

Incurable Haunting: Saluting Michel Deguy

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The poet names the holy (*das Heilige*). In a commentary on 'Wie wenn am Feiertage ...' ['As When on a Holiday ...'], part of his 'elucidations' or 'annotations' to Hölderlin's poetry, Heidegger famously writes that the role of the poet is to name the holy,¹ a maxim that he repeats in a number of places, for example in 'Wozu Dichter? [What Are Poets For?].'² In 'Die Sprache [Language]' he asks what is it to name, 'what is this naming (*Nennen*)?'³ We learn that this naming calls into the word. The naming 'calls (*ruft*).' In 'Das Gedicht [The Poem]' Heidegger further elaborates that the name tells what something is called, how it is customarily named (E 188/215). A name comes from, flows from, the very thing it calls, makes come. Naming is also mentioned by Heidegger in his commentary on 'Heimkunft/An die Verwandten [Homecoming/To Kindred Ones],' where he writes that the naming word is lacking for the holy. Holy names are lacking. This 'lack' of holy names is related, for Heidegger, to the 'absence' of the god. The god remains distant, yet the holy appears. Bearing in mind Hölderlin's poem about the poet's vocation (*Beruf*), Heidegger describes in the following way the vocation of the homecoming poet: 'to prepare joyfully for the greeting messengers (*den grüssenden Boten; les messagers saluant*), who bring the greeting of the still-reserved treasure (*den Gruss des noch gesparten Fundes bringen; le salut du fonds encore à l'épargne*)' (E 27/46).⁴ The absent god extends his greeting (*salut*) in the nearing of the heavenly ones.

The reason for quoting from the French translation of this work by Michel Deguy, himself amongst the early French translators of Heidegger, is that Derrida refers to this very passage in 'How to Name [Comment nommer],' an essay collected in a volume entitled

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Le poète que je cherche à être, bringing together contributions from the first international conference in honor of Deguy's work.⁵ Aside from the work of Edmond Jabès and Francis Ponge, of all of his living contemporaries Derrida devoted the most attention to the poetic work of Michel Deguy, whom he calls 'an immense poet of the French language,' 'a poet thinker of the French language' (CN 82/191).⁶

Deguy's poetic work is a mélange of a poetry that is particularly philosophically aware—no doubt having to do with Deguy's own training in philosophy prior to becoming a poet—and a thinking prose concerned not with the essence of poetry but perhaps with the very thought of poetry itself. However, in *La poésie n'est pas seule: court traité de poétique* [Poetry is Not Alone: A Short Treatise on Poetics] Deguy draws a distinction between philosophical thinking and what he calls "*la pensivité poétique*" (PNS 92).⁷ In a 1969 text Deguy poses the question 'What does "poetic vision" consist of? [...] In what *element* is it accomplished?' (F 145).⁸ Yet, Deguy is not satisfied with the word 'vision' so frequently used in the critical assessment of a poet, as it insists too much on the visible in experience.

As Derrida remarks, Deguy redefines 'the art of poetry,' 'rebaptizes' it, gives it a new definition, and assigns it a new task (CN 193/205). A new task that 'appeals to appellation and salutes denomination (*appelle à l'appellation et salue la nomination*)' (CN 193/205). Derrida's essay is not only dedicated to an assessment of Deguy's oeuvre, but it also juxtaposes the work of Deguy as a thinker of the poetic vocation with that of Hölderlin, at least the Hölderlin to whom Heidegger appealed as the exemplary practitioner of the poetic task. Deguy, whose first encounter with Heidegger's work was in a course by Jean Hyppolite at the Sorbonne in 1950 and also during meetings with Jean Beaufret, was also one of the three initial translators of *Approche de Hölderlin*, a volume of Heidegger's essays on the Swabian poet, published in French in 1962.⁹

Derrida quotes from Deguy's translation of 'Heimkunft' (rendered as 'Retour') in order to salute his friend Deguy but also to emphasize the term *salut*, a thought of which has been a preoccupation of Derrida's texts from the 1970s onward, but especially in the mid-1990s. Any discourse on *salut*, that is, on the safe and sound, the holy and the sacred, the healthy and the saved, the unharmed or unscathed and the immune (*le sain, le saint, le sacrée, le sauf, l'indemne, l'immun*) is

also bound up with 'a thought of *salut* (*une pensée du salut*).'¹⁰ Deguy's translation of Heidegger, which Derrida cites, introduces this other *salut*, that of the call, the salut-ation, and the greeting addressed to the other. Heidegger writes in a commentary on Hölderlin's 'Andenken' that 'remembrance is a kind of greeting (*Das Andenken ist ein Grüßen*)' (E 96/119). In fact, quoting a late fragment, Heidegger declares that every poetic word is 'a greeting word (*ein grüssendes Wort*)' (E 101/124).

Heidegger further elaborates on what he calls 'poetic greeting (*dichtenden Grusses*)' (E 96/120). Pointing to the rarity of a true greeting (*des echten Grusses*), he writes that in such a greeting the one who greets names himself but wants nothing for himself; he addresses everything to the one who is greeted. 'A true greeting,' Heidegger remarks, 'bestows upon what is greeted the recognition (*Anklang*) of its essence' (96/120). The '*thinking-of* (*Denken an*)' of this poetic greeting is 'a fundamental echoing or resonance by which what is greeted can enter into the nobility of its being, so that as what is greeted, it may henceforth have its essential abode in the greeting' (E 96-7/120). Greeting (*Das Grüßen*), thus, is 'a *re-thinking* (*An-denken*)' (E 97/120).

The greeted one (*das Gegrüßte*) is never forgotten, for the greeting wants nothing for itself (E 99/122). A greeting, however, is never a one-sided affair: the one who greets can only greet if he himself is greeted. According to Heidegger, a greeting takes place only if the one who greets is 'addressed in his historical being (*geschichtlichtes Wesen*) and recognised (*Annerkannte*) as the poet with a historical destiny (*dichterischen Bestimmung*)' (E 99/122-3). Noting here the language of a 'historical vocation,' it is also important to point out what is being greeted. In the examples provided by Heidegger what the poet greets is the mill, the courtyard, the daily work of the country man, and the trees. The poet even sends his greeting to the river Garonne.

I

In *Actes* (published in 1966), Deguy also names a greeting or a *salut*. Deguy, who writes of the poem as a naming, names le *salut* in a chapter entitled 'Apparition du nom [Apparition of the Name].' Yet, to salute is not only to name, it is also 'to call out to the other (*appeler l'autre*) as the other is called (*comme il s'appelle*)' (CN 184/194). The appellation salutes. In this chapter Deguy has recourse to a work written in Dante's

youth, *Vita nuova*, to open up another thinking of *salut*, ‘naming le *salut*, renaming the acts or verbs of salut-ation (*salut*), the *saluting* (saluer) and the *saving* (le sauver) themselves’ (CN 183/193). Deguy speaks ‘of Dante, of Beatrice — and of their salutation, their salvation (*leur salut*)’ (CN 183/193). Composed between 1292 and 1300, *Vita nuova*, which is the first work of fiction including both prose and poetry in which the prose explains the occasion for the composition of each poem, begins with what Deguy calls ‘le salut de Béatrice’ (A 42).¹¹ On the second occasion that the poet meets this “miraculous lady (*mirabile donna*)” (O 921/M 5),¹² the one ‘who was called Beatrice even by those who did not know what her name was’ (O 919/M 3), he remarks that ‘she saluted me with so virtuous a bearing (*mi salute molto virtuosamente*)’ that ‘I seemed there and then to behold the very limits of blessedness’ (O 921/M 5). Her ‘most sweet salutation (*dolcissimo salutare*)’ (O 921/5) was such that, for the poet, ‘there was no man mine enemy any longer’ (O 931/M 17). The poet speaks of the ‘surpassing virtue’ that her ‘miraculous salutation (*la mirabile salute*)’ had on him (O 931/17). When this ‘most gentle lady gave her salutation (*gentilissima salute salutava*)’, ‘Love’ bred in him such overpowering sweetness that made his body passive and helpless (O 931/M 18). The poet remarks that ‘in her salutation (*salute*) dwelt my bliss (*beatitudine*), a bliss which often exceeded my capacity to contain it’ (O 932/18).

As Deguy notes in *Actes*, “Beatrice is *salut* (Béatrice est le salut), in the secret, singular bivocality (*bivocité*) of this word. She is the one who salutes in the *Vita nuova* and the one who saves in the *Commedia*’ (A 244). She who confers blessing also addresses a salute or a greeting. *Vita nuova*, Deguy claims, is the book written ‘to establish (*fonder*) the double meaning of *salut*’ (A 246): *salut* ‘as a call one sends or resends in salvos (*comme un appel lancé ou relancé en salve*)’ of a vow or benediction, but also the *salut* of salvation that saves (CN 184/194). It is as though the two *saluts* operate within one another yet remain apart (CN 185/194). Derrida writes of this double sense that

the *Vita nuova* will have saluted le *salut* in saluting (*aura salué le salut en saluant*) Beatrice — or rather le *salut* of Beatrice because she’s the one who salutes and saves the *Vita nuova* in the *Vita nuova*. Beatrice is the one who salutes and the saluted one (*saluante et saluée*). And safe, she saves (*Et sauve, elle sauve*). (CN 185/195).

‘The poetics of salutation and salvation (*la poétique du salut*)’ (CN 185/196) announced here *seems* to resemble a Heideggerian thinking of the poetic act, already encountered above, in which the poet ‘responds to his distinctive summons (*assignation propre*): to utter the sacred, the holy or the intact (*le sauf*), the unscathed (*l’indemne*) (*das Heilige*), that is, salvation (*le salut*)’ (CN 196/186). These [French] words that come to us via Deguy’s translation, which remind us of the great debt owed to this poet-thinker-translator, display the motifs of this double sense of *salut*: the *salut* of the intact or unscathed (*heil, heilig, das Heilige*) and the *salut* addressed (*Grüßen*) in naming. And, as Deguy writes, the “poem” itself is that nomination receiving and giving the salutation (*le salut*), for the *salut* is exchange, while it salutes (*le salut est échange, saluant*)’ (A 247). Yet already in 1966 Deguy has begun to turn away from, but perhaps not entirely parting ways with, ‘this Heideggerian poetics of the unscathed, the immune, the *safe* (*sauf*) or the *salut*’ (CN 189/199). What marks Deguy’s ‘poetical *salut* (*salut poétique*) to the *salut*’ is the lack of any celebration of a popular or national language, or of any references to the Homeland and to historical essence. Further, Deguy’s poetics, Derrida suggests, marks the relation of poetical events to the Christian religion or a ‘Christian onomastics’ (CN 189/200).

II

In *La poésie n’est pas seule* Deguy, this ‘thinker poet of poetry’ (CN 191/203), revisits his relation to Heidegger in the name of a responsibility that Heidegger summons us to take, a responsibility to him and before him (PNS 31). The chapter entitled ‘Feuillure 1. Rapport à Heidegger [Dovetail 1: Relation to Heidegger]’ is a call to meditate again on *comme*, which Deguy associates with poetry and which Jean-Pierre Moussaron in *La poésie comme avenir* has analyzed as ‘the enigmatic element of Deguy’s thinking as poet’ (CN 194/207).¹³ The French *comme*, according to Deguy, exploits the difference between *comme* as *wie* (*comme* de comparaison’) and *comme* as *als* (‘en-tant-que,’ ‘le ‘que’ du comparative: plus *que*’) (PNS 36). Deguy expands on this difference in ‘Feuillure 3. Il y a comme et comme.’ As the title of this section indicates, Deguy articulates that if there is a ‘poetic phenomenology’ there is a difference between the *comme* of the philosopher, that is, *comme* as ‘en tant que (*quatenus, als, hê, as*)’ and the *comme* of the poet, *comme* as ‘de même que (*sicut*,

wie, hōs, like)' (PNS 88). Between the two, there is what Derrida refers to as 'a disjunction, a disconnection (*déliaison*), an anachrony or dischrony (*dischronie*)' (CN 199/212). For Deguy, the difference that exists between the two *comme*s marks the divergence between the phenomenology of the philosopher and of the poet.

Section 32 of *Being and Time*, 'Understanding (*Verständnis*) and Interpretation (*Auslegung*),' establishes the priority of the phenomenon of the 'as'-structure (*Als-Struktur*). Dasein, as understanding, projects its being upon possibilities, and 'interpretation' is the very working out of these possibilities. Thus, what has already been understood comes to be interpreted. What is "*explicitly* (*ausdrücklich*) understood has the structure of *something as something* (*etwas als etwas*)' because what is understood is 'already accessible in such a way that its "as which" can be made to stand out explicitly' (SZ 149/189). 'The "as,"' Heidegger explains, 'makes up the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood' and it constitutes the interpretation (SZ 149/189). However, an interpretation is never a 'presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us' (SZ 150/191-2). Rather, anything interpreted as something interpreted, 'has the "as-structure" as its own' (SZ 151/192).

An interpretation is grounded on understanding. Assertion (*Aussage*) is also grounded on understanding. By considering assertion, Heidegger argues, we can see in what ways the structure of the "as," which is constitutive for understanding and interpretation, can be modified. Assertion can be called a derivative mode of interpretation. Heidegger then provides three different significations of assertion: assertion as 'pointing out,' assertion as 'predication,' and assertion as 'communication.' Since the primordial meaning of *logos* is *apophansis*, that is, letting an entity be seen from itself, the primary signification of assertion, Heidegger claims, is 'pointing out (*Aufzeigen*).' When something becomes the 'object' of an assertion, in other words, when an assertion has given a determinate character to something present-at-hand, the assertion says something about it *as* a 'what' (SZ 158/200). When in §33 Heidegger writes that the function of *logos* as *apophansis* consists in letting be seen by pointing it out, letting it be seen *as something* (*etwas als etwas sehen lassen*), Deguy asks, does this also not imply a *wie*, a like, what he earlier calls a '*Wie-Struktur*' (PNS 90, 88)? When in sections 33 and 44 ('Dasein, Disclosedness,

and Truth') Heidegger writes that assertion and its structure (the apophantic 'as') are founded upon interpretation and its structure (the hermeneutic 'as') and also upon understanding (SZ 158/201), that is upon Dasein's disclosedness, is there not, Deguy wonders, a co-implication of the apophantic 'as' (*comme apophantique*) and 'the comparative like [comme comparant]'?

Would the phenomenon that phenomenology concerns itself with be able to show itself in another way? For Deguy, a problematic drawn from poetic experience comes to disturb the phenomenological presentation of the phenomenon (PNS 89). Even though, the Heideggerian gesture 'degrades (*abaisse*) metaphor and simile (*comparaison*)' (PNS 34), Deguy comments, 'comparing or likening is not extrinsic or superficial to *Dichten*' (PNS 36). For, comparison or simile is not imitation; it does not conform to a model, rather, it refers to the relation of 'being-like (*être-comme*)' (PNS 181). Early on in *La poésie n'est pas seule* Deguy writes that 'Notre existence/est/d'être-comme [Our existence/is/being-like] ...' and Part IV of his text is devoted to this '*L'être-comme*' (PNS 37). Elsewhere Deguy makes use of an archaic and uncommon verb *commer*, employed by writers such as Montaigne but later recommended to be stricken from the French language by the Académie française (1878). According to the *Litttré*, this verb means 'to liken, to make comparisons' but also contains resonances of the adverb and the conjunction *cum*.¹⁴

'The poetic thinking of *comme*' becomes accentuated in works that follow *Actes*, for example, *Figurations. Poèmes-Propositions-Etudes* (CN 197/210). Deguy's 1969 text contains further meditations on the poetic task, but this time rather than Heidegger or Hölderlin, Deguy appeals to Mallarmé. In a dense, elliptical piece with the title of '*// et ratures*,' Deguy explores in a Mallarméan vein the relation between the work and death and the role of death in all writing. Death, he writes, is that 'unknowable,' immeasurable thing whose event comes to transform all life, perhaps 'giving all things the status of figure' (F 122). In 'Crise de vers [Crisis of Verse],' he recounts, literature undergoes a crisis and the pure work implies the disappearance of the poet. The 'death' that happens 'to the one whom this "crisis" will change,' Deguy explains, is a 'depersonalization,' the very depersonalization that Mallarmé described to Cazalis in his famous letter. Thus, in 'the void,'

about which Mallarmé writes, 'the thing signs its disappearance' and poetic language speaks this disappearance of things or entities (F 122).

Derrida notes that subsequent to 'the play of the *comme*' in *Actes*, he notices 'the premises of an internal fissure of the *comme* within the *as if* (*comme si*)' (CN 199/213). In *Figurations*, for example, the figure of the dancer for Mallarmé 'calls and makes room for (*ménage*) the *comme si*' (F 124).¹⁵ In that text, referring to an unattributed phrase from *Crayonné au théâtre* ('cette espèce d'extatique impuissance à disparaître qui délicieusement attache aux planchers la danseuse [the type of ecstatic inability to disappear that attached the ballerina deliciously to the stageboards]),' Deguy writes that the ballerina does not cease to 'disappear-appear' (F 123).¹⁶ She holds herself in this tension called 'inability (*impuissance*),' 'as if' she were unable to disappear. The decisive difference between the 'fullness of positive appearance and the double negation is equivalent to the play of *comme*,' it calls and makes room for the '*comme si*' (F 124).¹⁷

In fact, Derrida adds, already in chapters entitled 'La Mesure,' 'Mimêsis' (e.g., A 202) and 'Technè,' in *Actes* 'the logic of a certain *comme si* comes to disturb the truth, to divide the self-presence of *comme*, to work alterity into the gathering of resemblance' (CN 200/213). The 'momentum,' 'the movement,' and 'the force' of the *as if*, Derrida writes, 'inscribes, records, and simultaneously produces, acts, takes note of the shape of a fold both internal and external to the *comme*[...] like a haunting (*comme une hantise*) making poetry at once chant and be disenchanted' (CN 201/215). Yet this haunting is not a matter of make-believe or the fabulous, rather it is the very structural contamination organizing the relation of two marks to each other. Embodying the spirit of Mallarmé's poetry and correspondence, where references to ghosts and haunting abound,¹⁸ in a crucial sentence missing entirely from the English translation, Derrida elaborates this haunting: 'The paradox of this spectrality that traverses "*// et ratures*" as in the shadow of a Mallarméan drape, is that this fantastic ghostliness (*fantomalité*) does not belong to an enchanted world' (CN 201).¹⁹

Like the ghost that comes back, the *as if* comes in the mode of returning or haunting. Signaling the disappearance of the *as such*, *as if* involves a thinking of the '*both... and*.' Each time an event, its performative force brings something about, yet it is not programmable. The *as if*, like the 'perhaps' or the 'quasi,' is what I have elsewhere called a *spectral*

modality. Describing the task of poetry as ‘the alchemy by which everything is transmuted in its annulment into its specter (*l’alchimie de transmuter toute chose en son annulation, en son spectre*),’ Deguy explores this notion of haunting further in a section called ‘Digression sur le récit [Digression on Narrative]’ (F 122). Critical language which has long left us with the alternative of choosing between reality and illusion, has difficulty grappling with that which ‘does not happen’ [*qui “n’arrive pas”*] but is not “imaginary”’ (F 133). In this section Deguy considers ‘two spaces:’ the space in which ‘I write, thus outside the book,’ the one in which I cough, move, smoke, etc. and the space of the page, of writing, ‘this *other* space’ that opens up in the one I read (F 135-6). Everyday language only has the opposition ‘*reality* versus *fiction*’ to think the relation between these two spaces, *comparing* the latter to the former, that is, in order to describe the book in its strangeness, in its difference, it can only make comparisons with perceived things. But, we already know from reading Mallarmé, that the book is not the doubled-image, the ‘copy’ of the real (F 136). Yet literature struggles *against* the very comparison that baptizes it, that is against the general ‘image-making (*l’imagerie*) of the *mimetic*,’ which at the moment of conferring upon it its identity assigns it the status of the ‘comparable,’ the analogous (F 136). How, then, to think the inseparability of these two ‘spaces?’ If the psychology and ontology of the *image* is dominated and regulated by the metaphors of reflection, conceived on the basis of a relation to a model or paradigm (F 137), then, asks Deguy, how to struggle with ‘the logic of *representation*,’ the one that speaks according to the schema of the mirror, the logic of division between (*bipartition*) thing-image, (perception-imagination, action-imitation, production-copy, etc.)? What must be thought, Deguy insists, is ‘the more complex indivisibility of the two in one (*l’indivision plus complexe du deux en un*)’ (F 137), ‘the irremediable contamination of the two spaces’ (F 137). Deguy’s concern becomes to attend to ‘the between-two,” “the neither-nor’ (F 147).

In the following section, ‘The Infinite Task,’ Deguy sets the task of criticism to-come as being concerned with ‘the secret “word” of the poem, its haunting’ (F 141). Such a criticism will not only attend to poetry’s song, sound, and melody, woven of sonorous waves, but also to ‘the haunting of *its words* (*la hantise de son mot*)’ (142). ‘This sound confused by itself,’ Deguy writes, ‘haunts poetry (language

as sonority, “melopoeia”)’ (F 141).²⁰ Later, in the same text, Deguy underscores this haunting once more: ‘We are *haunted*, to take up this word of Mallarmé, which is also that of Merleau-Ponty [...]; haunting (*hantise*): the mode of intimate, incurable (*inguérissable*) relation, of two in one (*deux en un*)’ (F 145).²¹ It is ‘to this haunting which is indivisibly “the haunting of the world”’ that poetry devotes itself (F 145). Derrida links this notion of haunting to *salut*, when he writes: ‘If haunting is incurable, whatever care or concern, whatever solicitude, cure or *Fürsorge* with which one surrounds it or oneself in order to be protected from it, in order to save oneself (*pour se sauver*), to get through it (*pour s’en sortir*) safe and sound, immune, unharmed (*indemne*), intact, there is no safety or salvation (*il n’y a pas de salut*). No salut (*Pas de salut*), no *run for your life* (*pas de sauve qui peut*) or merely a *run for your life* without hope of safety or salvation (*sans espoir de salut*). The incurable haunting, [...] can also mean that one has never done with the haunting....’ (CN 202/216).

III

The two *saluts*, salutation and salvation, shall continue to haunt one another. In some texts such as *A ce qui n’en finit pas* [To What is Never-Ending], Deguy pursues ‘the poem as a song of mourning (*chant de deuil*), as a threnody, the *salut* of the adieu—and come from the other (*salut de l’adieu—et venu de l’autre*)’ (CN 202/217), while in other texts such as *Gisants* [Recumbents] he explores salvation in terms of an exit or a way out. Early on in his short aphoristic treatise on poetics *La poésie n’est pas seule* Deguy poses a question, ‘What exit, what solution?’ and proffers an answer: ‘The exit (*l’issue*) is this extremity, a summit (*un sommet*)’ (PNS 16). The epigraph to the last section of the book, ‘La fin de la poésie [The End of Poetry],’ cryptically reads ‘L’issue est et n’est pas l’issue [The exit is and is not the exit]’ (PNS 169). In this section, Deguy, who somewhat mysteriously refers to this as ‘the famous incipit of Tao,’ further elaborates: ‘There are only impasses, aporetic roads (*rues apories*)’ (PNS 169). But what could Deguy be suggesting about ‘the way that is *and* is not the way, what exit (*issue*), if there is no exit [*pas d’issue*]?’ ‘The exit,’ he comments, is thus ‘to pass, to go from, to go through (*passer*), one impasse to another’ (PNS 169). Only the movement of thought, according to Deguy, can do this and the only

way to ‘communicate’ these impasses would be through recourse to the *comme* (PNS 169). Communication, thus, is of the order of *comme*. In ‘L’emboîtement [Dovetail]’ also from *Gisants*, Deguy asserts that all that there is, ‘what there is, is like ... [*Ce qu’il y a c’est comme ...*]’ (G 101/150) and there is no other exit (PNS 169):

chemin qui ne mène nulle part	Path that leads to nowhere
sans issue est le sommet	Without exit is the apex
nous montrant que l’issue est	Showing us that the exit is
Qu’il n’y a pas d’issue	That there is no exit
—pas d’issue donc hors paradoxe	—hence no exit beyond
	the paradox
De l’issue sans issue	Of the exit without exit
	(G 123/184)

The poem ‘Aide Mémoire [Memorandum]’ itself is this exit without exit, detailing ‘the book’s exit within the book (*la sortie du livre dans le livre*)’ (G 124/186). One exits ‘the book through the book’ (G 124/186).

Meditating on ‘*being free (être libre)*’ in another poem, ‘Le principe de la marelle [The Hopscotch Principle]’ in the section ‘Le journal du poème [Journal of the Poem]’ of *Gisants*, Deguy writes that liberation paradoxically ‘consists in knowing oneself to be *as* in prison (*à se savoir comme en prison*), that is, in search of a liberation rigorously comparable to liberty’ (G 108/160). ‘*Utopia*,’ if there is such a thing, would then be ‘*like* a prison and a liberation’ (G 109/163). As Derrida explains, it is ‘Aide Mémoire’ that articulates ‘what ties (*allie*) the “no-way-out (*sans-issue*)” with the *comme*’s flexion in[to] *comme si*’ (CN 205/ 219). There Deguy declares that:

poetry forbids identification	<i>Poésie interdit l’identification</i>
for the sweetness of the rigorous <i>like</i>	<i>Pour la douceur du comme</i>
	<i>rigoureuse</i>

(G 122/183)

One is then left with the option of making *as if*, 'acting as though (*Faire comme si*)' (G 123/182). A strophe reads:

'Promise of happiness?' To look for the way out (*chercher l'issue*) by going upward, by the 'summit,' which is a dead end (*sans issue*). To act as though the direction of the summit pointed toward a way out (*Faire comme si la direction du sommet montrait une issue*).

Salvation (*salut*), if there is any, would be to act *as if, as though* there were a way out.

To the question posed in 'Le principe de la marelle' — 'Can a poem all by itself... be a lever for getting out, and the movement of a liberation toward a salutary "outside" (*un 'dehors' salutaire*)?'— an answer may be found in a later text, *A ce qui n'en finit pas. Thrène* (G 110/163). Writing eloquently of his companion Monique's death, a meditation on 'the weight of her specter on his back' (*sa hantise sur mon dos*)' (ACNF 1), Deguy touches upon a death without consolation, without salvation.²² There is no consolation, only 'desolation, grief (*désolation*)' he repeats twice (ACNF 23). What for him is 'incurable' (ACNF 22) leaves him to 'live this survival: a task, a strangeness, a chance, a motif, a stupor, a remorse, an injustice, a meditation, a disproportion, a duty according to some, a deferment, a preoccupation' (ACNF 121). No eternal life, no place of rest on another plane, no 'commerce with the dead,' Deguy tells her, 'apart from the one I maintain' with 'your trace in me (*empreinte en moi*), this alien soul that "lives in me," this other truth that "inhabits the inner man (*habite l'homme intérieur*)," quenching the thirst of the ego and making it hospitable to alterity' (ACNF 121). If there is 'no solution (*pas de solution*),' what is left, then, is a living on that takes the form of a salutation and a send-off to a loved one (ACNF 111).

IV

Derrida's own thinking of *salut* not only does not favor one strand, whether salutation or salvation, whether calling out and greeting or desiring safety and conferring health, but insists that the two must be thought together. He attends to these two *saluts* when he exploits the bivalence of the French reflexive verb *s'appeler*. *S'appeler* would be to call or name oneself, to salute oneself, and in doing so call for one's

own salvation. Yet *s'appeler* is also to call one another or to call out to the other. Derrida writes: 'To be able to call oneself, call one another (*pour pouvoir s'appeler*), oneself like another (*soi-même comme un autre*), to call oneself or to call out to one another, in order to be able to call, where saluting is more than naming, it is necessary that *le salut* of salvation or health, *le salut* of redemption or resurrection never be assured' (CN 203/218).²³ For, 'to salute is to name the other precisely where the other is called (*l'autre s'appelle*), that is, is called (*est appelé*) from another place which will have had to be his or her end' (CN 203/217). There is mourning and incurable haunting 'where the other can no longer call himself or herself (*s'appeler*), save himself or herself and salute (*se saluer*), only be saluted, where the two meanings of *salut* part and say adieu to one another' (CN 203/217).

There is, according to Derrida, an absolute heterogeneity, an irreconcilable difference between the two *saluts*. 'The singular bivocality of the word *salut* must as it were part with itself forever and... one *salut* must never be like (*comme*) the other: *le salut* as (*comme*) health or salvation, redemption, resurrection, must never be like (*comme*) *le salut* as a call or as (*comme*) calling out to one another' (CN 203/218, Derrida's emphasis on *comme* throughout). There must be such difference, for this dissociation is Necessity itself (CN 203/218). *Salut* as health or salvation could always be refused, threatened, forbidden, lost, gone. But

the possibility of the non-*salut* of salvation or health must always haunt *le salut* as calling, that is, a poetical chant that promises a chance to call. [Yet] one can only call out to the other, and salute, while living, as one of the living, that is, while dying, as one of the dying, in one's passing-on (*sa mourance*) and in my own, in a living-on (*une survivance*) that is neither life nor death — and hence where there is no assured salutation, nor any salvation on the horizon. (CN 203/218)

As Derrida writes, this very salutation, 'the salutation that calls out to the other without hope or in any case without assurance of salvation (*salut*), the salutation that salutes the other without either one being assured of finding therein the *salut* of salvation, nor of remaining safe and sound, this salutation to the other is irreducible reference,

absolute difference which at once works on (*travaille*) reference and makes reference possible, and respect for the absolute referent which the other is, whatever happens (*quoi qu'il arrive*)' (CN 204/218). There can be no horizon, the condition for all that can happen, for 'this *salut* without salvation,' for, this greeting or salutation to the other would be 'unforeseeable, and heterogeneous reference, the event, an irruptive approach/coming, the *arrivance* of the other or death' (CN 204/218-9).

V

The singularity of each poem demands scrupulous attention and devotion on the part of the reader. 'Apparition du nom' is a 'unique and dated' text (CN 191/203). Derrida informs the reader that he chose to focus on this singular text, in order to name and salute a friend and a unique poet. What then follows and unfolds is an extraordinary protocol for the reading of poems, Deguy's especially, but also for every poem; extraordinary for many reasons, but particularly because it seems to go against much of what we have learned about poetic criticism in our culture. Derrida warns us that it is important not to derive any truisms or sweeping statements from a singular poem. Each poetic act, he writes, would require us not to be content with 'poor generalities' (CN 192/204). When one reads Deguy 'one must remember that each one of his poems entails a poetics that suits only him, Deguy, and it, the poem. Each proposition of poetics, each *one* (*chaque* une), is a poem, a singular act, dated, irreplaceable' (CN 191/203). It is *as if* each is 'almost untranslatable' (CN 191/203). Not only is each of Deguy's poems 'almost untranslatable,' but it is also 'untranslatable into another one of his poems, despite the *comme* [...] that unites the works' (CN 191/203). In reading Deguy's poems, Derrida explains, one finds a poetics 'always assigned to singularity, within the body of a poetic act whose signature itself forms, each time (*chaque fois*), a lone work, one and alone (*une et seule*), an irreplaceable operation' (CN 192/203).

To be sure, there is the name of Michel Deguy, under which all the poems could be gathered, but 'each poem bears its name, its name of poem (*son nom de poème*), another proper name, signed by an other Deguy, there's more than one (*il y en a plus d'un*) and more than two' (CN 192/203). What is underscored is the absolute singularity,

unrepeatability, and unsubstitutability of each poem. It is important to note that what is said of 'Apparition du nom' only 'pertains strictly speaking to 'Apparition du nom' and not to Deguy's work in general' (CN 192/203). This claim becomes even further refined and focused when Derrida writes that what is said of 'Apparition du nom' 'does not even pertain to poems of the same date, not even to all those that resemble one another in *Actes*' (CN 192/204). It is not that there may be no 'kinship (*parenté*)' 'family resemblance,' or 'Verwandschaft [affinity] among them,' but, for Derrida, 'it would be imprudent and unjust to form a concept or a law beyond analogy, beyond the "*comme*" that conjugates these poetical acts and co-operates the difference between these acts . . . among themselves' (CN 192/204). The words used here by Derrida carry an ethical weight: not only would it be 'impertinent' and 'unjust,' it would be 'violent' 'not only with regard to the poet Deguy' but also to the poet saluted, Dante, and the names, Giovanna and Beatrice, saluted by him (CN 192/204).

If we wanted to examine Deguy's complex thought of *salut*, then, justice would dictate a patient reading—reading here, in the non-conventional sense—of each of Deguy's poems. In reading Deguy, what is called for is 'an infinite commentary,' a commentary that would 'begin by awakening and reevaluating the *comme*' (CN 192/204). This would make any writing on a poem an engagement 'in almost (*quasiment*) interminable accompaniment' (CN 192/204). What Derrida is calling for, perhaps, is an entirely different way of reading and writing, or *accompanying*.

When he writes that "one must learn to poetically and altogether otherwise comment (*commenter poétiquement et tout autrement*)" on Deguy, I take this injunction as a call for an entirely other poetic accompaniment (CN 192/204). What would this accompaniment consist of? It would be to name with Deguy, 'to accompany him in *sunousia* countersigning with his own signature' (CN 193/204). It would also require that we substitute everywhere the pronoun 'poet' with the proper name (CN 193/205). The task would then be to 'attend to the proper name, each time as an other (*chaque fois comme un autre*)' (CN 193/205).

Derrida's poetic accompaniment, as exemplified in 'How to Name' for example, does not explicitly highlight its own procedure. Yet his accompaniment is not a simple slavish repetition of Deguy's words but

a reading, a salutation to the singularity of the other. A singularity is already inscribed in the notion of salutation at work in Deguy's writings and Derrida's reading or accompaniment, is a response in kind to Deguy, a salutation to the salute or the greeting. Derrida's own text performs this salutation [the '*salut à*'], which is always a singular reference to the other. Thus to comment on Derrida's own poetic accompaniment would not merely be to interject explanatory remarks guiding the reading of the work, but would be to read and write with him, closely following along as he reframes the vocation of the poet in the reading of a singular poet.

VI

A mark of singularity, the salutation is bound up with a *logic* of singularity. Commenting on Paul Celan's poetry in *Shibboleth*, Derrida writes of the date, that which marks itself as the one-and-only time. Each poem is dated, he repeatedly emphasizes. To read a poem is not to rephrase it, for each poem strives to be impossibly, absolutely singular. The singularity of every poem resists generalization, its irreducibility disallowing simple summary. This singularity almost forbids us to speak of poetry in general. To attend to its singularity would be to read the poem from out of the poem without imposing an interpretive grid on it. Each singular poem, then, asks to be read on its own terms; it even tells us how it is to be read. This irreplaceability or rarity actually prevents the singular from becoming law. Or, as Derrida writes in *Signéponge*, it is a law that is 'immediately transgressed (let us say, more precisely, *freed up* [franchie]).'²⁴

Yet pure singularity must also be readable. Any relation to the absolutely singular must pass through the law, the law of generality. For the poem not to be so inscrutable and encrypted as to be impenetrable, for the poem to speak to more than a select, exclusive readership, to speak to those who do not share the experience or knowledge of what is written about, it must be minimally readable. And for it to be readable, it must detach or free itself from itself and from immediate attachment to the here-now. 'By wresting or subtracting itself from itself (*en s'arrachant ou en soustrayant à elle-même*), from its immediate adherence, from the here and now, by freeing itself (*s'émancipant*) from what it nonetheless remains' attached to, it becomes readable as a singularity.²⁵ It is this self-division — a certain repetition — that

assures its readability and hence inscribes its *here* and *now* in iterability. In differing from itself, it effaces itself as a singular mark in order to become iterable, thus paving the way for a certain generality or formalizability. When Derrida concedes in 'How to Name' to conclude with some general theses, he only does so because 'perhaps' it would be 'suitable to cultivate generality as a virtue of restraint or the ruse of modesty' (CN 203/217). We must remember that if there is to be any generalizability, it must arise from out of the singular

The absolute singularity of the poem, then, forces a thinking beyond the dichotomy of the particular and the universal. Absolute singularity is the conjunction of the unique *and* the universal; the non-repeatable *and* the repeatable, the untranslatable *and* the translatable, the one-and-only time *and* the ideal; the readable *and* the cryptic. What is most striking about 'How to Name' is that, given all that we know about generalizability and formalizability, it is *as if* a further narrowing, a further emphasis or stress has been placed on absolute singularity, *as if* Derrida's later texts display an even stronger resistance to generalization. For, Michel Deguy's poetics, a 'singular poetic art' entirely and uniquely his, is a poetics assigned to singularity (CN 194, my trans).

Notes

- ¹ Martin Heidegger, "Wie wenn am Feiertage..." in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* GA Bd.4 (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1981), 58; translated by Keith Hoeller as "As When on a Holiday..." in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* (Amherst, NY, Humanity Books, 2000), 80. All further references, abbreviated as E, are cited in the body of the text, with page references first to the German edition followed by the English edition.
- ² Martin Heidegger, 'Wozu Dichter' in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), 251; translated by Albert Hofstadter as 'What are Poets For?' in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, Harper & Row, 1975), 94. Heidegger writes 'the poet... says (*sagt*) the holy (*das Heilige*).'. An alternative translation of 'Wozu Dichter' translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes is provided in Martin Heidegger, 'Why Poets?' in *Off the Beaten Track* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 202.
- ³ Martin Heidegger, 'Die Sprache' in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen, Neske, 1959), 21; translated by Albert Hofstadter as 'Language' in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, Harper & Row, 1975), 198.

- ⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Approche de Hölderlin* (Paris, Gallimard, 1962–73), 34.
- ⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Comment nommer' in *Le poète que je cherche à être*, ed. Yves Charnet (Paris, La Table Ronde/Belin, 1996); translated by Wilson Baldrige as 'How to Name' in Michel Deguy, *Recumbents: Poems* (Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 2005). I have silently modified the translation to reflect my reading. All further references, abbreviated as CN, are cited in the body of the text, with page references first to the French edition followed by the English edition.
- ⁶ Writer, poet, Professor of French literature at the University of Paris-VIII, where he taught from 1969–99, President of the Collège international de philosophie (1989–1992) and of Maison des Ecrivains (1991–98), editor and member of editorial board of the journal *Poésie*, which he founded in 1976, Deguy has authored over thirty books.
- ⁷ Michel Deguy, *La poésie n'est pas seule: court traité de poétique* (Paris, Seuil, 1987). All further references, abbreviated as PNS, are cited in the body of the text. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Deguy's texts are my own.
- ⁸ Michel Deguy, *Figurations. Poèmes-Propositions-Etudes* (Paris, Gallimard, 1969). All further references, abbreviated as F, are cited in the body of the text.
- ⁹ Deguy also co-translated 'Comme au jour de fête' with François Fédier, who also contributed two other translations to the enlarged edition of *Approche de Hölderlin*. Deguy recounts his relationship to Heidegger's work to Dominique Janicaud in *Heidegger en France. II. Entretiens* (Paris, Albin Michel, 2001), 77.
- ¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'Avances,' Preface to Serge Margel, *Le tombeau de Dieu Artisan* (Paris, Minuit, 1995), 42.
- ¹¹ Michel Deguy, *Actes* (Paris, Gallimard, 1966). All further references, abbreviated as A, are cited in the body of the text.
- ¹² Dante, 'Vita Nuova' in *Opere*, eds. Monfredi Porena & Mario Pazzaglia (Bologna, Nicola Zanichelli, 1966). All further references, abbreviated as O, are cited in the body of the text. In references to *Vita nuova*, I have generally used the translation of *The New Life* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti from 1861 (New York, New York Review of Books, 2002), which was to be so influential on Ezra Pound, as it preserves the resonances to the French word *salut*. However, where I have found it more appropriate, as is the case here, I have substituted the modern translation of Mark Musa taken from *Dante's Vita Nuova*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973). All further references to Musa's translation, abbreviated as M, are cited in the body of the text.
- ¹³ Jean-Pierre Moussaron, *La poésie comme avenir: essai sur l'oeuvre de Michel Deguy* (Sainte-Foy, Québec, Editions Le Griffon d'argile, 1992).
- ¹⁴ See Michel Deguy, *Gisants, Poèmes III 1980–1995* (Paris, Gallimard, 1999), 120–1; translated by Wilson Baldrige as *Recumbents: Poems* (Middletown, Conn.,

Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 179. All further references, abbreviated as G, are cited in the body of the text, with page references first to the French edition followed by the English edition.

- ¹⁵ For the dancer or ballerina in Mallarmé's writings, see *Crayonné au théâtre* in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* eds. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris, Gallimard, 1945), Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. All further references, abbreviated as OC, are cited in the body of the text. In particular, see 'Crayonné au théâtre' (OC 293–8), 'Ballets' (OC 303–7), 'Autre étude de danse: les fonds dans le ballet' (OC 307–9), the untitled page facing 'Mimique' (OC 311–2), and 'Le genre ou des modernes' (OC 312–321). Also, see Derrida's references in *La Dissémination* (Paris, Seuil, 1972), 271–5.
- ¹⁶ Barbara Johnson renders this phrase, which is from 'Ballets' in *Crayonné au théâtre*, as 'the type of ecstatic inability to disappear that attached the ballerina deliciously to the stageboards' (OC 305). See Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Scribbled at the Theater' in *Divagations: The 1897 Arrangement by the Author*, translated by Barbara Johnson (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2007), 131.
- ¹⁷ Mallarmé writes that the ballerina 'is-like (*est-comme*)' (for example, is-like a giant petal or a butterfly) (F 124). This is a reference to OC 308.
- ¹⁸ In addition to 'Mimique' and 'Quant au livre' (1895) mentioned by Derrida in *La Dissémination*, the following sources can be cited: 'Le tombeau de Charles Baudelaire' (1893) (OC 70), 'Sonnet (pour votre chère morte, son ami)' (1877) (OC 69); 'Toast funèbre' (1873) in *Poésies* (OC 54–5); 'Quand l'ombre menaça' (1883), collected with other sonnets in *Poésies* (OC 67); 'Autrefois, en marge d'un Baudelaire' in *Volumes sur le divan* in *Divagations* (OC 109); 'Autre étude de danse: les fonds dans le ballet' (OC 308); and 'Le genre ou des modernes' (OC 320), both in *Crayonné au théâtre*.
- ¹⁹ 'Le paradoxe de cette spectralité qui traverse "// et ratures" comme dans l'ombre d'un drap mallarmean, c'est que cette fantomalité fantastique n'appartient pas à un monde enchanté' (F 201).
- ²⁰ 'Ce bruit confus d'elle-même hante la poésie (la langue *comme* sonorité, 'mélopée').'
- ²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit* (Paris, Gallimard, 1964), 13; translated by Carleton Dallery as 'Eye and Mind' in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed with an introduction by Galen Johnson. Translation Editor, Michael B. Smith (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1993), 122. Merleau-Ponty writes 'les "autres," qui... me hantent, qui je hante, avec qui je hante un seul Etre actuel, présent [others who haunt me and whom I haunt; 'others' along with whom I haunt a single, present, and actual Being].'

- ²² Michel Deguy, *A ce qui n'en finit pas. Thrène* (Paris, Seuil, 1995). All further references, abbreviated as ACNF, are cited in the body of the text.
- ²³ In "Il courrait mort": salut, salut' Derrida distinguishes what he calls 'salut à' from 'salut de': "The two meanings or the two uses of the word *salut* are incompatible or irreconcilable and must remain so: the *salut à* presupposes a renunciation of the *salut de*. To address a greeting to (*salut à*) the other, a greeting from one's self as other to the other as other (*un salut de soi comme autre à l'autre comme autre*), for this greeting to be what it must be, it must break off (*séparer*) all hope of salvation or redemption, of all return and restitution of the "safe [*sauf*]," etc.' Jacques Derrida, "Il courrait mort": salut, salut. Notes pour un courrier aux *Temps Modernes* in *Papier Machine* (Paris, Galilee, 2001), 184, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg as "Dead Man Running": Salut, Salut' in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971–2001*, Edited and Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002), 269–70. Pleshette DeArmitt's unpublished essay 'Derrida's *Salut*: Beyond All Salvation' (presented at the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association Eastern, in Washington, DC, December 30, 2006), superbly brings out this distinction.
- ²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, bilingual edition, translated by Richard Rand (New York, Columbia University Press, 1984), 51; French edition *Signéponge* (Paris, Seuil, 1988).
- ²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Schibboleth pour Paul Celan* (Paris, Galilée, 1986), 32; translated by Joshua Wilner, revised by Thomas Dutoit as *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan* in *Sovereignities in Question*, edited by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York, Fordham University Press, 2005), 15.

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