different but equally unconventional form. In this later text, the lines are grouped more clearly into verses, but their inconsistent syllable count and their lack of rhyme scheme remain characteristic features. In a manner reminiscent of Charles Baudelaire's "Harmonie du soir" ("Evening Harmony"), the poem describes the sensory and emotional experiences that arise with the approach of dusk:

> Symphonie en gris
> A Rodolphe Salis.
>
> Plus d'ardentes lueurs sur le ciel alourdi,
> Qui semble tristement rêver.
> Les arbres, sans mouvement,
> Mettent dans le loin une dentelle grise. –
> Sur le ciel qui semble tristement rêver,
> Plus d'ardentes lueurs. –
>
> Dans l'air gris flottent les apaisements,
> Les résignations et les inquiétudes.
> Du sol consterné monte une rumeur étrange, surhumaine.
> Cabalistique langage entendu seulement
> Des âmes attentives. –
> Les apaisements, les résignations, et les inquiétudes

Flottent dans l’air gris. –

Les silhouettes vagues ont le geste de la folie.
Les maisons sont assises disgracieusement
Comme de vieilles femmes –
Les silhouettes vagues ont le geste de la folie. –

C’est l’heure cruelle et stupéfiante,
Où la chauve-souris déploie ses ailes grises,
Et s’en va rôdant comme un malfaiteur. –
Les silhouettes vagues ont le geste de la folie.

Près de l’étang endormi
Le grillon fredonne d’exquises romances.
Et doucement ressuscitent dans l’air gris
Les choses enfuies.

Près de l’étang endormi
Le grillon fredonne d’exquises romances.
Sous le ciel qui semble tristement rêver.

(Symphony in Gray
For Rodolphe Salis

No more glowing lights on the heavy sky,
Which seems lost in sad dreams.
The motionless trees
Trace on the distance their gray lace. –
On the sky that seems lost in sad dreams,
No more glowing lights. –

In the gray air float calm,
And resignation, and disquiet.
From the dismayed earth rises a strange, superhuman murmuring.
A cabalistic language heard only
By attentive souls. –
Calm, resignation, and disquiet
Float in the gray air. –

The vague silhouettes gesture like madmen.
The houses squat as awkwardly
As old women. –
The vague silhouettes gesture like madmen. –

It is the cruel and astounding hour,

When the bat unfolds its gray wings,
And takes off, prowling like a criminal. –
The vague silhouettes gesture like madmen. –

By the sleeping lake
The cricket sings exquisite romances.
And gently brings back to life in the gray air
Things fled away.

By the sleeping lake
The cricket sings exquisite romances.
Under the sky that seems lost in sad dreams.)[45]

The text's title, "Symphonie en gris" ("Symphony in Gray") recalls Théophile Gautier's "Symphonie en blanc majeur" ("Symphony in White Major"), first published in 1849. Unlike Gautier's Parnassian poetics, however, which value exactitude and rigidity in style and imagery, Krysinska's poetic style is one of indeterminacy and fluidity. In this poem, the gray half-light of dusk contributes to the subdued and ill-defined nature of its images: there are no more "ardentes lueurs" ("fiery rays") emanating from the sky, and objects are seen only in the form of "silhouettes vagues" ("faint silhouettes"); an imprecise sound rises up from the earth as a "rumeur étrange" ("strange murmur"); and an ambiguous emotional state results from "les apaisements, les résignations et les inquiétudes" ("the sense of calm, resignation, and worry") floating around in the air. The poem creates an incantatory effect through its repetition of certain lines and line fragments. And the intermingling images, sounds, and sensations that result from this repetition undermine the linear progression of the poem, creating a sense of stasis or circularity. This circularity lessens the definitiveness of the poem's conclusion, as well, where its final line recalls one of its initial images – "le ciel qui semble tristement rêver" ("the sky that seems to sadly dream") of the first verse. This stylistic imprecision also results from the uneven and inconsistent syllable count of the poem's *vers libre*. Varying in length from five to fifteen syllables, each line (with the exception of the first) transgresses perhaps the last defining characteristic of the alexandrine – its syllable count. This transgression produces a poetic line that is no longer recognizable or definable as an alexandrine.

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[45] Translation by Rosemary Lloyd.

In an article published in 1901, entitled "Évolution poétique : devant l'Académie" ("Poetic Evolution: Before the Academy"), Krysinska explains the reasoning behind her transgression of the alexandrine and her adoption of the *vers libre*. She proposes that "une œuvre poétique […], c'est avant tout une œuvre littéraire, avec des devoirs aussi rigoureux que le sont ceux du prosateur en ce qui concerne la beauté et la clarté du langage, la perfection du style, la précision, la justesse, l'imprévu des images, et aussi la concision, qui doit porter encore plus loin, s'il se peut, que dans la prose, le caractère, frappé et définitif, de la parole écrite" ("a work of poetry […] is first and foremost a literary work, its obligations as rigorous as those of prose when it comes to the beauty and clarity of its language, the perfection of its style, the precision, accuracy, and novelty of its images, as well as its conciseness, which must convey, even more so than in prose, if possible, the concrete nature of the written word") (102). "Or" ("However"), she remarks, "les règles strictes de la prosodie exigent à chaque instant le sacrifice de ces qualités" ("prosody's strict rules require poets to constantly sacrifice these qualities") (102). In order to form an acceptable poetic line, poets are often forced to settle for a word or wording that fits metrically but not artistically. "Combien de fois […] les versificateurs doivent s'y résoudre pour obtenir le métrage nécessaire ?" ("How many times have versifiers had to settle in order to produce the necessary meter?"), she remarks (102). It is to avoid making such poetic sacrifices that Krysinska adopts the *vers libre*, which allows her to move beyond the forced symmetry of the alexandrine or other even-syllabled meters: "[…] ainsi sincèrement et bravement renoncée, pour un motif d'honnêteté littéraire, la symétrie rompue donnerait une harmonie autre, mais belle et pittoresque" ("with its metric symmetry having been earnestly and valiantly renounced, for the sake of literary honesty, the poetic line's asymmetry would create a different, but pleasant and picturesque, kind of rhythmic balance") (102). This new rhythmic harmony in no way implies a depreciation of those poets who have produced great works in regularly metered verse: "Notre admiration pour eux est infinie" ("our admiration for them in immeasurable"), notes Krysinska; "Nous voyons dans leur œuvre des forêts de beautés si luxuriantes, si riches, qu'on n'aperçoit point quelques arbres abattus par place : les sacrifices littéraires" ("We see in their works such luxuriously beautiful and rich forests that we do not notice a few fallen trees: their literary sacrifices") (102). Nevertheless, these poets' adherence to a regular meter entails literary sacrifices that Krysinska is no longer willing to make. Her *vers libre* enables a fully sincere poetic expression that does not require the felling of any literary trees.

Others do not see this new poetic line in such a positive light. According to Krysinska, the poet Sully Prudhomme, in his 1897 article, "Vues générales sur le mouvement poétique en France" ("General Perspectives on the Progression of Poetry in France"), "traite de dangereuse hérésie la tentative nouvelle, l'acheminement vers plus de liberté dans les cadres" ("considers this new practice, this progression toward a less restrictive framework, to be a dangerous form of heresy") (102). And the poet Édmond Haraucourt writes, in Jules Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (1891), writes that the *vers libre* "supprime des difficultés pour les faibles, et des ressources pour les forts […] Il enlève toute cadence et n'offre rien en place" ("eliminates difficulty for the unversed, and resources for the well-versed […] It takes away every cadence and offers nothing in its place") (qtd. in Huret 339). In *Vers Libre: The Emergence of Free Verse in France 1886-1914* (1990), Clive Scott compares such remarks to Robert Frost's opinion that free verse is like playing tennis without a net (3). Scott notes that such negative reactions to the *vers libre* continue into the twentieth century and asks, “What is it in free verse that provokes such vituperations?” (4). He concludes:

> Clearly regular verse feels threatened by it, feels that free verse is a conspiracy to displace it; for, however much the *verslibristes* themselves may have claimed that free verse merely complemented and extended the resources of regular verse, they were also bound to justify free verse by its capacity to express, organically, the uneven life of the poet’s physiology and psyche, in a way that regular verse could not, and to reflect the up-to-the-minute of the self and its environment (including current, colloquial language and pronunciation), which made regular verse look anachronistic. (4-5)

Scott also attributes the perceived threat posed by the *vers libre* to the new poetic line’s subversively innovative characteristics: “In some senses free verse itself is to blame,” he remarks, “for, in its rejection of the time-honoured conventions of syllabicity, rhyme, and metricality, in its ousting of the aesthetic in favor of the expressive, of the formally anterior in favour of the instantaneous, of the enunciated in favour of the enunciation, of the lapidary and pre-ordained in favour of the contingent, the aleatory, the unpredictable, it could not but present itself as an anti-poetry” (2). While the *vers libre* is viewed as transgressive and expressive by its proponents, it is viewed as either unprincipled or subversive by its critics.

But can it be viewed as queer? In *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (1992), Monique Wittig talks about the nature of sexual categories and the need to think beyond them. She explains in “The Category of Sex” that the ideology of sexual difference “functions as censorship in our culture by masking, on the ground of nature, the social opposition between men and women. Masculine/feminine, male/female are the categories which serve to conceal the fact that social differences always belong to an economic, political, ideological order” (2). In this sense, “it is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary” (2). That is to say, sex does not exist, except as a political category. Yet despite its politically contingent nature, "it grips our minds in such a way that we cannot think outside of it," remarks Wittig (8). "This is why we must destroy it," she argues, "and start thinking beyond it if we want to start thinking at all, as we must destroy the sexes as a sociological reality if we want to start to exist" (8). In order to think beyond the category of sex altogether, one cannot continue to work from within it to change its norms. It must be completely surpassed as an ideological framework. Therefore, in a literary context, thinking beyond the norm might function in the same way as Krysinska's adoption of the *vers libre*. Rather than continuing to work with the twelve syllables of the alexandrine in ways that loosen or redefine its norms, Krysinska creates a new framework for the poetic line, a framework that altogether transcends the notion of a consistently-syllabled line.

In *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre* (*The Great Age of Alexander*) (1998), however, Jacques Roubaud questions whether such a liberated poetic line truly frees itself from the vestigial power of the alexandrine. He proposes that "le coup de force contre la métrique hugolienne n'a pas mis fin aussi simplement à la dominance de la prosodie traditionnelle ; que celle-ci, loin de continuer seulement chez ses héritiers officiels et affichés, se perpétue également ailleurs, et plus encore peut-être, sous d'autres déguisements, sous lesquels on ne s'attendrait pas à la trouver" ("the act of overthrowing the alexandrine – the Hugolian meter *par excellence* – did not simply end the reign of traditional prosody; this prosody persisted, not only in its official and self-declared heirs, but also, and perhaps even more so, in different clothing, clothing in which one would not necessarily expect to find it") (10). One of these disguises, he argues, is the *vers libre*. In Chapter 6 of *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre*, Roubaud discusses what he considers to be "*le paradoxe du vers libre :* à savoir qu'il ne l'est pas et que, loin de réussir à délivrer la poésie française des contraintes qui historiquement pèsent sur elle, son adoption a réussi en définitive à leur assurer un sursis en les maintenant sous une forme dissimulée" ("*the paradox of free verse*, which is that it is not, in fact, free, and that the adoption of free verse, far from successfully liberating French poetry from its historically weighty constraints, ultimately grants these constraints amnesty by allowing them to continue in disguise") (15). For this reason, the *vers libre* "se révèle être un instrument privilégié de la survie de l'ancien" ("turns out to be a valuable agent in the survival of the old regime") (15). "Cet échec du vers libre éclate inséparablement de son triomphe" ("this failure will forever accompany free verse's success"), Roubaud concludes (15). Despite the *vers libre*'s liberation from the metricality of the alexandrine, the hegemony of the traditional poetic line haunts the freer structure of the new poetic line.

It is in the very act of establishing itself as "antinomique du vers traditionnel" ("antonymic to the traditional poetic line") that the *vers libre* ensures its continued relation to the traditional poetic line (Roubaud 126). This is a relation of negation, but a relation, nonetheless. Roubaud points out that, by transcending the last defining characteristic of the alexandrine – its 12-syllable meter – the new poetic line paradoxically recalls this meter through its conspicuous and systematic avoidance of it: "Ce *creux* dans les longueurs permises des vers est un moyen, évident, d'affirmer le vers libre *contre* le vers traditionnel, et il est sûr que cette affirmation a, au moins, au début, une vertu libératrice" ("This *gap* in permitted line-lengths is an obvious means to establish the *vers libre* as antonymic to the traditional poetic line, and this assertion undoubtedly has, at least initially, a liberating effect"), acknowledges Roubaud (125). "Mais, très vite" ("But very quickly"), he continues, "cette *absence* du douze deviendra aussi aveuglante que sa présence" ("this *absence* of twelve will become as glaring as its presence") (125-26). Indeed, Krysinska's "Symphony in Gray" appears to make a spectacle of avoiding the 12-syllable line: After a most conventional and symmetrical 6-6 alexandrine, employed conspicuously in the opening line of the text, each of the subsequent lines contrasts with this symmetry and conventionality through its systematic avoidance of twelve syllables. Furthermore, since the majority of the text's subsequent lines count eleven syllables, they create the expectation of the conventional 12-syllable line only to subvert this expectation by ending one syllable "too soon." In this context, such lines are perhaps recognized less as "11-syllable lines" and more as "not-quite-12-syllable lines." The ghost of the alexandrine haunts the remainder of the poem, despite the text's systematic avoidance of the 12-syllable line.

Roubaud's disbelief in the possibility of fully transcending the alexandrine recalls Judith Butler's distrust in the possibility of fully escaping heteronormativity's categories of sex and gender. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler calls into question the feasibility and effectiveness of Wittig's proposition to "think beyond" the category of sex. By transposing Wittig's theory into the context of gender categories, she argues that, since there is no subject who precedes or enacts the compulsory repetition of gender norms, there is no possible subject position to be located outside of these norms and their constitutive power. For this reason, as Butler explains in "Critically Queer" (1993), any attempt to undermine the hegemony of heteronormativity must focus on "the subversive and parodic redeployment of power rather than on the impossible fantasy of its full-scale transcendence" (124).

Given the impossibility of fully escaping heteronormativity's power, Butler attempts instead to diminish this power by working the weaknesses in its norms in order to resignify them. On the other hand, Wittig's attempt to completely transcend the normative category of sex leaves its power intact, despite her calls to destroy it. This failure to neutralize the power of heteronormativity is what limits the queering potential of Wittig's proposition, according to Butler. As Butler explains with respect to her views on the queering potential of drag, "The critical promise of drag does not have to do with the proliferation of genders, as if a sheer increase in numbers would do the job, but rather with the exposure of the failure of heterosexual regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals. Hence, it is not that drag *opposes* heterosexuality, or that the proliferation of drag will bring down heterosexuality" ("Critically Queer" 26). By thinking beyond the category of sex, Wittig simply creates a new ideological framework. And the creation of a new ideological framework does not necessarily diminish the power of the old one; it simply contributes to a proliferation of norms.

Likewise, that the *vers libre* presents itself as opposed to the fixed-syllable poetic line simply implies that it creates a new ideological framework, a new norm, through which to define the poetic line. And according to Butler's conception of queering, such a proliferation of definitions is not necessarily enough to queer the hegemonic norm – that is, the traditional, regularly-metered poetic line epitomized by the alexandrine. So, while Wittig's desire to escape heteronormativity by transcending the category of sex finds its literary corollary in poets' adoption of the *vers libre*, the feasibility and queerness of such a transgressive act remain questionable. Like Roubaud, Butler does not believe that full transcendence of the norm is possible. And even if it were, it would not be enough to constitute an act of queering. For Butler, an act of queering requires diminishing the power of the norm. Transcending or deviating from this norm, however, as opposed to resignifying it, may very well leave the norm's hegemony intact. In this sense, the *vers libre* can be considered transgressive, with respect to the alexandrine, but it is not necessarily queer.

Transcendence and resignification need not be mutually exclusive, however, especially in the context of literary queerness. A literary feature can transcend a norm on one level and resignify it on another. In this case, while the *vers libre* can be viewed as an attempt to transcend the alexandrine, it can also be viewed as a resignification of the poetic line more generally. Despite Krysinska's denial of any revolutionary intent in her adoption of the *vers libre*, this new framework for the poetic line gained adherents. In 1887, Gustave Kahn published *Les Palais nomades*, a collection of poems written, in large part, in *vers libre*. Jules LaForgue, Jean Moréas, Jean Ajalbert, Édouard Dujardin, and Henri de Régnier, among several others, also published collections of free verse in the late 1880s and early 1890s (Scott, *Vers Libre* 67-68). As Daniel Grojnowski remarks in "Poétique du vers libre" ("Poetics of Free Verse") (1984), "de l'expérience individuelle on est passé à l'expression d'une parole collective" ("a form of personal experimentation became a means of expression for an entire community") (396). The *vers libre* was not just another norm in a proliferation of norms; its wide-scale adoption by poets in subsequent years made it a particularly *competitive* norm with regards to the possible prosodic composition of the poetic line. And as a competitive norm, this new prosodic framework has changed the defining characteristics of the poetic line in such a way that a consistent syllable count and rhyme scheme have evolved from essential to optional components. In other words, the *vers libre* may not have resignified our conception of the alexandrine, but it has, to a certain extent, resignified our conception of the poetic line in general.

A final qualification of queerness, however, involves the nature of such resignification. Is every act of resignification an act of queering? Not necessarily. Just as Butler's resignification subverts a central dynamic of the heteronormative paradigm – the alignment between sex and gender – a resignification of the poetic line must subvert a central dynamic of the normative poetic paradigm. As Hermine Riffaterre has remarked, for example, the versed poem traditionally aligns its content with its form, "subordinating the development of meaning to the repetition of a form or variations upon this form" (115). This typically plays out through the alignment of the line's syntax with its meter, which is precisely the alignment subverted by Hugo's *alexandrin disloqué*. It could be argued, however, that the *vers libre*'s resignification of the poetic line simply reverses the order of determinacy between form and content: rather than a line's meter determining its syntax, as is the case with the traditional alexandrine, the *vers libre* uses its syntax to determine its meter. Placing syntax in a position of primacy and meter in a position of dependency does not undo the alignment between them; it simply switches the hierarchy. For this reason, the *vers libre*'s resignification of the poetic line does not necessarily queer the poetic line, just as its transcendence of the alexandrine does not necessarily queer the alexandrine. The *vers libre* is transgressive but not queer, and its mainstream adoption indicates an instance of poetic innovation but does not constitute an act of literary queering.

Charles Baudelaire and the Prose Poem

Fabienne Moore remarks that the prose poem began to emerge at the turn of the eighteenth century when French society and culture were in the process of moving away from the ideal of purity and toward a reality of hybridity:

> As absolute monarchy by divine right was assailed, a hybrid political system, parliamentary monarchy, was advocated. As the supremacy of blue blood became contested, the mixing of classes and origins appeared. As a single revealed religion abused its authority, philosophers fought for tolerance and coexistence of a plurality of religions. As explorers and travelers charted new territories, Eurocentric homogeneity had to confront global diversity and deal with the consequences of interpenetration. (12-13)

This move from purity to hybridity manifested in the period's literary production, as well, where certain authors began to challenge notions of canonization and generic categorization (13). In 1740, Voltaire published his *Recueil de pièces fugitives en prose et en vers* (*Collection of Brief Works in Prose and in Verse*). In 1768, Peyraud Beaussol gave us *Écho à Narcisse, poème en* *trois chants dans un genre nouveau qui tient de l'héroïde, de l'élégie et de l'idylle* (*Echo to Narcissus, a Poem in Three Parts in a New Genre Combining Héroïde, Elegy, and Idyll*). And in 1783, Abel Beffroy de Reigny published *Marlborough, poëme comique en prose rimée* (*Marlborough, a Comical Poem in Rhymed Prose*). And this growing interest in juxtaposing prose and poetry found its most obvious outlet in the period's prose translations of texts that were originally in verse (125). Moore points to Jean-Baptiste de Mirabaud, in particular, whose 1724 prose translations of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* proved to be highly successful works of literature. "The success of Tasso's poem and its prose translation spurred the vogue for more modern, hybrid poetry – lyrical as well as epic – later in the eighteenth century," Moore argues (127).

With the increasing popularity of such modern, hybrid poetry, various pseudo-translations soon appeared. A year after Mirabaud's translation of Tasso, for example, Montesquieu deceptively published *Le Temple de Gnide* (*The Temple of Gnidus*) as a set of seven prose translations of Greek verse. James MacPherson followed suit, publishing his 1760s English "translations" of Ossian's epic poems. And as Suzanne Bernard conjectures, Montesquieu and MacPherson are likely to have inspired the prose poems of Évariste de Parny who published his *Chansons madécasses* in 1787, presenting them as French translations of Madagascan songs (28). The trend continued through the nineteenth century with the pseudo-translations of Chateaubriand and Eugène Hugo also taking the form of prose poems. Bernard believes that this consistent use of pseudo-translation not only allowed authors to claim more exotic origins for their literary compositions, but also served to justify their experimentation with prosaic characteristics in a classical lyric context: "les brusqueries du style, le manque de transitions, les expressions pittoresques ou réalistes, on souffre tout cela quand on le met sur le compte d'une poésie primitive, ou tout au moins étrangère" ("the stylistic abruptness, the lack of transitions, the picturesque or realist expressions – all of these things could be tolerated when attributed to a 'primitive,' or at least foreign, poetry"), she explains (35). Through their use of pseudo-translation, poets were able to justify their own experimentations in the new genre.

As a result of this strategic use of pseudo-translation, a new truth came to light: "que la rime et la mesure ne sont pas tout dans un poème" ("that there is more to a poem than rhyme and meter") (Bernard 24). The prose poems produced by the likes of MacPherson, Parny, and Chateaubriand may lack versification, but this does not mean that they lack "poeticity." Poetry is more than versification, and a poem is not defined by its form. Aloysius Bertrand, who, in the nineteenth century, elected to write prose poems outside the pretext of translation, embraced this novel conceptualization of the poem. Although Bertrand diminishes his authorship of *Gaspard de la Nuit – Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* (*Gaspard of the Night – Fantasies in the Manner of Rembrandt and Callot*), he does not justify its poems' prose form through the pretext of translation. In his introduction to the text, he presents them as original poetic compositions, written initially and intentionally in prose by a certain Monsieur Gaspard de la Nuit, who gave him the manuscript.

In the dedication opening his collection of prose poems, Charles Baudelaire explains that it was in leafing through *Gaspard de la Nuit* that he had the idea to attempt something similar himself, "et d'appliquer à la description de la vie moderne, ou plutôt d'*une* vie moderne et plus abstraite, le procédé que [Bertrand] avait appliqué à la peinture de la vie ancienne, si étrangement pittoresque" ("and to apply to a description of modern life, or rather, to a description of *a* modern and more abstract life, the process that [Bertrand] had applied to the depiction, so strangely picturesque, of historicized life") (*Œuvres* vi). The process that Bertrand had applied to his depictions of a picturesque medieval life in *Gaspard de la Nuit* seemed particularly apt, in Baudelaire's opinion, to accommodate the fluctuating and contrasting "mouvements lyriques de l'âme" ("lyrical movements of the soul"), "ondulations de la rêverie" ("wanderings of reveries"), and "soubresauts de la conscience" ("sudden shifts of conscience") that characterize this *vie moderne* (*Œuvres* vi).

In "Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste" ("The Artist's *Confiteor*"), the third of his *Petits poëmes en prose* (*Little Poems in Prose*), Baudelaire explicitly addresses the conflicted mental states that typify his experience as an artist of *modernité.* The text, which was published in 1862, depicts the initial attractiveness, and subsequent repulsiveness, of the infinite sky and sea on an autumn evening, and it reflects upon the poet's impression of powerlessness in the face of such beauty:

> Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste
>
> Que les fins de journées d'automne sont pénétrantes ! Ah ! pénétrantes jusqu'à la douleur ! car il est de certaines sensations délicieuses dont le vague n'exclut pas l'intensité ; et il n'est pas de pointe plus acérée que celle de l'Infini.
>
> Grand délice que celui de noyer son regard dans l'immensité du ciel et de la mer ! Solitude, silence, incomparable chasteté de l'azur ! une petite voile frissonnante à l'horizon, et qui, par sa petitesse et son isolement, imite mon irrémédiable existence, mélodie monotone de la houle, toutes ces choses pensent par moi, ou je pense par elles (car dans la grandeur de la rêverie, le *moi* se perd vite !) ; elles pensent, dis-je, mais musicalement et pittoresquement, sans arguties, sans syllogismes, sans déductions.
>
> Toutefois, ces pensées, qu'elles sortent de moi ou s'élancent des choses, deviennent bientôt trop intenses. L'énergie dans la volupté crée un malaise et une souffrance positive. Mes nerfs trop tendus ne donnent plus que des vibrations criardes et douloureuses.
>
> Et maintenant la profondeur du ciel me consterne ; sa limpidité m'exaspère. L'insensibilité de la mer, l'immuabilité du spectacle, me révoltent … Ah ! faut-il éternellement souffrir, ou fuir éternellement le beau ? Nature, enchanteresse sans pitié, rivale toujours victorieuse, laisse-moi ! Cesse de tenter mes désirs et mon orgueil ! L'étude du beau est un duel où l'artiste crie de frayeur avant d'être vaincu.

> (The Artist's *Confiteor*
>
> How the close of an autumn day pierces! Pierces to the point of pain, for delightful sensations, though vague, may be intense, and there is no sharper pang than that of Infinity.
>
> What greater delight than for the eye to drown in the immensity of sky and sea! Solitude, silence, incomparably chaste blue, on the horizon a tiny sail quivering which, by its smallness and isolation, resembles my irremediable existence, monotonous melody of the sea swell – all these things think through me, or I think through them (for, in the grandeur of reverie, the *I* is soon lost); they think, I say, but musically and picturesquely, without quibble, without syllogism, without deduction.
>
> These thoughts, whether from inside me or from external things, soon become too intense. Voluptuous energy creates uneasiness and positive suffering. My overtense nerves then give out only peevish and painful vibrations.
>
> And now the depth of sky is appalling; its clarity exasperates me. I find the indifference of the sea, the immutability of the spectacle, revolting … Ah! must I suffer eternally, or else eternally flee the beautiful? Nature, pitiless enchantress, always victorious rival, let me go! Tempt no more my desires and my pride! Study of the beautiful is a duel in which the artist cries out in fear, before being bested.)[46]

Baudelaire's poem conforms quite well to the definition of a prose poem offered by *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*:

> A composition able to have any or all features of the lyric, except that it is put on the page – though not conceived of – as prose. It differs from poetic prose in that it is short and compact, from free verse in that it has no line breaks, from a short prose passage in that it has, usually, more pronounced rhythm, sonorous effects, imagery, and density of expression. It may contain even inner rhyme and metrical runs. Its length, generally, is from half a page (one or two paragraphs) to three or four pages, i.e., that of the average lyrical poem. If it is any longer, the tensions and impact are forfeited, and it becomes – more or less poetic – prose. (664)

While it may recall prose through its organization into paragraphs and its lack of line breaks, "Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste" retains many lyrical features, such as the elevated syntax and diction of its first paragraph, the more pronounced imagery of its second and third paragraphs, and the more marked rhythms and inner rhyme of its fourth paragraph. And the tensions in the poem are many, from those created by its competing generic elements to those implied through its central images and extended metaphors.

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[46] Translation by Keith Waldrop.

One of these images is that of a duel between artist and Beauty. In the final line of the text, the poet concludes that "L'étude du beau est un duel où l'artiste crie de frayeur avant d'être vaincu" ("The study of beauty is a duel in which the artist calls out in fear before being defeated"). It is a metaphor that extends throughout the text and depicts, through related tropes and images, the powerlessness of the artist to master his subject, Beauty. As the poet exclaims in the first paragraph, "les fins de journées d'automne sont pénétrantes ! […] et il n'est pas de pointe plus acérée que celle de l'Infini" ("The ends of autumn days are piercing! […] and there is no sharper tip than that of the Infinite"). The dueling poet is wounded by the sharpest of blades, pierced "jusqu'à la douleur" ("to the point of pain") by the infiniteness of the autumn evening. It is an image of powerlessness that is further developed in the second paragraph, where Baudelaire describes, against the immensity of the sky and sea, "une petite voile frissonnante à l'horizon" ("a little sail trembling on the horizon"). In its "petitesse" ("smallness") and its "isolement" ("isolation"), the tiny sail reminds the poet of his own "irrémédiable existence" ("merciless existence").

The solitude, the silence, the incomparable chastity of the azure, the puny trembling sail, and "la mélodie monotone de la houle" ("monotonous melody of the waves") – all these images communicate with the poet: "toutes ces choses pensent par moi, ou je pense par elles" ("all of these things think through me, or I think through them"), he declares in the paragraph's subsequent lines. The ambiguity of this experience heightens the tension between the poet as agent and the poet as mere vehicle of the images, "car dans la grandeur de la rêverie, le *moi* se perd vite !" ("for in the immensity of revery, the *me* is quickly lost!"). But in losing his sense of self, the poet comes to a realization: “elles pensent” (“they think”), he concludes. He describes the thoughts as a musical and picturesque process, “sans arguties, sans syllogismes, sans déductions” (“without equivocation, without syllogisms, without deductions”). When the poet is not the agent in this aesthetic process, there is no excessive reasoning; there are no syllogisms or deductions at work; there is only image and music. The beauty of the scene prevails over the intellectual and linguistic artifice of the poet.

The third paragraph develops another form of tension, this time between the poet’s sensations of pleasure and suffering in the face of such an aesthetic experience. All of these thoughts quickly become too intense for him. “L’énergie dans la volupté crée un malaise et une souffrance positive” (“the energy of this exquisiteness becomes a source of malaise and tangible suffering”), he writes, “Mes nerfs trop tendus ne donnent plus que des vibrations criardes et douloureuses” (“My strained nerves can do no more than quiver shrilly and painfully”). The poet’s description of this climactic experience adds a sexual connotation to the poem and its tension between agency and passivity. And while the third paragraph depicts the climax of his experience, the fourth depicts his ensuing exhaustion and resignation. “Et maintenant la profondeur du ciel me consterne ; sa limpidité m’exaspère. L’insensibilité de la mer, l’immuabilité du spectacle, me révoltent …” (“and now the profundity of the sky dismays me; its clarity exasperates me. The indifference of the sea, the constancy of the scene, irk me …”), concedes the poet. The parallelism of the sentences reinforces his passivity in this dynamic, as the repetition of the syntactical construction “subject – object pronoun – verb” highlights his function as recipient, not agent, of the actions. He has been pierced by the aesthetic intensity of the autumn evening, but he, as artist, has been unable to penetrate its “profondeur” ("profundity") and its "limpidité" ("clarity"); he remains powerless before its apparent "insensibilité" ("indifference") and "immuabilité" ("constancy").

The poet's sense of powerlessness is encapsulated in his forlorn question, "Ah! faut-il éternellement souffrir, ou fuir éternellement le beau ?" ("Ah! Must I suffer forever, or forever flee from Beauty?"). The question's chiasmic structure reinforces its rhetorical quality and its apparent lack of solution. Faced with an impossible choice, the poet can either flee Beauty or face it in an artistic duel – a duel that he can only ever lose. In either case, Beauty is a source of suffering for the artist. And so he turns to Nature and addresses her directly as the embodiment of his dueling adversary: "Nature, enchanteresse sans pitié, rivale toujours victorieuse, laisse-moi !" ("Nature, merciless enchantress, ever-victorious rival, let me be!"), he pleads. As an artist, he finds himself compelled to pursue and master the beauty of nature, but now, he is the one who feels pursued, and what was initially an attraction has become an aversion.

That the poet's emotional state switches from attraction to aversion over the course of a single aesthetic experience recalls the "soubresauts de la conscience" ("sudden shifts of conscience") that Baudelaire dreams of being able to depict through the supple and jolted language of a poetic prose (*Oeuvres* vi). And it is partly by means of its construction as a prose poem that "Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste" ("The Artist's *Confiteor*") enables the expression of such dueling emotional experiences and states of mind. In "Poetry without Verse," Tzvetan Todorov in fact wonders if "Baudelaire had only been attracted to the genre insofar as it enabled him to find an appropriate form […] for a thematics of duality, contrast, and opposition" (64). In any case, he remarks that prose poems are "texts which are in their very conception based on the meeting of opposites" (64).

The most predominant of these opposites is that of prose and verse. In the nineteenth century, prose and verse were perceived, and had been for a while, as distinct and opposite modes of literary production, whose binary relation was, within the domain of literature, all-encompassing. The prose poem, then, constituted a form of hybrid that subverted the perceived distinction between the two modes – prose and verse. And as these literary modes became genres in their own right, later in the century, the prose poem has come to subvert the generic distinction between prose and poetry, as well. But the prose poem is more than a hybrid. It is, in a sense, an oxymoron, as well. As Jonathan Monroe notes in *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre* (1987), "The prose poem marks a crucial moment in literature where the coexistence of various modes of literary production (read genres) becomes, in [Fredric] Jameson's words, 'visibly antagonistic'" (20). With respect to prose and verse in particular, their antithetical relation can be seen as far back as the seventeenth century. A well-known example appears in Molière's *The Bourgeois gentilhomme* (*The Bourgeois Gentleman*), whose *Maître de Philosophe* (Master of Philosophy) confidently explains that "tout ce qui n'est point prose est vers ; et tout ce qui n'est point vers est prose" ("All that is not verse is prose; and all that is not prose is verse") (64). The prose poem's hybridity combines two modes (and later, two genres) that are considered not only distinct, but wholly antithetical. And it is this oxymoronic quality that contributes to the queerness of the *poème en prose.*

Any attempt to resolve the apparent inherent contradiction of the prose poem entails a re-examination of the seemingly incongruous terms, "prose" and "verse," as well as a re-evaluation of the relation between them. This is not a simple task, however. While the Master of Philosophy's respective definitions of prose and verse turn out to be amusingly unhelpful, they also turn out to be surprisingly insightful regarding the difficulty involved in defining prose and verse in positive, rather than negative, terms. The prose poem compounds this difficulty. Whereas the *vers libre* transcends the metered poetic line, the *poème en prose* transcends the poetic line all together. In doing so, it removes an important feature from the literary form – that of versification. Until this point in literary history, the organization of syntactical fragments into lines and verses has been a defining characteristic of poetry. And so, its transgression calls into question our conception of poetry's "poeticity." As Todorov concisely puts it, "if poetry is not verse, what is it?" (60). Without versification, how is poetry to be defined? Are there additional factors peculiar to the poetic genre that can be identified as contributing to the poeticity of the *poème en prose*?

Literary critics of the prose poem have attempted to answer this question. Suzanne Bernard proposes three factors: unity ("le poème doit former un tout, un univers fermé, sous peine de perdre sa qualité de poème" ("the poem should form a whole, an enclosed world, lest it lose its poetic quality")), gratuity ("un poème ne se propose aucune fin en dehors de lui-même" ("a poem proposes no purpose beyond its own existence")), and brevity ("plus que le poème en vers, le poème en prose doit éviter les digressions morales ou autres, les développements explicatifs" ("more so than the versified poem, the prose poem must avoid any digressions, moral or otherwise, and any explanatory constructions")). Todorov disagrees, demonstrating that the poeticity of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* lies principally in their rejection of representation. Moreover, he is tempted to conclude that "the identification of poetry with the 'presentative' use of language is a historically circumscribed and culturally determined fact," since "varying conceptions of poetry have existed and will continue to exist from one period or country to another" (77). He leaves the question unanswered, asking instead if there is even such a thing as "a transcultural, transhistorical 'poeticity'" (60). Hermine Riffaterre, on the one hand, believes that there is, and she proposes that it lies in the reader's perception of "constants," which can be instances of intertextuality, rhetorical figures, parallelisms, or picture sequences (101). Michel Beaujour, on the other hand, suspects that "there is little substance behind the smoke; little at least to be apprehended and described by formalist, rhetorical, or stylistic strategies" (40).

Ultimately, the question pertains to genre theory. In asking if there is such a thing as "poeticity," we are asking about the essential nature of the poetic genre. Is poetry inherently different from other prose genres? Or are its defining qualities historically and socially constructed? Ralph Cohen believes that there are no essential generic traits and that genres are contextually and historically dependent. In "History and Genre" (1986), he explains that generic classifications are empirical, not logical: "They are historical assumptions constructed by authors, audiences, and critics in order to serve communicative and aesthetic purposes" (210). For this reason, "Such groupings are always in terms of distinctions and interrelations, and they form a system or community of genres" (210). In addition, "Groupings arise at particular historical moments, and as they include more and more members, they are subject to repeated redefinitions or abandonment" (210). If poetry's definition is dependent on its relation to other genres, and if concepts of genre are historically and socially contingent, then Todorov may be correct to doubt the existence of a "transcultural, transhistorical 'poeticity'."

As socially constructed, historically dependent, and contextually defined categories, genres function within literature in much the same way as genders function within society. Ralph Cohen in fact notes their shared etymological root, as well as their predisposition to hierarchical classification (203). In the context of gender, this hierarchical classification is enforced, according to Monique Wittig, through a process of particularization and universalization. Wittig develops this idea in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (1992) where she equates the feminine with the particular and the masculine with the universal. In “The Mark of Gender,” she discusses the idea in relation to the notion of grammatical gender, the role it plays in language, and more importantly, the role it plays in society. “The mark of gender, according to grammarians, concerns substantives,” she writes, but in her opinion, its effects reach beyond the realm of language (76). As a materialist, Wittig believes that such gendered language “casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it” (78). This process does not affect male and female bodies in the same way, however, because there is, in fact, only one gender – the feminine one. “For the masculine is not the masculine but the general,” Wittig explains in “The Point of View: Universal of Particular?” (60). “The abstract form, the general, the universal, this is what the so-called masculine gender means, for the class of men have appropriated the universal for themselves” (80). As a result, language produces only “the general and the feminine, or rather the general and the mark of the feminine,” she concludes (60).

In the context of literature, prose can be considered an unmarked genre, and poetry a marked one. This classification of poetry and prose can be traced to classical conceptions of language and the way it is used in either genre. As Roland Barthes explains in *Degré zéro de l’écriture* (*Writing Degree Zero*) (1972), prose and poetry are traditionally conceived of in terms of the following equations,

Poetry = Prose + a + b + c

Prose = Poetry – a – b – c,

where a, b, and c are particular attributes of language, “inutiles mais décoratifs, tels que le mètre, la rime ou le rituel des images” (“useless but decorative, such as meter, rhyme, or the convention of imagery”) (35). In this sense, “Toute poésie n’est alors que l’équation décorative, allusive ou chargée, d’une prose virtuelle qui gît en essence et en puissance dans n’importe quelle façon de s’exprimer” (“All poetry is none other than the decorative, allusive, or laden equivalent of an implied prose which underlies any form of expression, whether essentially or potentially”) (35). Prose is the default, universal, and unmarked form of language. And what differentiates it from poetry is the absence of “additional” attributes, such as rhyme, meter, or imagery. Poetry is marked by these formal and stylistic attributes, whereas prose is not seen to have any identifying marks of its own, besides the lack of poetic ones.

In the nineteenth century, conceptions of poetry as a purely decorative form of prose began to evolve: “Les poètes instituent désormais leur parole comme une Nature fermée, qui embrasserait à la fois la fonction et la structure du langage” (“From this moment on, poets established their poetic language as a closed system, which simultaneously encompassed the function and the structure of language”), Barthes explains (36). Poetry became a “substance” and gained “une qualité irréductible” (“an irreducible quality”) (36). But even today, poetry is still particularized with respect to the more general and universal qualities that characterize prose. In *Défigurations du langage poétique* (*Defigurations of Poetic Language*) (1979), Barbara Johnson’s argument for the subversiveness of the prose poem relies on this same concept of marked and unmarked genres. She argues that differentiating between poetry and prose is not a matter of differentiating between their respective attributes; rather, it is a question of differentiating between the presence and absence of defining attributes: “la prose, dans son acception courante” (“prose, as it is currently understood”), she remarks, “n’est pas un énoncé marqué « prose », mais au contraire précisément un énoncé qui *n’est pas marqué*, qui ne porte en lui aucune signalisation métalinguistique” (“is not an utterance marked ‘prose’; on the exact contrary, it is an utterance that *is not marked*, that does not bare any metalinguistic markings") (37).

The prose poem, then, with its hybrid nature, raises the question: is it marked or unmarked? Something cannot be *both* marked and unmarked, or *neither* marked nor unmarked, so it must be one or the other. If we view the prose poem as marked (since it is, ultimately, still a poem), we are left to define the nature of these marks, which, as critics have shown, has proven quite difficult when versification is no longer present. And if we argue that it is unmarked (since it is, after all, written in prose), then it forfeits its poeticity, because its poeticity is ultimately what marks it as distinct from prose. Once again, the oxymoronic quality of the prose poem emerges. And this oxymoronic quality leads us to reassess not only what we classify as "marked" or "unmarked," but our very *definitions* of "marked" and "unmarked." As Johnson concludes, "S'il est impossible de savoir si un énoncé marqué « non Marqué » est ou n'est pas marqué, ce qui est certain, c'est que la définition de « marqué » n'est plus certaine" ("While it is impossible to know whether an utterance marked 'Unmarked' is or is not marked, one thing is clear: that the definition of 'marked' is no longer clear") (54).

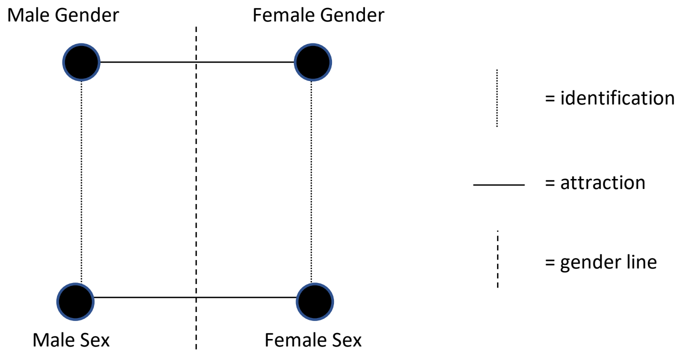
It is this reassessment of classification and definition that constitutes an act of literary queering. If we try to resolve the prose poem's inherent contradiction by reassessing our classification of poetry as marked and prose as unmarked, we are led to one of two conclusions: either poetry is also unmarked, in which case it loses its particularity, or prose is also in fact marked, in which case it loses its universality. In this way, the hierarchical nature of the relation between prose and poetry is dissolved. And if we try to resolve the contradiction by reassessing our definition of "marked," we could perhaps attribute to it alternative qualifications or a range of degree. If it is a question of degree, we might say that prose is also marked, just to a lesser degree than poetry. In this sense, literary writing is only ever more or less poetic, and the prose-poetry binary is in fact a prose-poetry spectrum. Stéphane Mallarmé appears to adhere to this notion of literature when he states in *Sur l'évolution littéraire* (*On Literary Evolution*) that "en vérité, il n'y a pas de prose : il y a l'alphabet et puis des vers plus ou moins serrés : plus ou moins diffus. Toutes les fois qu'il y a effort au style, il y a versification" ("in truth, there is no prose: there is the alphabet and then there are poetic lines, more or less compact, more or less dispersed. Every time there is an attempt at style, there is versification") (*Œuvres Complètes* 2: 698). Or, if it is a question of alternative qualifications, we could redefine the concept of "mark" to include, for example, certain narrative structures. In this case, we might say that prose is also marked, just in a different way than poetry. And by viewing prose as marked in a *different way*, rather than simply to a *different degree*, we bypass the hierarchical relation altogether and subvert the literary paradigm that places prose in opposition to poetry.

One way to queer the gender binary would be to remove the mark of gender from the feminine, thereby eliminating its particularization and its differentiation from the general and masculine. But perhaps a more thorough way to queer the gender binary would be to call into question what a "mark of gender" even is. The prose poem queers literary genres in this way. Rather than simply removing the mark of genre from poetry, it calls into question what we consider to be a mark of genre in the first place. In this sense, it destabilizes not only our conception of poeticity, but also our conception and use of genres in general.

It is perhaps for this reason that the *poème en prose* continues to be considered subversive and troubling. As Michel Delville remarks, "Despite the advent of free verse and the subsequent obsolescence of meter and stylistic criteria for distinguishing poetry from prose, the prose poem has paradoxically continued to be regarded by many as a rather disturbing, if not downright illegitimate mode of literary expression” (4). In “The Rhythmicity of the French Prose Poem” (1999), Clive Scott attributes such qualities to the prose poem’s being more than just an ambiguous genre and a source of duality. He agrees with Mary Ann Caws’s opinion that “Part of the contemporary fascination with the prose poem has to do […] with its supposed potential for multiple perspectives, changeable limits, floating borders, and shifting contours” (“The Self-Defining” 180). Scott argues that “‘Ambiguity’ suggests only the difficulty of making choices, an awareness of the multiplicity of the possible,” whereas “‘floating borders’ suggests, with more relevance, changing one’s mind, the frustrations and fruitlessness of the pursuit of consistency, constant processes of reassessment in a sequential experience” (35). In other words, the prose poem makes for a particularly queer reading experience. More than an ambiguous one, this experience is an unstable one. We are no longer confident that what we are reading counts as a poetic line, and moreover, we are no longer confident of what constitutes a poetic line in the first place.

Section 3: Visualizing the Poetic Line

If we were to visualize the heteronormative paradigm, we might imagine a grouping of dots and lines. The dots could mark normative subject positions regarding sexes and genders, and the lines could mark the normative relations between them. So, from the dot marking “male sex,” there is a line of correspondence linking it to the dot marking “male gender.” Similarly, there is a line linking “female sex” to “female gender.” These are lines of identification. In other words, if one has been identified as having a male sex, one should identify as having a male gender as well. There are also lines of attraction, which link the male side of the paradigm with the female side. In terms of sexual attraction, for example, a line of attraction links male sex-gender with female sex-gender. And finally, there is a line of separation between the male side and the female side of the paradigm so that the male side is perceived as distinct from, and opposite to, the female side. Identification should take place on the same side of this gender line, and attraction should take place across it to incorporate both sides. The paradigm could look like this:



Initial attempts to queer this paradigm have visualized it in different arrangements. One method of visualizing it differently is to manipulate or redraw its lines so that they form alternative relations between subject positions.[47] In other words, instead of linking male sex with female sex in a relation of attraction, an alternative paradigm might bend the line of attraction so that it circles back to the male side of the paradigm, joining male sex with male sex in a relation of sameness (Figure 1, below). And in terms of identification, instead of aligning female sex with female gender, an alternative paradigm could cross the gender line to align female sex with male gender in a gender non-conforming relation (Figure 2, below):

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[47] An equivalent visualization could rearrange or replace the various subject positions, that is, the dots, instead of the lines. For example, "Male Sex" could be replaced with another "Female Sex" so that the line of attraction joins female sex with female sex. I have chosen to highlight manipulations of the lines because these alternative visualizations are more easily distinguishable.

Figure 1

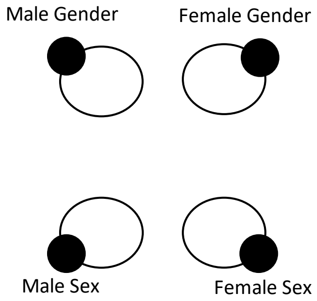
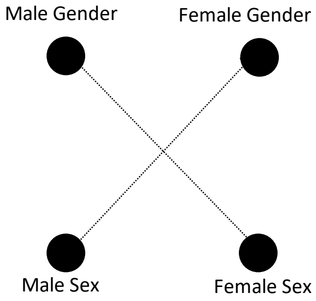


Figure 2



More recent representations of queerness have visualized the paradigm differently by removing its gender line altogether. In doing so, they have eliminated the binary distinction that heteronormativity maintains between male and female, and they have placed the male and female subject positions at opposite ends of a spectrum. This enables the visualization of non-binary gender identities and intersex variations. And this increased diversity of subject positions leads to an increased possibility in relations of attraction, as witnessed by the emergence of pansexuality. The removal of the gender line significantly destabilizes the paradigm and creates too many alternative visualizations to diagram. Generally, however, it enables the lines of identification to join any point between the two original genders with any point between the two original sexes, and it enables the lines of attraction to join any two points between the male and female ends of the sex/gender spectrum.

At the end of the nineteenth century, and at the beginning of the twentieth century, poets begin to visualize the poetic line in a somewhat similar fashion, giving substance and plasticity to an otherwise transparent structural framework so that it might also be manipulated or repositioned upon the page. This section will look at two texts – Guillaume Apollinaire's calligram, "La cravate et la montre" ("The Tie and the Pocket-Watch") and Stéphane Mallarmé's

"Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" ("A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance"). It will examine how each text visualizes the poetic line upon the page, and it will explore how such visualizations relate to the queered paradigm described above.

Black on White: "La Cravate et la montre"

Published in 1918 in Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes: Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre,* "La cravate et la montre" is composed of two distinct images – a tie and a pocket-watch. And each image entails a slightly different visualization of the poetic line upon the page. The tie, as Pénélope Sacks-Galey remarks, is a more solid figure whose interior is composed entirely of words and word fragments (43). The watch, on the other hand, is an emptier figure in which the poem's words and word fragments serve primarily to outline, rather than fill, its shape:

LA CRAVATE
DOU
LOU
REUSE
QUE TU
PORTES
ET QUI T'
ORNE O CI
VILISÉ
OTE- TU VEUX
LA BIEN
SI RESPI
RER

COMME L'ON
S'AMUSE
BI
EN

les la
heures
et le beau
vers Mon
dantesque cœur té
luisant et
cadavérique de

la
le bel les
inconnu Il yeux vie
est Et
— tout pas
5 se
les Muses en ra se
aux portes de fin fi
ton corps ni l'enfant la

dou
l'infini leur
redressé Agla
pas un fou de
de philosophe
mou

rir
semaine la main

Tircis

It is in part for this reason that the tie is a little easier to "read" than the watch. Proceeding from left to right and from top to bottom, like in a conventionally written French poem, the reader can progress, uninterrupted, from the neck of the tie to its split ends. Even though the poem's lines are significantly fragmented, with certain lines containing no more than a single word or syllable, each line still reads horizontally from left to right, and the overall grouping of lines still reads vertically from top to bottom. As a result, it is possible to isolate the poem's text and rewrite it in a more conventional free verse structure, such as:

> LA CRAVATE DOULOUREUSE
> QUE TU PORTES
> ET QUI T'ORNE
> Ô CIVILISÉ
> ÔTE-LA SI TU VEUX
> BIEN RESPIRER
>
> (THE PAINFUL TIE
> THAT YOU WEAR
> AND THAT ADORNS YOU
> O CIVILIZED ONE
> REMOVE IT IF YOU WANT
> TO BREATHE WELL)

This division into lines represents only one possibility out of many, since, by prioritizing the visual width of a tie over syllable-count or rhythm, the poem leaves it to the reader to determine the rhythmic grouping of its words. But while the grouping of the words may vary, the order of the words remains stable, since the left-to-right and top-to-bottom arrangement of the text's lines does not impede its overall linearity in any significant way.

A linear reading of the watch, however, proves more difficult. The reader will likely start with the phrase "Comme l'on s'amuse bien" ("How one enjoys oneself"), which forms the ring at the top of the image, but it immediately becomes unclear whether the line continues to "les heures" ("the hours") directly below, or to the phrase, "la beauté de la vie passe la douleur de mourir" ("the beauty of life passes the pain of dying"), which outlines the circular edge of the watch. In either case, the poetic line does not progress horizontally from left to right, and the reader must decide how to proceed based on certain grammatical and paratextual clues. The groupings of words forming the inner circle, for example, are positioned like numbers on a clock-face, so we might be tempted to read them in a clockwise direction. The capitalized letter of "Mon cœur" ("My heart") signals a possible starting point, like the capitalized letter at the beginning of a sentence. And after completing this clockwise progression, the reader might continue to the remaining part of the image – the two clock hands, which are positioned at five minutes to twelve, and which can be read vertically, like the tie, above. Again, this approach presents only one of several possible readings. As Katherine Shingler has demonstrated, the order in which the various elements of the watch are read can differ from reader to reader.[48] Whereas word and line order remain stable in the image of the tie, they become variable in the image of the pocket-watch. This variability in reading order frustrates any attempt to separate text from image in order to rewrite the poem in linear form. But such non-linearity encourages us to adopt a more global perspective of the text. Focusing on all of the poem's lines simultaneously, rather than successively, we are able to view the larger image that these lines create.

From this perspective, the poetic line no longer functions solely as a supporting structure to metrically or rhythmically organize groups of words; it also functions as a material component of the poem, with its groupings of black letters contrasting against the white page in such a way as to outline the shape of a pocket-watch. And in order to trace the curved outline of a pocket-watch, the calligram's lines must do something that the poetic line has never done before: they must bend and curve, tracing arced and circular trajectories as well as straight ones. Poets over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have taken on various aspects of the poetic line (challenging its syntactical-metrical alignment, its fixed syllable-count, its rhyming endings, and its length), but until Apollinaire's calligrams, one concept remains untouched and unquestioned – the poetic line's orientation upon the page.

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[48] See "Perceiving Text and Image in Apollinaire's Calligrammes," in which Shingler attempts to determine if readers can attend to the textual and visual components of the calligram simultaneously. In order to better understand how readers perceive and comprehend a calligram, she analyses their eye movements as they view/read "La cravate et la montre." Her analysis documents a significant variety of reading patterns.

It is this characteristic, more so than its combination of text and image, that renders Apollinaire's calligram truly novel, since the concept of worded images has been around for centuries. In "Beyond the Word: Italian Visual Poetry and its French Antecedents," Giovanna Wedel de Stasio explains that worded images represent a continuation of "an old manneristic tradition typified by the Greek *technopegnia* or poems shaped as objects (3rd century B.C.)" (138-39). These *technopegnia* were followed by "the *carmina figurata* composed by Latin Medieval poets, in the shape of crosses, angels, chalices, and other Christian emblems" (139). In the sixteenth century, "poems shaped as objects (e.g., wings, eggs, leaves, bottles) were still quite popular," and in the seventeenth century, "it is possible to find many poems in the shape of animals (particularly peacocks)" (139). But the *technopegnia* and the *carmina figurata,* as well as their early-modern descendants, recall the solid nature of the calligram's tie more than the outlined nature of its pocket-watch. As such, they maintain the left-to-right and top-to-bottom reading direction with lines oriented horizontally and grouped vertically. The lines of the pocket-watch, however, which are not limited to the cardinal directions, are more daring and more novel in terms of their orientation upon the page.

But is there any queerness to the bent and freely oriented lines of the calligram's pocket-watch? Does this text's visualization of the poetic line upon the page form a literary equivalent to any of the queered heteronormative paradigms visualized above? While it is true that these visualizations also bend and re-orient the lines of the paradigm, just as the calligram bends and re-orients the poetic line upon the page, this manipulation of lines is not necessarily enough to constitute an act of queering. The paradigm's lines are lines of relation, meaning they exist to demonstrate the relation between sexes and genders in terms of identification or attraction. In other words, it is not just the lines that are manipulated in the queered visualizations; this manipulation serves ultimately to alter the relation between the subject positions that the lines connect. When the vertical lines of identification are re-oriented, for example, male sex can be paired with female gender, or female sex with male gender, in a gender-nonconforming relation. And when the horizontal lines of attraction are bent in a circular fashion, male can be paired with male, or female with female, in a homosexual relation. It is possible to bend and re-orient the paradigm's lines without altering the subject positions that they connect, however. Male sex can be joined to female sex by a bent, wandering line of attraction, for example, but this line still ultimately links the two in a normative relation. In this sense, a bent line may indicate deviance (from the normative, straight line), but it is not necessarily queer. Similarly, the poetic lines of Apollinaire's calligrams may be deviant, but they are not for that reason queer.

The bent and freely oriented lines of the calligram's pocket-watch can only be considered queer if they alter a certain normative relation. Are any such relations at play in the pocket-watch? It depends on what aspect of the poem we are looking at. With respect to the poem as a semantic text, there are relations of signification: As an expressive text, the poem as a whole relies upon a fundamental relation in its production of meaning – that between signifier and signified. And with respect to the poem as a visual text, there are relations of form: As a calligram, the poem relies upon a fundamental relation regarding its delineation of an image – that between the black text of its lines and the white space of its page.

With respect to relations of signification, calligrams in general alter the conventional relation between signifier and signified by adding image-based signifiers to their text-based signifiers. In “The Tie and the Pocket-Watch,” however, the relation between signifier and signified is altered in a more substantial, and possibly queer, way. This occurs in the poetic lines representing the hours of the clock-face. In the position corresponding to “1 o’clock,” Apollinaire places the phrase “Mon cœur” (“My heart”); for “2 o’clock,” he writes “les yeux” (“the eyes”), and for “3 o’clock,” he puts “l’enfant” (“the child”), continuing in this manner through 12 o’clock. As Peter Gahl points out, such phrases “evade the *technopaignion* principle, for they do not form an image or a part of it” (121). “Mon coeur” does not visually resemble the number “1” in any way. Instead, it alludes to this number discursively, forming a new relation of signification between “Mon coeur” (“My heart”) and “1 o’clock.”

With the conventional signifier for one o’clock (“1,” “I”, “one,” etc.) having been replaced by the phrase “Mon cœur” (“My heart”), an alternative relation of signification is formed. And this relation of signification is a little less evident to readers than the conventional one. As Per Nykrog remarks, the phrases indicating the numbers on the clock-face are not the kinds of puzzles we are used to solving in conventional processes of interpretation. This is because “le lecteur n’a pas besoin de trouver le mot d’une énigme pour arriver au chiffre qui appartient à chaque place, il le sait bien en avance” (“the reader does not need to solve an enigma in order to find the number that belongs in each position; he knows it well in advance”) (117). “The problem is rather of understanding *why* one phrase or another represents a certain number,” explains Gahl (121). We do not have to determine what “Mon cœur” signifies. We already know that it signifies “1 o’clock.” What we must determine is the relation of signification that joins them. In other words, we have the dots, but we must draw the line between them.

Scholars and critics have tried their hand at establishing this relation. While most tend to agree that “Mon cœur” replaces the number “1” to signify “1 o’clock” because we have only one heart, and that “les yeux” (“the eyes”) signifies “2 o’clock” because we have two eyes or because “les yeux” rhymes with “deux” (“two”), other numbers inspire a myriad of explanations. This is especially true of the number 6, which is replaced by the word “Tircis.” On the one hand, Anne Hyde Greet and S.I. Lockerbie, in their edition of Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*, read “Tircis” as a pun on the phrase “tire six” (“take six”) (388). On the other hand, Gahl points to the correspondence between the number of letters in “Tircis” and the hour that it replaces. Or, as an alternative explanation, he notes that “tircis” is the common French name “for the speckled wood (*pararge aegeria*) butterfly,” of which the male sex of certain varieties bears “six conspicuous specks on the upper side of the wings” (126). Similarly, for the number 10, which Apollinaire replaces with the phrase, “le bel inconnu” (the beautiful stranger), Greet and Lockerbie point to the fact that “an unknown person is designated by X,” and that “X” is also the roman numeral for “10” (387). Heep, however, proposes a religious interpretation, in which “le bel inconnu” (“the beautiful stranger”) corresponds to Jesus (93). He also sees a correspondence between the beauty of this unknown person and “les yeux” (“the eyes”) of the 2 o’clock position (which mirrors the 10 o’clock position) since “beauty is perceived through sight” (93). Nykrog and Sacks-Galey both point to a literary interpretation, explaining that *Guiglain ou le Bel Inconnu* (*Sir Gingalain or The Fair Unknown*) is the title of a medieval romance, but it is unclear how this relates to the number 10 (Nykrog 118, Sacks-Galey 113).

I am less concerned with establishing explanations for Apollinaire’s alternative signifiers and more interested in the fact that it has proven rather difficult to do so. Several of the explanations proposed by critics seem stretched, to say the least. We have not even found (if there is one to find) a consistent *category* of relations (some measure quantity in terms of the body, like “Mon cœur” (“My heart”) and “les yeux” (“the eyes”); others measure quantity in terms of the signifiers’ letter-count, like “Tircis” and “semaine” (“week”); and others rely upon cultural knowledge, like “les 9 muses” (“the 9 muses”) and “le vers dantesque” (“the Dantean meter”)). The reason that these relations are not immediately evident to the reader, or easily categorizable, is that Apollinaire not only avoids denotative signifiers (“1,” “I,” “one,” “—,” etc.), but also connotative signifiers (their less direct, but still culturally recognized equivalents). The poet could have replaced the conventional denotative signifiers with certain connotations, such as the pronoun “Je” (“I”) or the word “Unique,” which evoke the number “1” a little more easily than the phrase “My heart,” for example. But Apollinaire does not employ culturally recognized equivalents, opting, it seems, for more personal associations. Denotations and connotations are types of relations that function on a cultural level, whereas associations need only function on an individual level. For this reason, Apollinaire’s various phrases do not constitute culturally recognized signifiers. And as such, they are not located on the normative paradigm of signification. In other words, Apollinaire’s phrases constitute alternative dots that exist apart from the conventional line of relation. These outlying signifiers alter the normative relation of signification, skewing the line of relation, which must now connect a normative signified (the hours) with a non-normative signifier (Apollinaire’s personal associations with the numbers 1 through 12).

How does this queered relation between signifier and signified relate to the materiality and plasticity of the calligram's poetic lines? In a conventional clock-face, "1 o'clock" can be marked in various ways: with the number, "1," the roman numeral, "I," the word, "one," or simply with a line. As this last instance reveals, it is not the line itself that signifies "1 o'clock," since all hours are typically marked with identical lines; rather, it is the *position* of the line on the clock-face that carries significance and indicates the corresponding hour. And in the poem, it is the position of "Mon coeur" on the page that signifies "1 o'clock." It is only a material, plastic, and freely oriented poetic line that can be positioned in such a significant way.

As a *visual* text, as well as a semantic text, the calligram relies upon another type of relation – that between positively and negatively delineated space, between the black markings of the text and the white blankness of the page. The image created by the calligram is filled-in or outlined in black, so, in order to view or read the calligram, we focus on the black marks of its letters, words, and lines. In this sense, a normative relation between text and page presents the black text as significant and the white page as insignificant. That is to say, the negatively defined white space of the page does not signify. It merely serves as a contrasting background against which the positively defined black marks can be viewed and interpreted.

But just as the hours of the clock-face alter the relation between signifier and signified, they alter the relation between text and page, as well. It is the *position* of "Mon coeur" that indicates "1 o'clock," more so than the meaning or appearance of the words, and this is the case for all of the phrases indicating the hours of the clock-face. Where they are positioned on the page determines their meaning. In this case, then, meaning is also derived from the blank, white space underlying the words, and not just from the words themselves (whether semantically or visually). White space is made to signify as much as black marks, and the normative relation between signifying text and non-signifying page is altered.

The signifying quality of the white page is not common to calligrams in general however; it can only be glimpsed in this particular part of this particular calligram. As Gahl remarks, "In no other of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* is the mechanism of visual poetry similarly contaminated with 'non-figurative' elements (the purely verbal signifiers representing the clock's figures) – a feature which makes *La Cravate et la montre* quite unique" (121). It is the non-figurative nature of these elements in particular that enables Apollinaire to replace normative signifiers, which rely on denotations or connotations, with non-normative signifiers, which rely on unconventional or personal associations. And it is the signifying capacity of positions on a clock-face that enables Apollinaire to focus the reader's attention on the poetic line *in space*, where the white space in which the line is positioned signifies as much as the meaning of the line or the shapes that it forms. Without such particular characteristics (the use of a clock-face and non-figurative elements), calligrams, in general, do not alter relations of signification or form in any significant way, and they do not function as literary equivalents to the queered heteronormative paradigms above. Their novel orientation of the poetic line upon the page may be deviant, but it is not queer. And their reliance upon the visual as well as semantic qualities of the poetic line may in fact reinforce the poem's positive delineation of space, where the reader focuses on the black marks of its words and lines as both semantically and visually significant, overlooking the signifying potential of the white page.

White on Black: "Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard"

Stéphane Mallarmé composed his last complete poetic text, "Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" ("A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance"), in 1897 for publication in the magazine *Cosmopolis*. The poem is a monumental work of twenty pages, with a complex syntax of interweaving and nesting subordinate clauses and a widely varied typography, which ranges in weight from bold to italic and which ranges in size from three-point to twenty-two-point fonts (Bloch 22). Its fragmented poetic lines, which vary in length, are dispersed and scattered across its pages, and they are often surrounded by large areas of white space. “Les ‘blancs,’ en effet, assument l’importance, frappent d’abord” (“The ‘white spaces,’ in fact, take on significance, become the most striking aspect”), remarks Mallarmé in the preface to the original publication (*Œuvres Complètes* 1: 391). Normally, we pay much more attention to the poetic line than we do to the blank space of the page that surrounds it. But in “A Throw of the Dice,” this blank space becomes more noticeable and more important. In fact, it becomes as significant to our interpretation of the poem as the poetic line itself. As this section aims to demonstrate, if we are to fully appreciate the poem on an oral, a visual, and a semantic level, we can no longer read the poetic line in isolation, separated from the page around it. And if we are to more fully apprehend the iridescent *Idée* (Idea) that the poem aspires to represent, we must learn to read the white space of the page like we do the black marks of the text. How does such a visualization of the poetic line on the page relate to the queered heteronormative paradigms, above? And how might this relation enhance our conception and representation of queerness?

In his preface to the poem, Mallarmé compares “A Throw of the Dice” to a musical score: “de cet emploi à nu de la pensée avec retraits, prolongements, fuites, ou son dessin même, résulte, pour qui veut lire à haute voix, une partition” (“this visual dissection of thought, with its indentations, prolongations, fugues, and overall appearance on the page, produces, for those who wish to read it aloud, a musical score”) (1: 391). This “emploi à nu de la pensée” (“visual dissection of thought”) refers to the exposition of a thought in its various layers and parts. In this case, it is the poem's principal phrase, "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" ("A throw of the dice will never abolish chance"), whose composite layers and parts are exposed. Its fragmentation begins in the opening pages of the text, with the first four words, "UN COUP DE DÉS" ("A THROW OF THE DICE") isolated on the right-hand side of the first Page.[49] Written in capitalized letters and 22-point font, the fragment looks a lot like a title, but upon turning the page, we realize that it continues, in the same typeface, with the word "JAMAIS" ("NEVER"), on Page 2. We cannot read the rest of the phrase, however, because it is interrupted by a subordinate clause, written underneath in slightly smaller font, which reads: "QUAND BIEN MÊME LANCÉ DANS DES CIRCONSTANCES / ÉTERNELLES / DU FOND D'UN NAUFRAGE" ("EVEN WHEN THROWN UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES / EVERLASTING / FROM THE DEPTHS OF A SHIPWRECK"). This clause is in turn interrupted by the lines of Page 3, which are of smaller type face again, and which evoke images of a shipwreck in a stormy sea. The poem continues in this manner, interweaving different layers of thought and distinguishing between them by the use of different typefaces. In his comparison of the text to a musical score, Mallarmé explains that "La différence des caractères d'imprimerie entre le motif prépondérant, un secondaire et d'adjacents, dicte son importance à l'émission orale" ("The difference in typeface between the principal motif and secondary or adjacent ones signals their respective importance to the oral performance of the text"), and he adds that "la portée, moyenne, en haut, en bas de page, notera que monte ou descend l'intonation" ("the ranging position of the lines, from the middle, to the top, to the bottom of the page, indicates whether the reader's intonation is to rise or fall") (1: 391-92).

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[49] Following the convention established by Robert Cohen, I have used the capitalized Page to designate each folio.

Michel Murat proposes that the metaphor of the musical score serves to remind us that there is an oral component to the text and to provide a familiar analogy through which to understand a formally unusual poem (107). But with respect to the poetic line, more specifically, the comparison of the text to a musical score highlights the need to read the line in relation to the page around it. Musical notes on a score are identified in two ways – rhythmically and melodically. Their rhythmic value is established by their appearance (for example, the difference between a whole note, half note, and quarter note), but their melodic value is established by their position (where lower positions on the staff correspond to lower pitches and higher positions to higher pitches). The poem functions in much the same way, with its typefaces corresponding to the oral weight of the line and its line position indicating rising or descending intonation. For this reason, our oral interpretation of the poem relies upon the typographic appearance of the poetic lines, as well as their position on the page.

With respect to our visual interpretation of the text, the page plays an equally important role. On Pages 3 and 4, the majority of the poetic lines span the width of two pages, so that we are encouraged to view both pages simultaneously, as a folio. The inevitable central page-break, however, creates a noticeable gap in the poetic line that crosses over it. As a result, the white space of the margins that normally mark the beginning and end of the poetic line now emerges from within the line's interior. But such a visual disturbance actually enriches our interpretation of the line. On Page 3, for example, the central margin appears between the words "par" and "avance" of the line, "par   avance retombé d'un mal à redresser le vol" ("already on its way back down as it struggles to remain even keel"), which describes the plunging helm of the ship as it seesaws in the storm. The whiteness of the page surges up in the middle of the line, breaking it in two, much like "l'Abîme blanchi" ("the white Abyss") of the stormy sea breaking through the hull of the ship. Such a visualization of the storm and shipwreck is further reinforced by the arrangement of the poetic lines on the page. As Michel Murat has remarked, the slanting accumulation of lines on Page 3 visually recreates the appearance of an upended ship (130). And with the lines' representing the body of the ship, the central page-break functions to depict the breach in its hull. Similarly, the lines of Page 4 can be read as a visual representation of a whirlpool, with the white space of the central margin depicting the hollow center of the whirlpool's vortex. In this sense, as well, the white space of the page functions as an integral part of the text's visual representation, rather than simply serving as its background or frame.

Whereas the white space of the page contributes in a fairly straightforward way to our oral and visual interpretations of the poem, its contribution to our semantic interpretation is a little more complicated. This is partly because the poem's narrative coherence is often already obscured by the text's syntax, whose interweaving and nesting clauses consistently interrupt any one line of thought. Page 4, for example, picks up the supplemental narration of the storm at sea to recount the final moments of the ship and its captain. The captain of the sinking ship holds the dice in his hand, hesitating to throw it. Will he let the fateful number remain forever undetermined in his clenched fist, or will he roll the dice in vain, out into the stormy waves? It remains to be determined since, with the turn of the page, the poem returns to its principal phrase. The words "N'ABOLIRA" ("WILL ABOLISH") appear in 22-point font at the bottom of Page 5, forming a continuation of the previously interrupted fragment, "UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS" ("A THROW OF THE DICE NEVER"). But before the phrase can continue any further, it is interrupted once more by the supplemental narrative, which intervenes on Page 6. The text on this Page both starts and ends with the expression "COMME SI" ("AS IF"), a repetition that gives it an air of stasis as the text circles back to where it started, much like the "simple insinuation" (simple insinuation) that it describes circling around the mouth of the abyss. Page 7 then interrupts this supplemental narrative of the shipwreck with another layer of thought – the description of a solitary feather poised on a dark velvet hat. Richard Weisberg sees in this image a reference to Hamlet and his well-known struggle with indecision (790). Page 8 brings us back to the sea narrative by depicting the fleeting image of a mermaid as she suns on a rock before disappearing into the mist. And Page 9 returns to the poem's principal theme – that of a dice throw and the chance that it fails to abolish. The words, "LE HASARD" ("CHANCE"), also written in 22-point font, finally conclude the poem's principal phrase: "UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS … N'ABOLIRA … LE HASARD" ("A THROW OF THE DICE NEVER … WILL ABOLISH … CHANCE").

Like a rolling dice that eventually comes to a stop, revealing the number that chance had kept uncertain, the poem's principal phrase has finally come to an end, providing a long-anticipated resolution to the "rythmique suspens" ("rhythmic suspense") created by its accumulating subordinate clauses. All that was suspended in numeric and syntactic indeterminacy is now determined. And with the conclusion of this phrase, the quill appears to drop from the poet's hand, like the dice from the captain's. Directly under the words "LE HASARD" ("CHANCE"), we read: "*Choit / la plume / rythmique suspens du sinistre / s'ensevelir / aux écumes originelles / naguères d'où sursauta son délire jusqu'à une cime / flétrie / par la neutralité identique du gouffre*" ("*Falls / the quill / rhythmic suspense of the destruction / to bury itself / in the original spray / from which, not that long ago, its delirium leapt to the heights / withered / by the corresponding neutrality of the abyss*"). The italicized clause, like an extraneous stage direction, describes the last, permanent descent of the poet's quill toward the white abyss of the page. This quill, whose "blancheur rigide" ("rigid whiteness") once gleamed in contrast to the dark sky, is now “flétrie” (“withered”), beaten and disheveled, as a result of its encounter with the cold disinterest of the abyss that is both stormy sea and blank page. And like the sunken shipwreck embedded on the ocean floor, the quill now lies dormant on the white abyss of the page.

But the poem does not end here. With the principal phrase concluded, it picks up a new main clause, also written in capitalized letters, but of slightly smaller size. Spanning the last two Pages of the poem, this clause reads (without the interjecting subordinate clauses): “RIEN … N’AURA EU LIEU … QUE LE LIEU … EXCEPTÉ … PEUT-ÊTRE … UNE CONSTELLATION” (“NOTHING … WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE … BUT PLACE ITSELF … EXCEPT … PERHAPS … A CONSTELLATION”). All traces of the captain-poet’s struggle against the stormy sea/blank page have disappeared “dans les parages / du vague / en quoi toute réalité se dissout” (“in these waters / nebulous / in which all reality dissolves”) (Page 10). And all that remains visible is a silent, shimmering constellation, “à l’altitude … aussi loin qu’un endroit fusionne avec au delà” (“at a height … so great that place fuses with the beyond”) (Page 11).

This residual image remains the focus of the poem’s final Page, over the course of which it appears to merge visually, conceptually, and metaphorically with the text itself: “Ce doit être / le Septentrion” (“It must be / the Septentrional constellation”), we learn. Mallarmé’s reference to this particular group of stars recalls the concluding image of “Sonnet in -x,” where, “dans l’oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe / de scintillations sitôt le septuor” (“in the mirror’s framed oblivion are fixed / by the sparkling twinkle of its stars, the septet”). Through his reference to the musical term “septet,” Mallarmé encourages the reader to establish an aural connection between constellation and text, in which the constellation’s seven stars parallel the sonnet’s seven rhymes, as Alain Chestier has noted (48). In “A Throw of the Dice,” the connection is established visually. As Cohn has pointed out, the arrangement of the text on the page in fact resembles the shape of the Big Dipper (27-28). It can be seen to cover the whole of Page 11, with its handle on the left page and its trough on the right. And it can be seen again, in miniature, in the cluster of lines concluding the poem.

A connection between constellation and text is established conceptually, as well, by the supplemental clauses of Page 11. Their description of the constellation is abstract enough that it can also be read as a description of the poem itself, as well as a description of a rolling dice: The constellation is described as cosmically enumerating, “sur quelque surface vacante et supérieure, le heurt successif […] d’un compte total en formation” (“on some high and vacant surface, the successive impacts […] of a final sum in formation”) (Page 11). Such a description also evokes a sort of tallying of dice rolls, or alternatively, the progressive formation the poem, whose subordinate phrases jostle each other as they accumulate on the blank page. The text continues after this description with an accumulation of present participles: “veillant / doutant / roulant / brillant et méditant” (“watching / doubting / rolling / shining and contemplating”), where the implied subject of each verb appears to alternate between constellation, text, and dice. And the conclusion of the phrase – “avant de s’arrêter / à quelque point dernier qui le sacre” (“before stopping / at some final point that crowns it”) – could be read as referring to all three at once: Just as a rolling dice eventually comes to a stop under its crowning number, so a constellation moving slowly through the sky eventually reaches its pinnacle, and a text unfolding thought by thought eventually arrives at its anointing phrase. The poem then comes to an end itself, its own anointing phrase written simply at the bottom of the Page: “Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés” (“Every Thought yields a Throw of the Dice”).

For Mallarmé, a thought is not a simple or linear event, which means its transcription onto the page cannot be, either. As the poet states in "Crise de vers" ("Crisis of Verse"), "l'acte poétique consiste à voir soudain qu'une idée se fractionne en un nombre de motifs" ("the poetic act consists in suddenly remarking that an idea fragments into a number of motifs") (*Œuvres Complètes* 2: 209). This is why, as he explains in the preface to "A Throw of the Dice," "il ne s'agit pas, ainsi que toujours, de traits sonores réguliers ou vers – plutôt, de subdivisions prismatiques de l'Idée" ("as is always the case, it is not about regular sonorous characteristics or poetic lines –rather, it is about prismatic subdivisions of the Idea") (*Œuvres Complètes* 1: 392). Like a prism splitting light into its composite colors, the poetic act splits *l'Idée* (the Idea) into its composite layers and constellates them across the page. The poet has no more control over the nature of this fragmentation and dispersal than he does over the outcome of a dice throw. His task, nonetheless, is to roll this dice, and to work toward a syntactical, oral, and visual representation of the dispersed fragments. With every new thought, a new dice roll, and a different prismatic scattering to transcribe onto the Page.

The poet's endeavor to transcribe this process is what gives the poem its characteristic, constellated, appearance. On some pages, the text is grouped around focal points, and on others, it is scattered across the expanse of the Page, like stars in the sky. Such a visual presentation of poetic lines encourages us, in fact, to perceive the text as we would perceive a constellation. In "Écrire au 'folio du ciel': Le Modèle de la constellation dans *Un Coup de Dés* de Mallarmé" ("Writing on the 'Folio of the Sky': The Shape of the Constellation in 'A Throw of the Dice' by Mallarmé"), Elsa Courant remarks that "la lecture du « Coup de Dés » nous impose d'effectuer un travail de liaison entre des syntagmes dispersés, exactement comme nous le ferions pour identifier une constellation" ("the task of reading 'A Throw of the Dice' requires us to engage in a process of connecting the dispersed syntactic units, exactly as we would connect dispersed stars when identifying a constellation") (884). This act of connecting is facilitated by Mallarmé's use of varying typefaces, where certain words "ressortent davantage par leur taille, leur police, leur isolement sur le blanc de la page" ("stand out on account of their size, their typeface, their isolation against the white of the page") in a way that corresponds to "les différences de brillance, de taille, d'importance des étoiles qui définissent les groupements des constellations" ("the differing brightness, size, and importance of the stars characterizing the groups of stars in a constellation") (884). When we "read" a constellation, we do not recognize and interpret each star individually; rather, we look at all of its stars at once and recognize the relation between them. Approaching the text in a similar manner allows us to adopt a more global perspective, to view the various layers of thought simultaneously, and to consider how they might fit together to form a signifying whole. For this reason, a contextualized visualization of the poetic line, which takes into consideration the lines' arrangement on the surrounding page, becomes essential if we are to more fully appreciate the poem on a semantic level.

But the gradual fusion of text and constellation is significant for another reason, as well: it brings the poem closer to what Mallarmé has termed *l'œuvre pure* (the pure literary work). This *œuvre pure* is a theoretical ideal toward which every literary composition aspires. It remains just beyond reach, however, because every spoken or written composition must rely on the medium of language. And language is flawed. As Mallarmé remarks in "Crise de vers" ("Crisis of Verse"), "Les langues imparfaites en cela que plusieurs, manque la suprême : […] la diversité, sur terre, des idiomes empêche personne de proférer les mots qui, sinon se trouveraient, par une frappe unique, elle-même matériellement la vérité" ("Languages, imperfect because multiple, lack the one, supreme language: […] the diversity of dialects on Earth prevents any individual from uttering words which would constitute, in their singular materiality, the truth") (*Œuvres Complètes* 2: 208). With every different language, a different representation of the truth. There is no single language which is, itself, truth. Furthermore, a frustrating disparity often exists between the aesthetic qualities of words and the ideas that they serve to evoke. Mallarmé gives the example of the words "nuit" ("night") and "jour" ("day"): "quelle déception, devant la perversité conférant à *jour* comme à *nuit*, contradictoirement, des timbres obscur ici, là clair" ("such disappointment, when faced with the distortion that assigns, in contrary fashion, 'day' a dark timber and 'night' a light timber") (2: 208). Upon pronouncing *nuit*, we inevitably introduce bright timbers into a word that serves to evoke darkness, and upon pronouncing *jour*, we do the contrary. "Tourné à de l'esthétique" ("Becoming quickly concerned with the question of esthetics"), comments Mallarmé, "mon sens regrette que le discours défaille à exprimer les objets par des touches y répondant en coloris ou en allure" ("my senses lament the fact that discourse fails to express things through strokes that correspond in coloring or appearance") (2: 208).

And so, there is a chance that with every word put to paper, the poem deviates a little further from the purity and potential of its originally blank page. The poet's task, however, is to abolish this chance, one word at a time, by using language in such a way as to offset its inherent imperfections and limitations. This use of language is what differentiates poetry from "l'universel *reportage*" ("the all-purpose *reporting*") of everyday use (2: 212). "Au contraire d'une fonction de numéraire facile et représentatif, comme le traite d'abord la foule, le dire, avant tout, rêve et chant, retrouve chez le Poëte, par nécessité constitutive d'un art consacré aux fictions, sa virtualité" ("Whereas the masses treat speech – first and foremost a form of dreaming and singing – as a simple and representative means of exchange, the Poet, whose art requires the act of fabrication, recovers its potential”), states Mallarmé (2: 213). Poetry must recover language’s potential so that it might regain or recreate – through text – the potential of the originally blank page. *L’œuvre pure* is the literary work that accomplishes this impossible task. And for this reason, it alone is capable of truly and fully representing *l’Idée* (the Idea).

In “Crisis of Verse,” Mallarmé describes the nature and functioning of the pure text. He explains that “l’œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poëte, qui cède l’initiative aux mots” (“the pure literary work entails the elocutary disappearance of the poet, who hands his initiative over to the words themselves”) (2: 211). Mobilised “par le heurt de leur inégalité” (“by the friction of their unevenness”), these words “s’allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l’ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction enthousiaste de la phrase” (“light up from their reciprocal reflections like a streak of fire reflecting off the surfaces of precious stones, replacing the poet’s perceptible breath with the ancient lyrical murmur or the enthusiastic flow of the phrase”) (2: 211). The poet, as speaker, will have stepped back so that the words might act on their own accord, undirected and unrestrained in their potential. The poem will be animated from within by the breath of an ancient lyricism or the flow of its phrasing. And most remarkably, it will be a silent and radiant writing, whose words shine and reflect off one another like a flame off polished gemstones. It is perhaps for this reason that “A Throw of the Dice,” like “Sonnet in -x,” concludes with the image of a shimmering constellation. Silent, autonomous, and radiant, this cosmic writing in the sky offers a sublime visualization of *l’œuvre pure*.

But a key difference separates the poetic text from the constellation with which it has been gradually merging. Whereas the constellation’s white stars shine against a black sky, the text’s black words contrast against a white page. Mallarmé is acutely aware of the less lustrous dynamic between text and page. “On n’écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur” (“One does not write, luminously, against a dark background”), he remarks in “L’action restreinte” (“Action Restrained”), “l’alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s’indique […] l’homme poursuit noir sur blanc” (“the alphabet of the stars, alone, presents as such […] man proceeds in black on white”) (2: 215). And this is, inevitably, also the case for “A Throw of the Dice.” The poem’s written words do not shine brightly against a dark background like the stars of a constellation; nor do they glow and reflect off each other like a streak of fire off gemstones. Despite the poet’s efforts to mitigate the imperfections of language, the poem’s text will never fully assume the radiant quality of *l’œuvre pure*. And for this reason, it will only ever produce a lackluster representation of *l’Idée*.

This is perhaps why Mallarmé encourages us to read more than the poem’s text. When defining and explaining the act of reading in “Le Mystère dans les lettres” (“The Mystery in Letters”), he emphasizes our interaction with “le blanc” (“the white space”) more than our interaction with the written text itself:

> Lire –
>
> Cette pratique –
>
> Appuyer, selon la page, au blanc, qui l’inaugure son ingénuité, à soi, oublieuse même du titre qui parlerait trop haut : et, quand s’aligna, dans une brisure, la moindre, disséminée, le hasard vaincu mot par mot, indéfectiblement le blanc revient, tout à l’heure gratuit, certain maintenant, pour conclure que rien au-delà et authentiquer le silence –
>
> Virginité qui solitairement, devant une transparence du regard adéquat, elle-même s’est comme divisée en ses fragments de candeur, l’un et l’autre, preuves nuptiales de l’Idée.
>
> L’air ou chant sous le texte, conduisant la divination d’ici là, y applique son motif en fleuron et cul-de-lampe invisibles. (2: 234)

> (Reading –
>
> This practice –
>
> To bring to the inaugural white space of the page one's own openness, unmindful of even the loud typeface of the title: and, when, vanquished word by word, chance has been straightened out into the smallest of scattered fragments, the initially gratuitous white space invariably returns, this time conclusive, to affirm that there is nothing more and to authenticate the silence –
>
> Purity which has, under the clarity of the correct gaze, divided into its own candid fragments, each proof of the pureness of the Idea.
>
> The air or melody underlying the text, carrying the prophecy from one point to another, stamps this white space with its invisible fleuron.)

It is the white space, not the word, that both inaugurates the page and concludes the text. And its invariable return, after even the smallest alignment of words, authenticates the presence and role of silence in our reading. When regarded in a certain way by the reader, this white space appears to split into fragments, much like the textual representation of *l'Idée.* And when the underlying "air ou chant" ("air or melody") that silently drives the text comes to an end, it stamps its invisible fleuron in the white space at the bottom of the page. If we are to read this white space, and the silence that it represents, we must adopt an ingenuous "transparence du regard" ("clarity of gaze") that is not limited in focus to the black text of the poetic line. This unreserved reading approach will look past even the looming words of the title in order to engage with the white fragments of silence around it. Unlike the poem's fragments of text, which produce a lackluster representation of the Idea, the poem's fragments of silence serve to authenticate its purity. They are, as Mallarmé terms it, "preuves nuptiales de l'Idée" ("proof of the pureness of the Idea"). Free of the imperfections of language that haunt the poem's text, they retain the purity and potential of the originally blank page.

This silent white space is part of any page of text. But in “A Throw of the Dice,” it is incorporated *into* the poem itself, contributing to our reading on an oral, a visual, and a semantic level. Even if we cannot read white space as we would read words, it is as much a part of the poem as the text itself. And by incorporating the white space of the page into the poem, Mallarmé incorporates, along with it, the purity and potential that it has retained. In this way, “A Throw of the Dice” does, in theory, have the ability to truly and fully represent the Idea. This ability simply resides in the signifying white space of its page, rather than in the words of its text. If we can succeed in adopting an ingenuous “clarity of gaze” that can “read” this white space as well as the text, we might be able to glimpse the luminous Idea behind the poem’s prismatic representation of thought.

How does Mallarmé’s literary theory relate to the queered heteronormative paradigms above? Initial alternative visualizations of the paradigm are formed by manipulating heteronormativity’s lines of attraction and identification so that the relations between its subject positions are, in turn, altered. For example, the heteronormative line of attraction joining male sex to female sex can be visualized differently so that it joins male sex to male sex in a homosexual relation. Similarly, the heteronormative line of identification joining female sex to female gender can be visualized differently so that it joins female sex with male gender in a gender non-conforming relation. These visualizations are limited, however, to working with the subject positions and relations that construct the original heteronormative paradigm: Like the heteronormative paradigm, the queered paradigms consist of four dots representing two possible sexes and two possible genders. And like the heteronormative paradigm, they also use lines of identification and lines of attraction. More recent alternative visualizations of the paradigm have mitigated this limitation, to a certain extent, by adding new subject positions (non-binary genders and intersex variations) and new relations of attraction (pansexuality) to the paradigm. But these queered paradigms are still based on an internal relation of identity between sex and gender, and an external relation of attraction, whatever the nature of these relations may be. In this sense, they have expanded the alternatively visualized paradigms, but they have retained the basic framework of the original, heteronormative paradigm. If we were to apply Mallarmé's literary theory to queer theory, we might say that the queered paradigms are limited by a flawed medium – the intentionally restricted language of heteronormativity. And for this reason, these queered paradigms can only ever be lackluster representations of queerness, whose radiance remains as difficult to fully and truly capture as the radiance of the Idea at the origin the poem.

This is not to say that the queered paradigms are without value. They are as valuable to our understanding of queerness as the written or spoken text is to our understanding of a poem. And it is not to say that the alternatively visualized paradigms ineffectively queer the original. They very efficiently derange the supposed logic of heteronormativity. It is simply to suggest that by acknowledging the possibility of the paradigms' limitations, and by entertaining the theoretical possibility of an "iridescent queerness" comparable to Mallarmé's luminous Idea, we can expand our conception and representation of queerness and tackle more pervasive norms shaping notions of identification and attraction.

In "A Throw of the Dice," Mallarmé circumvents the limitations and imperfections of language by attributing meaning to the white space of the page and encouraging us to incorporate this signifying white space into our interpretation of the poem. Could we apply the same technique to the queered paradigms? Is it possible to circumvent the limitations of our representations of queerness by making the white space around their subject positions and relations signify, and by incorporating this white space into our conceptualizations and representations of queerness? The existence of agender and asexual identities points toward such a possibility. Asexuality, for example, does not manipulate or redirect the paradigm's line of attraction toward new or unsanctioned subject positions. It simply transcends the line completely and posits a subject position that is not defined by, or subject to, sexual attraction. And in a similar way, agender transcends the paradigm's line of identification, positing a subject position that is not defined by, or subject to, gender. As such, asexuality and agender cannot be represented by the dots and lines of the heteronormative paradigm, even if we chose to rearrange or propagate them. Asexual and agender subject positions exist somewhere in the white space, unmarked and undefined by the paradigms' dots and lines. In this sense, the white space surrounding the paradigms can no longer be overlooked as a source of nothingness or meaninglessness. It has been made to signify a lack of sexual attraction or a lack of gender identification.

Is a lack of sexual attraction or a lack of gender identification enough to make this white space an alternative source of queerness – one that is not limited by the flawed language of heteronormativity? If we see queerness as a subversive potential whose task is to undermine the hegemony of heteronormativity, a lack of sexual attraction or gender identification does not constitute queerness. In fact, it precludes even the possibility of queerness because there is nothing to subvert. At the same time, however, this conception of queerness is limited by its express reliance upon the language of heteronormativity: As Butler has demonstrated, queering through subversion requires a strategic redeployment of existing norms, not a creation of new ones.[50] So perhaps our conception of queerness is as lackluster as our representations of it. And perhaps a more lustrous conception of queerness would consider a lack of sexual attraction or a lack of gender identification as, in fact, fundamentally queer.

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[50] See, in particular, p. 19, p. 24, and p. 26 of "Critically Queer." *GLQ*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1993.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, queerness is understood in terms of sexual inversion – that is, an inversion of one's gender identity with respect to one's sex. The equivalent of today's male homosexuality, for example, is understood not as the attraction of one man to another, but as the attraction of an inwardly feminine individual to a man. As Karl Heinrich Ulrichs characterizes it in *The Riddle of Man-Manly Love* (1864-65), a male sexual invert is "*anima muliebris virile corpore inclusa*" ("a woman's soul in the body of a man"). As this theory of sexuality implies, our conception of queerness was influenced by an unquestioned assumption – that sexual attraction could only occur between opposites. Once this assumption is eventually challenged, enabling such queerness to be understood in terms of same-sex attraction, the homosexual becomes the more common representation of queer sexuality. In much the same way, the emergence of bisexuality challenges another unquestioned assumption – that sexual attraction is limited in its object to one sex. What unquestioned assumption(s) might be limiting our current conception of queer sexuality? Could it be the assumption of sexual attraction itself?

A similar evolution can be traced with respect to our conceptions of gender identity. While in different terms, sexual inversion challenged the assumption that sex always aligns with gender, and the possibility of such misalignment was recuperated by initial theories of transsexuality and transgenderism. Then, the assumption of two genders was questioned, with the emergence of trans* and non-binary gender identities. It is through consideration of an agender identity, however, that we have challenged the assumption of gender identity altogether.

Previous conceptions of queerness evolved by questioning assumptions about the nature of sexual attraction and the nature of gender identification. A conception of queerness that includes the possibility of asexuality and agender, however, has evolved by questioning two slightly more pervasive assumptions – that attraction has to be sexual and that identity has to be gendered. These assumptions signal the presence of additional, underlying norms. In the realm of attraction, for example, heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and pansexuality are themselves divisions of the larger norm of allosexuality. And the hegemony of allosexuality over asexuality signals the presence of additional, underlying ideologies, like that of "sexualnormativity." For this reason, it does not matter that asexuality does not divert or invert the heteronormative paradigm's lines of attraction in any way. It has transgressed the notion of sexual attraction altogether in order to take on larger underlying norms like allosexuality and larger underlying ideologies like sexualnormativity. The same can be said for agender, which altogether transgresses the notion of gender identity in order to take on larger underlying norms related to identity. In this sense, a lack of sexual attraction and a lack of gender identity can in fact be considered queer. Their queerness simply entails the transgression, rather than the subversion, of heteronorms.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler criticizes Monique Wittig's call to altogether transgress the heteronormative category of sex, arguing that, even if transgressing a heteronorm were possible, such an act would not necessarily weaken its hegemony. This is why she proposes a subversive repetition of gender norms, which aims to undermine their hegemony rather than transgress it. As the emergence of asexuality and agender has demonstrated, however, a transgression of heteronorms is, in fact, possible. This possibility does not necessarily undermine Butler's claim. It could simply signal a later phase in the queering process. That is to say, perhaps it eventually becomes possible to transgress a hegemonic norm precisely because this norm has been sufficiently subverted, its hegemony sufficiently undermined. In other words, perhaps both subversion and transgression are valid methods of queering, but the subversion of a heteronorm must precede its transgression.

In any case, a more lustrous conception and representation of queerness will involve both the subversion and transgression of heteronorms. This is because the weakening of heteronormativity does not necessarily imply a strengthening of queerness. With respect to the heteronormative paradigm, for example, alternatively visualized arrangements of its subject positions and relations initially challenge the supposed truth of heteronormativity, weakening its claim to universality. But it is the eventual normalization of these alternatives that will ultimately diminish the hegemony of its norms. As they become normalized, these alternatives lose their subversive potential. Queer today, norm tomorrow, so to speak. And in becoming norms themselves, they will lose their queerness altogether. For this reason, if our conception of queerness is limited to a subversion of heteronorms and a weakening of their hegemony, then queerness will lose luster over time. The transgression of heteronorms, however, will enable queerness to retain its luster by adopting novel forms and meanings as older ones become normalized.[51]

The transgressive potential of queerness need not be limited to a transgression of heteronorms. As we continue to view queerness from different angles and perspectives, even newer forms of queerness, such as asexuality, will eventually become normalized, allowing more-recently-recognized norms, like allosexuality, also to be transgressed. As one facet of queerness loses luster through normalization, the brilliance of another facet will catch our eye.

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[51] This process of growth and evolution can be witnessed in asexuality, for example, with the emergence of the ace spectrum and different orientations of romantic attraction (heteroromanticism, homoromanticism, and panromanticism), the transgression of the assumption of romantic attraction (aromanticism), the transgression of the assumption of reciprocal attraction (lithromanticism), and the introduction of a queerplatonic relationship.

For this reason, a conception of queerness that fully exploits both its subversive and transgressive potential is not simply more lustrous; it is, more specifically, iridescent. Its different facets shine at different times, depending on the perspective from which we view it. And given the dynamic nature of iridescence, no single representation of queerness will succeed in capturing it. Rather, a gradual accumulation of representations, each depicting a slightly different facet of queerness, will function much like the accumulating fragments of text comprising "A Throw of the Dice" and its prismatic division of *l'Idée*. If we can adopt a more global perspective, we can view various layers of queerness simultaneously, like the various layers of thought comprising the Idea at the origin of the poem. And if we can recognize and appreciate how these layers combine to form a signifying whole, we might be able to glimpse the iridescent nature of queerness.

Since asexuality constitutes a lack of sexual attraction, and agender a lack of gender identity, these forms of queerness cannot be represented by the black, positively delineated dots and lines of the heteronormative paradigm, regardless of how we rearrange or propagate them. They reside, instead, in the white, negatively defined space between and around these dots and lines. Unmarked by subject positions and relations extrapolated from the heteronormative paradigm, this white space is not limited by the flawed language of heteronormativity. As such, it functions as an alternative source of queerness – one that can be mined for its transgressive, rather than subversive, potential. While the subversive potential of queerness is what enables it to undermine the hegemony of heteronormativity, its transgressive potential is what enables it to grow and evolve. This capacity for growth is important to our conception of queerness, which must continue to expand as we continue to recognize the hegemony of more encompassing norms. And this capacity for evolution is important to our representation of queerness, which must continue to take on new forms as its initial forms become normalized over time. Therefore, if we aim to more fully and truly represent queerness in all its iridescence, we cannot focus solely on the positively defined subject positions and relations extrapolated from the heteronormative paradigm. We must work to maintain an ingenuous “transparence du regard” (clarity of gaze), which can look past the hegemonic framework of the paradigm to acknowledge the as-yet undefined possibilities that can be mined from the white space surrounding its dots and lines.

CONCLUSION

With the turn of the nineteenth century, lyric poetry witnesses a remarkable revitalization after two centuries of relatively scarce poetic output. And by the turn of the twentieth century, the lyric tradition is evolving in dynamic fashion as the notion of *modernité* encourages poets to break with past traditions, reject established values, and experiment with novel forms and styles. At the same time, French culture witnesses a proliferation of legal, scientific, and literary discourses revealing a novel fascination with manifestations of sexual perversion and gender subversion. An examination of the intersections between these concurrent cultural developments reveals a complex discursive, aesthetic, and theoretical relation between the poetic and the queer in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France.

The French lyric tradition both shapes, and is shaped by, the period's discursive production of queer identity and desire. Cultural characterizations of poetic identities and sexual identities appear to have influenced one another, with Alfred de Vigny's characterization of the *poète maudit* inspiring Marcel Proust's characterization of the sexual invert, and the *femme poète*'s frequent depiction as a type of intersex or third gender. Other common poet types, namely the *poète voyou* and the *poète voyant*, appear to occupy a somewhat queer position in relation to society. By functioning in deliberate disaccord with social norms and values, the *poète voyou* cultivates a lifestyle apart from and against the social order. And by striving to see beyond "the known," the *poète voyant* strives to uncover, imagine, or construct alternative ways of thinking and being that are not limited by various ideologies. All of these poet types are embodied by the poet figure Sappho who, in accordance with the period's burgeoning fascination with queer sexuality, re-emerges in nineteenth-century France as a definitively lesbian figure.

Poets identify not only with Sappho's poetic identity, but also, with her queerness. And for Charles Baudelaire in particular, Sapphic eroticism becomes synonymous with the poetic ideal.

The lyric "I," perhaps the most defining characteristic of the lyric tradition, has a particularly constraining effect on the poetic subject that it precedes and conditions. Any lyric poet attempting to express a "love that dare not speak its name" must negotiate and mitigate the implications of the pronoun's autobiographical assumption, which implies a direct reference between poet-speaker and poet-author. And if a poet is not a heterosexual male, they must subversively repeat this lyric "I" in ways that create space for the emergence and expression of alternative subjectivities. Such subversive repetition can be witnessed in Marcel Proust's "Je contemple souvent le ciel de ma mémoire" ("I Often Contemplate My Memory's Skies"), where his unstable first-person pronoun appears to change referents as the poem progresses. In the context of lyric translation, Renée Vivien, Pierre Louÿs, and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore repeat their translated lyric "I" in ways that subvert the transparency norm and destabilize the hierarchical distinction between masculinized author and feminized translator. And in the context of the love lyric paradigm, Paul Verlaine's use of a plural first-person pronoun and Renée Vivien's use of an androgynous first-person pronoun subvert the paradigm's binary structure and destabilize heteronormative readings of the poems. So, while the highly conventionalized lyric "I" precludes the expression of queer subjectivities, poets' subversive repetition of the first-person pronoun works the weaknesses in this norm to create space for alternative subjectivities. Their subversive repetition thoroughly destabilizes the first-person pronoun and contributes to a defining feature of the nineteenth-century French lyric tradition – the progressive destabilization of a conventionally transparent and coherent lyric "I."

And finally, the poetic line, which conveys meaning in a variety of ways, makes the poetic genre particularly well-suited to implicit or non-verbal expressions of queerness. The often highly figurative and connotative language of lyric poetry allows poets to implicitly express their own queer identity or desire, thereby facilitating discursive productions of queerness that remain subject to censure or societal disapprobation. Or, by attributing meaning to formal aspects of a poem, poets can reinforce their expressions of queerness. Renée Vivien's "Sonnet féminin" ("Feminine Sonnet"), for example, replaces the traditional alternation between masculine and feminine rhymes with all feminine rhymes to aurally reinforce a sense of femininity and visually reinforce a pairing of feminine with feminine. And Paul Verlaine's sonnet, "Sapho," inverts the traditional ordering of quatrains and tercets, recalling the "inverted" sexuality of Sappho herself. But such metaphorical inscriptions of queerness into a poem's formal elements raise certain interpretive issues: First, readers must consider the context that enables these elements to signify in a such a way and recognize that their queerness changes according to the historical, cultural, and linguistic context in which a poem is written and read. And second, readers must try to avoid the risk of essentializing readings, which, for example, attribute Charles Baudelaire's use of inverted sonnets to his capacity for artistic innovation while attributing Paul Verlaine's use of inverted sonnets to his own sexual "inversion."

As certain poets of *modernité* break with past traditions and reject established values, their formal and stylistic innovations queer conventional conceptions of French poetry. This form of literary queering can be witnessed in Stéphane Mallarmé's "Sonnet in x," for example, which embraces meaninglessness in a way that recalls Lee Edelman's theory of queer negativity. Similarly, Victor Hugo's dislocated alexandrine constitutes a form of literary queering à la Judith Butler. Through his stylistically subversive repetition of the alexandrine, Hugo loosens French poetry’s traditional alignment of syntax and meter. And the prose poem, which Charles Baudelaire adopts as a means to express *modernité*’s characteristic duality, constitutes a more deconstructive form of literary queering. By eliminating the versification from poetry, the prose poem calls into question the notion of poeticity, as well as our traditional categorization of poetry as “marked” and prose as “unmarked” genres, and ultimately, the very definition of a marked and unmarked form of literature.

By conceptualizing queerness in poetic terms, we can gain insight into the nature of queerness and the critical potential of queer theory. As my analysis of Stéphane Mallarmé’s “A Throw of the Dice” reveals, if we are to more fully apprehend the Idea that the poem aspires to represent, we must learn to read the white space of the page like we do the black marks of the text. This more encompassing reading approach can be applied to visualizations of the heteronormative paradigm in ways that enable us to conceptualize novel forms of queerness. Most representations of queerness visualize alternatively organized paradigms by altering the conventional relations between subject positions or adding new subject positions and relations. These alternatively visualized paradigms are as important to our understanding of queerness as the written text is to our understanding of a poem. But if we are to more fully apprehend the queerness that our alternatively visualized paradigms aspire to represent, we must also turn our attention to the blank space between and around the paradigm’s subject positions and relations. The recent conceptualizations of agender and asexuality appear to reside in this blank space, since a lack of gender identification and a lack of sexual attraction cannot be positively delineated within the paradigm. By altogether transgressing the norms of gender identification and sexuality, rather than subverting them, these “white space” forms of queerness challenge ideologies that are even more encompassing than heteronormativity, such as the ideology of sexualnormativity.

The intricacies of this relation between the poetic and the queer highlight the need for a more nuanced conception of queer poetry. A poem's queerness does not derive solely from the queerness of its author or the queerness of its subject-matter. It can derive from the poem's destabilization of the conventional lyric "I," from its cultivation of meaninglessness, from its manipulation of formal elements such as rhyme scheme or meter, or from its elimination of defining features like versification. For this reason, critical approaches to queer poetry need not be limited to primarily biographical and thematic readings of poetic texts; they can incorporate literary readings, as well, and situate such readings within a theoretical framework that draws from both poetic theory and queer theory. These two theories have the potential to inform one another. When poetry is conceptualized in queer terms, the emerging notion of literary queering provides a new lens through which to approach the evolution of lyric traditions, and when queerness is conceptualized in poetic terms, queer theory gains the ability to not only subvert the norms of heteronormativity, but to transgress them entirely, so that it might evolve and challenge the hegemony of ever more encompassing norms.

These ideas open new pathways of exploration for both literary studies and LGBTQ studies. The lyric tradition plays a pivotal role in the discursive production of queer identity and desire. And the emerging cultural interest in manifestations of queerness shapes the lyric tradition in return. It would be interesting to trace these influences in other cultural or historical settings. The notion of literary queering extracts the queer from its conventional engagement with sex and gender norms and transposes it into an engagement with literary norms. Such a contextual shift raises many questions regarding the relation of social norms to literary norms.

How do they compare? Do they inform each other? And how to they intersect in large-scale phenomena like artistic movements, which are both products and producers of cultural norms? And finally, if a poem's queerness need not derive solely from the queerness of its author or the queerness of its subject-matter, the study of queer poetry has the potential to more critically engage with poetic texts, and the literary category of queer poetry has the potential to be much larger and more diverse than initially thought.

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