within it all of the complexities of his view of death as the impossibility of possibility, of the Open as the experience of the limitlessness of the limit, of the turn as mobile and yet suspended, as well as his rejection of the historicising of an authentic relation to death:

> Sometimes, when fear seizes [Malte], he cannot avoid hearing the anonymous hum of 'dying' which is by no means a consequence of the times or of people's negligence: in all times we all die like the flies that autumn forces indoors, into rooms where they spin blindly in an immobile dizziness, all of a sudden dotting the walls with their mindless death. (SL 123–4)

Human beings 'die' just as these flies 'die' (the quotation marks suspending this process in the extract above). The extent to which Blanchot excludes any discussion of the animal in this essay is perhaps surprising, given that animals play a large role in the formulation of the Open in the eighth *Elegy*; however, contained within the above reference to flies in Rilke is Blanchot's entire conception of the possible-impossible experience of dying, which is not reserved for the human. The experience of dying is a confrontation with an outside in which all that is inhuman errs – this is not outside thought in opposition to inside, but an outside which, like the other night, is irreducible to any such binary.

Animals and Automation

Animals, in their ignorance of their own mortality, gaze into the boundless Rilkean Open; humans, constrained by the knowledge of their approaching death, can only look backwards.

> What *is* really out there we only know
> by looking at the countenance of creatures.
> For we take a young child and force it
> to turn around, to see shapes and forms,
> and not the Open that is so deep in the face
> of an animal. Free from death.[82]

Heidegger inverts the hierarchy constructed by Rilke; the human stands at the top of the clear and stable order which composes *Dasein*: 'The stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, the human forms a world [*der Stein ist weltlos, das Tier ist weltarm, der Mensch ist weltbildend*].'[83] The animal is poor in world because it does not perceive being as Being; beings only appear to the animal as elements

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of its environment; consequently the animal is surrounded by a circle of its urges rather than things. Only man sees being in the light of Being. The difference between man and animals is underscored by the animal's lack of language; the animal is deprived of speech because it does not have access to the world as the struggle between concealment and disclosure. This account of the negativity of the animal's worldly or spiritual poverty, from a lecture course from 1929 to 1930, led Derrida to argue that Heidegger's characterisation of animal life perpetuates the humanistic and anthropocentric prejudices that have long dominated Western philosophy. There is no animal *Dasein*, nor is the animal *Vorhandensein* or *Zuhandensein*; Heidegger thinks the animal only as a median between stone and human being, and so his thesis remains 'fundamentally teleological and traditional, not to say dialectical'.[84]

References to animals by Blanchot might be easily overlooked because there are only ever fleeting glimpses or passing comparisons; the creatures that do appear are not majestic beasts, household pets or farmyard animals, but almost always what we might consider unexceptional, perhaps even base or dirty, and alien: several rodents, numerous flies, a butterfly, a caterpillar, dragonflies, cuckoos, a magpie, a nightingale, a skylark, a stag beetle, a squirrel, woodlice, toads, fish, a lizard, a wolf. These creatures, from fictional and critical work, tell us something significant about the experience of writing and dying when they appear.

Blanchot had tentatively proposed a comparison between writer and animal in the opening essay written for *Faux pas* in 1943, remarking that both live a lonely existence, only to then reinscribe some sort of Heideggerian hierarchy: 'These images, natural as they may be, are not convincing. It is to the intelligent witness that the silent animal [*bête*] seems prey to solitude' (FP 2). The implication is that this witness is a human and it is only down to their presence that the animal can be deemed solitary, because the mute beast lacks language and therefore a sense of otherness. Furthermore, the writer has privileged access to this solitude or sense of anguish: Blanchot writes that it does not occur to us to consider the anguish of the cobbler in the same way (FP 3). The solitude reserved for the writer is not a solipsistic refuge but an exposure to the outside; the anguish experienced by the solitary writer deprives them of the relation with another, estranges them from human reality, and likens them (perhaps surprisingly following the previous quotation) to something inhuman, in this instance vermin: 'Thus stripped bare [*dépouillé*], and ready to plunge into his monstrous particularity, [anguish] casts him outside himself and [. . .] confuses him with what he is not' (FP 12). From an

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early point in his career as a novelist and critic, then, the difference between animals and humans proves to be extraordinarily fragile for Blanchot, as he recognises the otherness reserved for the writer as the figure who experiences the frailty of world. The elaboration of the inhuman in Blanchot's writing demonstrates the extent to which he moves beyond an understanding of language as the sheltering 'house of Being', solely accessed by the human, towards a view of literature as the medium that dismantles the sovereign subject through exposure to the alterity of the outside.

An inhuman interruption occurs at the midway point of *Death Sentence*, the first in a series of shorter narratives published by Blanchot between the late 1940s and late 1950s, in a scene in which one of the female protagonists, Nathalie, enters the narrator's hotel room early one morning. She stands in the middle of the room like a statue, but is paralysed with fear rather than made of stone. The narrator remarks that something irremediable had happened before recounting the time he witnessed a squirrel become trapped in a cage hanging from a tree:

> I once saw a squirrel get caught in a cage that hung from a tree: it leaped across the threshold with all the energy of its very happy life, but hardly had it touched the planks inside when the light trigger clapped the door shut, and even though it had not been hurt, even though it was still free, since the cage was enormous, with a little pile of shells inside, its leap broke off abruptly and it remained paralysed, struck in the back by the certainty that now the trap had caught it. (DS 38–9)

The vastness of the cage means that the squirrel remains free even once the trap has closed, and the small pile of nuts inside ensures its survival: this is both a death sentence and the suspension of death, transforming the squirrel and Nathalie alike into living statues. Neither are sovereign subjects in this debilitating experience which shakes the human–animal hierarchy to the core. The irremediable is therefore a realisation that something other is in control, something beyond the limits of the cage which has always already preceded any account of being. This anonymous force is what Levinas calls the *there is* [*il y a*], a sort of impersonal field that presents being and cannot itself be negated, since the necessity of affirmation always precedes the possibility of negation. The *there is* constitutes a radical challenge to dialectical thought and renders any origin or event, beginning or ending, impossible.[85]

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In an earlier review of *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* from 1943, Blanchot writes: 'Anguish reveals to man that in every

particle of air there exists something terrible, and this existence of the terrible is the very proof of existence' (FP 49). The *there is* is so terrible for Malte because he staunchly tries to remain faithful to himself, refusing to embrace what terrifies him in his death: its impossibility. He clings on to the hope that he will die an authentic death; however, as his childhood fear, referred to in one episode as 'the Big Thing', reminds him, death brings with it a radical transformation into something completely other:

> Now it was there. Now it grew out of me like a tumour, like a second head, and was a part of me, though it could not belong to me at all, because it was so big. It was there like a huge, dead beast, that had once, when it was still alive, been my hand or my arm.[86]

Limbs, distanced from any bodily identity, morph into strange animals in this anonymising experience. What emerges is nothing familiar, comforting or natural, but an unrecognisable inhuman. Rilke maintains in the *Duino Elegies* in 1923 that animals are ignorant of their mortality. Significantly for Blanchot by the time of writing *Death Sentence*, this anguished revelation is not reserved for the human; Blanchot is therefore far from the philosophical position attributed to him by Ulrich Baer, who names him alongside Heidegger and Agamben as thinkers who interpreted the eighth *Elegy* as 'a treatise about the ontological difference between human and animal'.[87] Blanchot's concern is what precedes or gives ontology, which itself has no origin and exceeds the distinction between human and animal.

To return to the ensnared squirrel of *Death Sentence*: within this cage it is free to move and to survive, but this is a limited freedom normally reserved for people. Here the squirrel is exposed to the experience of death and so, like Nathalie, it is irreversibly altered, transformed into a moribund figure. One page later, Nathalie, her hair longer than usual, makes a bid for freedom when reminded of the room's limitations after she knocks into a table:

> She reacted to the noise with a frightened laugh, and fled like an arrow. Then everything becomes confused. I think that after she cried out I grew wild [*J'imagine qu'à partir de ce cri j'étais hors de moi*]. I saw her lunge toward the open air [*air libre*], and the instinct of the hunter seized me. I caught up with her near the stairway, grabbed her around the waist, and brought her back, dragging her along the floor as far as the bed, where she collapsed. My fit of rage was one of the few I have had since my very angry childhood, and it was uncontrollable [*n'avait plus de borne*]. I do not know where this violence

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> came from; I could have done anything at a time like that: broken her arm, crushed her skull, or even driven my own forehead into the wall, since I do not think this furious energy was directed at her in particular. Like the blast of an earthquake, it was an aimless force which shook beings and knocked them over. I have been shaken by this blast too, and so have become a tempest which opens mountains and maddens the sea. (DS 40)

Both characters are overcome by their instincts in this passage. Assuming the roles of predator and prey, they behave like animals: Nathalie bounds for freedom sniggering fearfully; the narrator chases after her, dragging his prey along the floor in an uncontrollable and limitless rage, comparable to a natural disaster powerful enough to tear the ground from beneath them. Neither the narrator nor Nathalie can be described as human in this brief moment; like the squirrel, both assume a disturbing otherness. The possibility of an authentic death and language constitute human existence for Heidegger and ensure that we, and not animals, understand Being as such. When the conditions of authenticity are shown to be impossible for human and animal alike, the distinction between the two is suspended and the response to this 'completely different demand [*tout autre exigence*]' is a non-linguistic mode of expression bearing some resemblance to animalistic cries and gestures, rather than any redemptive poetic language.

The fragility of the difference between human and animal in this narrative has consequences beyond their responses to death and dying. As beings that are partly inhuman, bearing animalistic or feral traits, the narrator, Nathalie and the other female protagonist J. experience the solitude that occurs in the presence of an estranged and unhearing other. Linguistic communication is consequently often ineffective and replaced by other forms of expression: touch conjures thoughts where words fail ('Slowly I put my hand on hers; this contact was like a bitter memory, an idea, a cold, implacable truth [. . .] At one moment I saw her lips move and was aware that she was talking, but now I, in turn, no longer made an effort to grasp those words'); facial expressions communicate strong emotions and demands ('I noticed that her mood had changed: a sort of cold respectability was mounting in her face'); and the silent gaze has the power to transform the listener ('A gaze is very different from what one might think, it has neither light nor expression nor force nor movement, it is silent, but from the heart of strangeness its silence crosses worlds and the person who hears that silence is changed [*devient autre*]') (DS 77, 35, 68). Michel Haar has criticised Heidegger's view of the animal, arguing that he overlooks other forms of expression beyond language: 'one could object that

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Heidegger's phenomenology has taken into account neither the cries, moaning, nor the grimaces, mimicry, gestures, and postures which are irrefutably modes of expression among, for example, mammals'.[88] Haar's criticism cannot be directed at Blanchot. Dialogues in this narrative are brief and often unsuccessful, generally failing to communicate any decisive message:

> For the first time, I decided to telephone her. It was around noon. [J.] was alone. I could hardly hear her, because after the first word or two she was overwhelmed by a violent fit of coughing and choking. For a few seconds I listened to this ragged, suffocated breathing; then she managed to say to me, 'Hang up,' and I hung up. (DS 13)

The ability to reach out to the being that witnesses one's solitude is what is at stake in this failed communication and in the indeterminate nature of the various cries, howls, splutters and sneers that feature throughout the narrative: 'a sort of breath came out of her compressed mouth, a sigh which little by little became a light, weak cry'; 'her voice was naturally surprising – fairly harsh, lightly veiled, clouded by disease and yet always very gay or very lively'; 'This was said in the most tempestuous tone of voice; it was a sort of frenzied cry which would not have seemed natural to me even coming from the most violent sort of person' (DS 20, 21, 59). The narrator endeavours to make himself understood, but this moment of comprehension never takes place in the here and now.

The question of an inhuman transformation in the face of impossible death again arises in a lengthy study of Lautréamont's *The Songs of Maldoror*, first published one year after *Death Sentence* in 1949. Blanchot remarks that the creatures who populate the definitive edition of the first song – the octopus with the silken gaze, the horseshoe bat, the toad, the itch bite that causes scabies – have taken the place of the name Dazet, which appears in the first edition of the song published one year earlier (LS 79). Georges Dazet is an old classmate, a relic from the author Isidore Ducasse's past. This is not some mere literary artifice, writes Blanchot; we have not caught Lautréamont in the act of replacing one name for another. This interruption signals something far more radical: that the author has been transformed by the experience of writing this text (LS 80–1). Dazet ceases to be Dazet and the inhuman emerges from the depths to take his place. How does this happen? Surely Ducasse is not complicit in his own transformation? Blanchot has a theory: 'The truth is that at this moment Dazet effectively dies, and dies so completely that the hand which casts him into nothingness will later return to the past to erase every trace of his existence' (LS 82). A second hand returns to

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the text to haunt the first: in doubling the hand in this way Blanchot contests the limit between nature and technology, because this second hand cannot be described as organic.

The experience of Lautréamont, or Isidore Ducasse, when writing *The Songs of Maldoror* is an exposure to what Blanchot in the opening essay of *The Space of Literature* calls the solitude of the work. This is the first essay Blanchot wrote for his new monthly column in the *Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue française* in 1953; he was living in Èze at the time, a Provençal hilltop village where he would remain until his return to Paris in 1958, and so the essay may be read as a reflection on Blanchot's own experience as writer and critic. Here Blanchot distinguishes between the meditative solitude discussed by Rilke – 'For weeks, except for two short interruptions, I have not pronounced a single word; my solitude has encircled me and I am inside my efforts just as the core is in the fruit' (SL 21) – and the radical solitude of the work. He maps this on to the distinction between the book which is unreliable or insufficient action in the world, and the work which suspends the familiar world (SL 23). In the background is an engagement with Levinas, whose stated aim in a series of lectures given in 1947 was to go beyond the definition of solitude by sociality and to repudiate the Heideggerian view of solitude in the midst of a prior relation with the other.[89]

Levinas understands solitude as the unity between an existent and its existing where the existent possesses such mastery over its existing that all objects in the world are encountered as if they emanated from the subject.[90] The approach of death challenges this solitude because it marks the end of the subject's virility when something unknowable and absolutely other appears and reveals that existence is pluralist.[91] The *there is* is this state prior to solitude, encountered in the approach of death and suffering, which Levinas defines in direct response to Heidegger as an existing which is not an 'in-itself' but the absence of all self, 'being without nothingness which leaves no hole and permits no escape'.[92] Blanchot is similarly concerned with the *there is* as the undercurrent that precedes or gives ontology, but his is a more radical insurmountable solitude that nonetheless allows an exposure to alterity and belongs to the work. What Blanchot and Levinas both take from Heidegger in dissident fashion is that essential solitude precedes the familiarity of world and is in that sense an exposure to alterity and the outside. The difference between them at this stage is that Levinas is thinking as a philosopher – one who has to account for subjectivity – and therefore seeking to defend the primacy of what he calls ethics over ontology, while Blanchot as a writer is more interested in the 'experience' of the outside through the work.

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Blanchot asks what it means for the writer that something like the work exists, and exists in a strange way – without proof, use, marker of completion or incompletion – as an impersonal and anonymous affirmation: it is and nothing more. To write is to withdraw language from the world, and so words become images and appearances that indicate the shadow of events, rather than signs and values that are bound to reality. The solitude experienced by the writer stems from belonging to a work that offers no shelter from the *there is*: writing is an exposure, in language and through language, to 'the opaque, empty opening onto that which is when there is no more world, when there is no world yet' (SL 33). The impulse felt by some writers, often the most literary, to keep a diary or journal is evidence of this experience because it reveals a desire to maintain the self, to attach writing to daily reality, and to root the movement of writing in time (SL 29). This rupture in world exposes them to alterity: 'The third person is myself become no one, others become the other [*autrui devenu l'autre*]' (SL 28). Here we might recognise the experience of Isidore Ducasse or Lautréamont, whose childhood friend is replaced by a mass of writhing creatures, or the experience of Oedipus who is tasked with maintaining the rupture between gods and humans. The solitude of the work allows a thinking of relation in Blanchot which only occurs in the absence of all mediation.

The difference between Blanchot and Levinas is further underscored by their treatment of hands. Levinas considers how we work with our hands in the 'concreteness of need' to suppress the distance between ourselves and objects, noting that what is interesting about the modern tool, more so than its instrumental function as analysed by Heidegger, is its function to suppress work and thus the pain and suffering of the subject. Hands in Blanchot do not always reach out to the world: there are always at least two hands involved in writing, one which deals in the possible and looks to assert itself as master by bringing the writer's task to an end and releasing the pencil, another which continues to write even when asked to stop by the first hand. 'The mastery of the writer is not in the hand that writes, this "sick" hand which never lets the pencil go, which can't let it go, because what it holds it doesn't really hold' (SL 25). The quotation marks suspending 'sick' highlight the uncertain status of this other hand as it hovers over the page, neither grasping nor letting go of the pencil; it is impossible to tell whether it is dead or alive, singular or plural, animal or human. This other hand deals with something beyond the world in a time that is 'barely human'. The writer belongs to the work but only ever achieves the book; torn between action in the world and the worklessness of the outside, they are unable to put

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an end to this task. This more radical solitude of the work reveals a fissure between writing and world: 'To write is [. . .] to withdraw language from the course of the world, to detach it from what makes it a power through which, when I speak, the world is spoken and the day is built through work [*travail*], action and time' (SL 26). The writer is exposed to the radical solitude of the work by the hand that withdraws language from world.

Blanchot's consideration of hands in this subsection bears some resemblance to a passage from *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* which, given the reference to Rilke in the opening paragraphs, he may have had in mind. In this passage a young Malte drops a crayon while drawing a picture of a solitary knight on horseback. He kneels down under the table, his left hand supporting him, and gropes around in the dark with his right hand looking for the crayon. He watches as this hand becomes distanced from him to the extent that it resembles 'an aquatic animal, examining the ground'. A ghostly disembodied hand suddenly emerges from the wall – a fur rug stretches between Malte and this wall – and Malte comments that he felt that one of the hands belonged to him and was committing itself to 'something irreparable': 'With all the authority I had over it, I checked it and drew it back flat and slowly, without taking my eyes off the other, which went on groping. I realized that it would not leave off.'[93]

Malte's left hand is engaged in work in the world. Malte's right hand reaches out, pulls away from bodily identity and transforms into an indeterminate animal. The hand that reaches out to him is described as 'a larger, extraordinarily thin hand, such as I had never seen before'. This hand is also not necessarily human; it does not bear any human characteristics and it seems at least noteworthy that a fur rug marks the region where this encounter takes place. It is unclear whether this hand is a reflection of Malte's own hand, the hand of another human, the hand of another animal, dead or alive. It reaches out to grasp Malte's hand but it is refused. Could it have grasped or touched him in the first place? If it were like the hand that writes in 'The Essential Solitude' it would have been able neither to grasp nor to release. Nevertheless, one thing is certain: what Malte has embarked upon cannot be undone. This encounter with the other forever exposes him to the alterity of the outside and to the impossible and irreversible experience of dying and writing.

Thinking is described by Heidegger as a craft [*Hand-werk*].[94] The hand serves a purpose beyond its everyday use as a bodily organ because it is the means by which the human stretches out and receives itself in the other. Heidegger restricts the hand to the human (paw, fin and claw are excluded) and denies the hand as first instrument,

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arguing that the essence of the hand does not let it be determined as an organic part of the body for grasping – apes have organs that can grasp – but as a thought that gives and is given. Derrida reveals an aporetic logic governing this thinking of the hand ('*Dasein* is neither *vorhanden* nor *zuhanden*. Its mode of presence is otherwise, but it must indeed have the hand in order to relate itself to other modes of presence')[95] and shows that a critique of modern technology is evident in the privileging of the singular hand of thinking and craftsmanship which is threatened by industrial automation and modern mechanisation.

Blanchot welcomes the view that the hand is the organ by which we might reach out to the other; however, in stark contrast to Heidegger, hands in his work are always plural, possibly animal, and disperse rather than gather. Hands surface in *Death Sentence* as characters perform mundane tasks ('She had the telephone to hand and she could call the concierge without dialling'), as they try to communicate ('I received a few words in J.'s hand, in her hand rather than her handwriting'), and as they reach out to others ('I took her hand gently, by the wrist (she was sleeping), and scarcely had I touched it when she sat up with her eyes open, looked at me furiously and pushed me away, saying, "Never touch me again."') These hands have a transformative, even destructive, effect on those they touch: 'I was no longer at all afraid for myself, but for her I was extremely afraid, of alarming her, of transforming her, through fear, into a wild thing which would break in my hands' (DS 8, 12, 25, 68). The plaster casts of the hands of J. and Nathalie have an uncertain status in the eyes of the narrator; the survival of J.'s hands beyond her death in plaster form and the disunity that characterises the lines spreading across the palms incite wonder in the narrator towards the beginning of the text (DS 10–11), while the infinite mortality of the cast produced from Nathalie's hands horrifies the narrator in the closing pages: 'And now that thing is over there, you have uncovered it, you have looked at it, and you have looked into the face of something that will be alive for all eternity, for your eternity and for mine!' (DS 79). The hand is at once what is most human and most inhuman; the two versions of the plaster casts reveal that hands transgress the presumed border between nature and technology.

The sight of these inhuman hands, the acknowledgement of their finitude which traps the narrator and Nathalie, provokes the irreversible realisation that something other that cannot be negated, that precedes any account of being, is in control. The writing hand always intervenes and suspends this world. A further passage from *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* echoes the experience of

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Blanchot's protagonists. Rilke's narrator speaks, in the second person, of exceeding your own boundaries: like a beetle that is trodden on you gush out of yourself, beyond your limits; your hands cannot contain your 'infinitely ramified being [*deines zahlloszweigigen Daseins*]'.[96] The role of hands in both texts is not to gather existence into one unified and finite bodily identity which would represent some philosophical truth, but to reach beyond existence towards the outside, death, the inhuman, and a dispersion that precedes all gathering.

A hand haunting the suppressed third section of *Death Sentence* stresses the significance of this motif to the text. At the end of the first edition of this text, Blanchot's narrator, commenting that there is 'no end for a man who wants to end alone', asks us to imagine the hand that once wrote and is still writing these pages: 'let [anyone who might read these pages] try to imagine the hand that is writing them: if he saw it, then perhaps reading would become a serious task for him' (DS 81). The brief third section containing this plea would be deleted in the 1971 French edition, along with the subtitle 'story' [*récit*], and the second edition of this text bears no acknowledgement of the fact that it is a later edition.[97] The continued non-presence of the other hand ensures that the work never achieves completion and can always be copied, edited, rewritten – evidenced by the silent modifications to this text some twenty-three years after its initial publication. Rilke's Malte similarly recognises the power of the hand to continue in his absence: 'For a while yet I can write all of this down and express it. But there will come a day when my hand will be far from me, and when I bid it write, it will write words I do not mean.'[98] Blanchot and Rilke are in many ways anticipating Derrida's understanding of iterability as already a kind of technology: 'To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in its turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting.'[99] Iterability is that paradoxical doubling, not reliant on the authority of any author, which means that a text or a word can be repeated; as the condition of possibility of writing it simultaneously undermines the possibility of any 'original' copy. Iterability is the logic linking repetition to alterity. There is a connection, for Blanchot as well as Derrida, between the mechanical and the inhuman.

Nowhere is this clearer in Blanchot's work than in the essay on Lautréamont. 'Analysis is a machine that is not easily stopped', writes Blanchot in a section entitled 'The Perpetual Movement of Analysis' (LS 66). Analysis is not easily stopped because any definitive interpretation of the work is shown to be illegitimate or insufficient,

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and so analysis is compelled to continue its 'underailable' mechanical movement, producing differing interpretations of the work with each turn of the faulty wheel. One such interpretation of *The Songs of Maldoror* is that this text recounts the struggle between God and man; this is the view of H. R. Linder who published *Lautréamont: sein Werk und sein Weltbild* in 1947. Blanchot cites Linder in his essay and continues:

> what then becomes significant is that, during this struggle, the work allows itself to be invaded incrementally by an obscure confusion of metamorphosed beings, it gives way to marshy phantoms, a pile of octopuses, toads, crabs, humming spiders, bloodsucking leeches, countless snakes. Lautréamont's poetry perhaps reveals nothing to someone who naively questions it about God and about evil, but it reveals itself through its tendency to be able to speak about God only by means of fantastic animal figures – and not to speak to us about him, but to forget to speak to us about him, by condensing around thick living substances which are at once excessively active and limply inert. (LS 68)

'God' appears in this work not as one figure but as shifting animal forms. The work is constructed around these marshy phantoms which reveal the absence of any creator beyond its limits, or iterability as its condition of possibility. Blanchot is not here replacing faith in God with the faith in progress characteristic of modernity, because analysis is a faulty machine which never delivers any definitive interpretation or truth. These strange animals are ominous, perhaps even terrifying (bloodsucking leeches, humming spiders, countless snakes), because they signal danger as the work turns on itself and confronts its own impossibility, that enigmatic outside that can never be conceptualised, and when it is, by critics such as Linder, is only ever 'a rudimentary framework, clumsily reconstructed from the outside [*maladroitement reconstruite du dehors*]' (LS 69). The work as a result is as fluid and unstable as the amorphous creatures that Linder seeks to solidify by imposing a concrete meaning on the text. Repetition, for Blanchot in 1949 as much as Derrida in 1971, and this includes critical interpretations of the literary work, is bound to alterity because it interrupts the self-identity of the same. Iterability is the condition of possibility of all language, but its effect is heightened in the literary work by the work's ability to point to itself; such outward self-reflection is the reason why these haunting beasts flood *The Songs of Maldoror*.

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The closing chapter of the new version of *Thomas the Obscure* (1950), in which Thomas takes a springtime walk through the

countryside, is perhaps the most sustained engagement with the 'natural' world in Blanchot's entire oeuvre, but this is not nature as we know it. This chapter demonstrates the extent to which Blanchot seeks to draw a parallel between the human and the animal as creatures inhabiting a world traversed by the outside. The animals described in this chapter are deprived of world: there are dragonflies without wings, blind toads and deaf cuckoos. Like the animals of the Rilkean Open, they live in ignorance of their mortality: the toads look to the future, the notion of perishing compels the pupa to become a butterfly, mayflies give the defiant impression that life will last forever. The backdrop is no richer: the sky is transparent and empty, trees bear no fruit, birds fly through nothingness, and an immense sea stretches out beneath Thomas's feet. On first inspection, this scene could appear gloomy, but there is something overwhelmingly positive about Thomas's walk through the countryside where he exists harmoniously with these strange creatures: 'The spring enveloped Thomas like a sparkling night and he felt himself called softly by this nature overflowing with joy' (TO 113). Even the stone, the inanimate object that Heidegger once sentenced to worldlessness, gains a world of its own in this joyous scene: 'A stone rolled, and it slipped through an infinity of metamorphoses the unity of which was that of the world in its splendour. In the midst of these tremblings, solitude burst forth' (TO 114).[100] The weird and wonderful transformations of the stone and the animals mentioned above indicate the suspension of the familiar world and an exposure to something completely alien. They affirm the impossibility of dying for both human and animal, neither of whom are able to address death as a personal or individual experience. The concept of the subject, at least any sovereign subject, is here dismantled by Blanchot.

The mood of the chapter shifts as Thomas enters the town and encounters the humans who have raised themselves to the top of the hierarchy of beings: 'They rose up as stars, ravaging the universal order with their random course. With their blind hands, they touched invisible worlds to destroy them' (TO 115). These hands are concerned with action in the world: they reach out, touch and destroy from within their finite world. The hand that writes, conversely, never touches or grasps; it responds to the demand of the outside, reaches out to the other and suspends the world, opening up the abyss above which the poem hangs and creating a non-hierarchical society which favours no people or being. Thomas leads these 'star-men' to the sea, in a literary experience comparable to his own in the first chapter, where they encounter the impossibility of dying: 'leaning over the crypt, [they] remained there in a profound inertia, waiting

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mysteriously for the tongue [*langue*] whose birth every prophet has felt deep in his throat to come forth from the sea and force the impossible words into their mouths' (TO 116–17). Unlike the animals compelled to transform when confronted with the impossibility of dying, these people await the arrival of a redemptive poetic language which will save them from their forlorn state. This redemption never occurs; the impossible words never fill their mouths; and they do not die an authentic death. Instead, they are called back to the sea where this narrative began, lured there by the promise of an ending which Thomas recognises will never arrive. The difference between animal and human is fragile in this closing chapter: both are condemned to interminably transform, to affirm the abyss above which they all hang when world is suspended.

The opposition between techne and technology upheld by Heidegger thus gives way in Blanchot's fiction and criticism to a very different experience of language: the mechanical. The experience of writing *Thomas the Obscure*, his first novel, prompted the evolution which sees Blanchot move away from a nationalist agenda and a Heideggerian understanding of literature as foundation and truth as revealing. For Heidegger the possibility of a new historic dwelling on earth for the German people is revealed through Hölderlin's mythic saying; Blanchot shifts from such a foundational view of literature through his engagement with Mallarmé, the poet of the abyss, and the recognition that literary language can take itself as object. Literature is founded on a ruinous impossibility – the bottomless abyss, the outside, the neuter, the *there is* – which cannot be overcome, and so writing is condemned to repeat what it cannot articulate: the experience of dying. There is no redemptive turn or event, only incessant exposure to the outside. The appearance of hands and animals in Blanchot signals the suspension of world, exposing its frailty, shaking the hierarchy holding such an isolated system in place to its very core, and creating non-hierarchical differences as opposed to a single hierarchical distinction between writer and man, man and animal. This mechanical, repetitive, impersonal, inhuman experience is therefore inseparable from the possibility of literature, which does not reside in *aletheia*, but in radical errance. Such nomadism explains why Thomas is depicted as shepherd at the end of *Thomas the Obscure*, guiding the lost beings back to the sea to start again at the beginning (or the end).

In Blanchot's writing we encounter a strange environment beyond human control or understanding into which we may reach and meet, at the limits of the human, an inhuman resistance that can only be affirmed. Unlike Rilke, and subsequently Heidegger, Blanchot

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privileges neither animal nor human, but indicates a region where difference is maintained but released from an anthropocentric teleology. For Blanchot, writing cannot be enclosed within anthropological or anthropocentric mastery, which it challenges in the name of the other to which it gives voice. Perhaps at first, because of the urban climates that dominate his fiction, Blanchot's thought seems irreconcilable with ecological thinking. His writing is almost bereft of references to landscapes of any sort: in his fictional work we occasionally glimpse the sea, a beach, a distant mountain range, but on the whole his characters are located within anonymous urban surroundings. On his green credentials, Timothy Clark writes: 'Ultimately, Blanchot's work may adumbrate a thinking that meets one of the most urgent demands of post-enlightenment thought, that is, resources towards a re-enchantment of the natural world that would not at the same time be a kind of mystification, evasion or deception.'[101] While Clark rightly highlights a thinking of world that destabilises our traditional view of the environment, the description of this work as a 're-enchantment of the natural world' suggests a residual romanticism. This is not a work that seeks to captivate in its presentation of the natural world but to expose the impossibility of any such 'nature', which is always already contaminated by the technical. Earlier we saw that Heidegger was accused of presiding over the naturalisation of technology, where the tool or instrument exists simply for *Dasein* who alone discloses the world. In Blanchot, hands transgress the presumed border between nature and technology, they are simultaneously what is most human and most inhuman. These hands are evidence of an unruly technology that is not subordinate to pre-technological ontological questioning, because it precedes and exceeds the human subject.

Notes

1. Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, p. 79.
2. Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p. 54. See Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, [1962] 1988), pp. 91–107. For an overview of Heideggerian world, see Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 245–8; and Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, pp. 49–55, 136–40.
3. See Bradley, *Originary Technicity*, p. 75.
4. Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, pp. 137–8.

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5. For a discussion of equipmentality in *Being and Time* that summarises charges of anthropocentrism, the idealisation of technology, and technophobia, see Bradley, *Originary Technicity*, pp. 68–93. Derrida argues

that Heidegger privileges the human and presupposes a thought free from technics; see, for instance, Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Stiegler argues that the account of the tool given by Heidegger reduces technics to a supplemental role; see Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, I, pp. 243–5, 274.

6. Keith Hoeller, 'Translator's Introduction', in Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, pp. 7–19 (p. 11).
7. Heidegger, 'Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry', in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 59.
8. Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1–56 (p. 19).
9. Ibid., p. 23.
10. Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 137.
11. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Grey (New York: Perennial Library, [1976] 2004), p. 16. Derrida notes that an implicit but nonetheless clear hierarchy is evident in Heidegger's thinking of *Hand-werk* [the work of the hand, handiwork, handling]. The true or authentic joiner, for instance, 'accords himself with the hidden plenitude of the wood's essence, and not with the tool and the use value'. 'The meditation on the authentic *Hand-werk* also has the sense of an artisanalist protest against the hand's effacement or debasement in the industrial automation of modern mechanization.' Jacques Derrida, '*Geschlecht II*: Heidegger's Hand', trans. John P. Leavey, in *Martin Heidegger*, ed. Stephen Mulhall (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 431–66 (pp. 440, 442). The final section of this chapter considers unruly hands in Blanchot as examples of such automaticity.
12. Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 14.
13. Ibid., p. 24.
14. Meyer Schapiro, 'Still Life as Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh', in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist and Society: Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), pp. 135–42.
15. Jacques Derrida, 'Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing [*pointure*]', in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 255–382 (p. 333).
16. Ibid., p. 283.
17. Ibid., p. 339.
18. Ibid., p. 349.
19. Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Off the Beaten Track*, pp. 46–7.
20. Ibid., p. 46.

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21. Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on "Humanism"', trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 239–76 (p. 239). This essay was originally a response

to a letter from Jean Beaufret written in 1946, revised and first published in 1947.

22. The last quotation is a reference to a poem by Hölderlin quoted by Heidegger: ‘Since we have become a discourse [*Seit ein Gespräch wir sind*]’. See Hölderlin, ‘Conciliator, you that no longer believed in . . .’, in *Poems and Fragments*, pp. 422–31 (pp. 428–9).
23. Heidegger’s is a controversial reading of Hölderlin. Paul de Man argues that Heidegger distorts the meaning of ‘As When on a Holiday . . .’, making Hölderlin say that reconciliation between the Sacred and the poetic is possible when his is in fact a ‘philosophy of separation’. Paul de Man, ‘Heidegger’s Exegeses of Hölderlin’, in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 246–66.
24. For an overview of the significance of Hölderlin for Heidegger as ‘The Poet of the Germans’, see Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political: Dystopias* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 94–113.
25. Robert Savage, *Hölderlin after the Catastrophe: Heidegger, Adorno, Brecht* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), pp. 5–7.
26. Authorship of this fragment is uncertain, but it is known to originate from a conversation between Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin and dates from 1796/7. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, trans. Jeff Fort (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), pp. 28–9.
27. Ibid., p. 14.
28. Ibid., pp. 17–37.
29. See Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, in *Basic Writings*, pp. 311–41.
30. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger*, pp. 83–92.
31. For Hölderlin’s post-war reception in Germany by those on the left and the right, see Savage, *Hölderlin after the Catastrophe*. For Mallarmé’s reception in France and how those on the right struggled to accept him as the ‘national poet’, see David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 80–1, 107–9.
32. Blanchot’s close friend Levinas writes in 1947: ‘If at the beginning our reflections are in large measure inspired by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where we find the concept of ontology and of the relationship which man sustains with Being, they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy, and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian’ (*Existence and Existents*, p. 19).
33. Blanchot, *Thomas l’Obscur* (1941), p. 33 (my translation).
34. Ibid., p. 27 (my translation).
35. Blanchot’s neuter, which will be discussed in the following chapter, ensures that his work resists classification and speaks from a place free of oppositions; it is neither inside nor outside philosophy. Derrida argues with reference to Blanchot that philosophy constitutes itself by

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determining its own outside; it is therefore difficult to hold on to the opposition between what is inside and what is outside philosophy: 'The neuter and not neutrality, the neuter beyond dialectical contradiction and all opposition: such would be the possibility of a "narrative" [*récit*] that would no longer be simply a form, a genre or a mode of literature, and that is carried beyond the system of philosophical oppositions. The neuter cannot be governed by any of the terms involved in an opposition within philosophical language or natural language.' Jacques Derrida, 'Living On', trans. James Hulbert, in *Parages*, pp. 103–91 (p. 132) (translation modified).

36. Heidegger, '"As When on a Holiday . . ."', in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, pp. 67–99 (p. 83).
37. Hölderlin provides a partial answer to this question in 'Bread and Wine': 'They are, you say, like the wine-god's sacred priests, | Who roamed from land to land during the sacred night.' The response ties together religion, myth, the sacred and poetry, conforming neatly to Heidegger's description of *Sage* which will play a significant role in the essay to come. Hölderlin quoted in Heidegger, 'Why Poets?', in *Off the Beaten Track*, pp. 200–41 (p. 202).
38. Heidegger, 'Why Poets?', in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 200.
39. Extract from Hölderlin's 'Bread and Wine' quoted in Heidegger, 'Why Poets?', in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 201.
40. Heidegger, 'Why Poets?', in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 203.
41. Ibid., pp. 205–6.
42. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. Martyn Crucefix (London: Enitharmon, 2006), pp. 62–3.
43. For the opposition to Rilke's inversion of the human–animal hierarchy, see Martin Heidegger, 'Significance of Dis-Closure', in *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 131–60.
44. Heidegger, 'Why Poets?', in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 226.
45. Ibid., p. 214.
46. For an overview of Heidegger's criticism of Rilke in 'Why Poets?, see Véronique M. Fóti, *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiēsis, Sophia, Technē* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), pp. 30–43.
47. Heidegger, 'Why Poets?', in *Off the Beaten Track*, pp. 216–17.
48. The basis for 'The Question Concerning Technology' was therefore underway a few years before the paper was first given as a lecture on 18 November 1953. Another key text in the development of Heidegger's thinking on technology, although not published until much later, is 'Das Ge-Stell' (1949), which is a preliminary version of the later essay according to the *Gesamtausgabe*. See Martin Heidegger, 'Das Ge-Stell', in *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975–), LXXIX: *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (1994), pp. 24–45.
49. Heidegger, 'Why Poets?', in *Off the Beaten Track*, pp. 217–21.
50. Ibid., p. 233.
51. Ibid., p. 237.

52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 227.
54. Heidegger, 'Das Ding', in *Gesamtausgabe*, VII: *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (2000), pp. 165–87 (p. 180) (my translation). On the difference between perishing and properly dying according to Heidegger and how to translate these terms, see Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 30–2.
55. Fóti, *Heidegger and the Poets*, p. 35.
56. Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), p. 17.
57. Ibid., pp. 22–3.
58. Ibid., p. 27.
59. Maurice Blanchot, 'Death as Possibility' (1952), 'The *Igitur* Experience' (1953), 'Rilke and Death's Demand' (1953), in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp. 85–159.
60. Blanchot was not alone in querying the translation of *eigentlich* as 'authentic': Levinas notes that the connection to *eigen* was overlooked when *eigentlich* was translated into French as 'authentique' in the 1930s. See Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 26.
61. For these terms as they are used by Heidegger, see *Being and Time*, pp. 343–4.
62. Ibid., pp. 306–7.
63. Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 22.
64. Ibid., p. 8.
65. 'Every transgression operates from then on against or beyond transgression to the extent that it would be the fact of a (non)pace [*pas*]; transgression transgresses the (non)pace itself, steps across a pace beyond the pace, across a not beyond the not [*franchit un pas au-delà du pas*]; and what we might call the digression of distance diverts, from *Thomas the Obscure* on, every logic of the limit, of opposition, of identity, of contradiction, but as well sets free, under the apparent normality of his language (vocabulary and syntax), the contamination of noun (*pas*, pace) and adverb (*pas*, not, no).' Jacques Derrida, 'Pace *Not(s)*', trans. John P. Leavey, in *Parages*, pp. 11–101 (p. 36).
66. Derrida, *Aporias*, pp. 33–5.
67. Ibid., p. 44–5.
68. Ibid., pp. 76–8. See also Derrida, '*Geschlecht II*: Heidegger's Hand'.
69. Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 76 (translation modified).
70. Paul de Man similarly argues that Rilke's language puts into question what it seems to promise ('a form of existential salvation that would take place in and by means of poetry'): 'The promise contained in Rilke's poetry, which the commentators, in the eagerness of their belief, have described in all its severe complexity, is thus placed, by Rilke himself, within the dissolving perspective of the lie. Rilke can only be understood if one realizes the urgency of this promise together

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with the equally urgent, and equally poetic, need of retracting it at the very instant he seems to be on the point of offering it to us.' Paul de Man, 'Tropes (Rilke)', in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 20–56 (pp. 23, 56).

71. See Beda Allemann, *Hölderlin et Heidegger*, trans. François Fédier, 2nd edn (Paris: PUF, 1987). The text was published in German in 1954 and first appeared in French translation five years later in 1959; Blanchot's article appeared in January 1955 and is one of the last to be included in *The Space of Literature*. Paul de Man is critical of Allemann, who proposes a homogeneity between Heidegger and Hölderlin that rests on the movement of reversal that occurs in both: 'There is not to be found in Hölderlin a singular ontological reversal, but a lived philosophy of repeated reversal, that is nothing more than the notion of becoming. Since there is always reversal, there is never any effective reconciliation, not even in the early works' (*Blindness and Insight*, p. 265).
72. 'At the frontier Man forgets himself because he is wholly in the moment; and the God forgets himself because he is nothing but time; and both are unfaithful, time because in such a moment it is a categorical turning-point in which beginning and end cannot at all be made to fit; and Man because at the moment of categorical turning he must follow but in what follows he cannot at all match what was there in the beginning.' Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin's Sophocles*, trans. David Constantine (Highgreen: Bloodaxe, 2001), p. 68.
73. Blanchot will later write of madness in terms of indifference in 'Forgetting, Unreason' (1961), in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 194–201. He equates madness in *The Madness of the Day* to being blinded by light. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of both texts.
74. Lacoue-Labarthe, breaking with the Romantic Hölderlin of Heidegger, points to the sober literalness of the poet when he writes that Adorno is correct to contradict Heidegger's 'emphatic and pious commentary' on the poem 'Remembrance', 'which lends itself so poorly to the diction proper to this poem, concerned as it is with "sobriety"'. Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Heidegger reads Hölderlin in bad faith and with very precise intentions (*Heidegger*, pp. 41–2).
75. Jacques Derrida, 'Che cos'è la poesia?', in *Points . . .: Interviews, 1974–1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf and others (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 288–99 (p. 297).
76. Schlegel writes of the fragment: 'A fragment, like a work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a hedgehog.' See 'Athenaeum Fragments', trans. P. Firchow, in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 251. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of how the Blanchotian fragment differs from that described here.
77. Derrida, 'Istrice 2: Ick bünn all hier', in *Points . . .*, pp. 300–26.

78. Derrida, 'Che cos'è la poesia?', in *Points . . .*, p. 289. Blanchot writes elsewhere: 'You will not find the limits of forgetting, however far you may be able to forget' (AO 34). See Chapter 4 for a discussion of forgetting and exteriority in Blanchot.
79. Derrida, 'Che cos'è la poesia?', in *Points . . .*, p. 295.
80. Ibid., p. 299. Leslie Hill writes that, in refusing any explicit or implicit appeal to an ontology of the artwork and any reliance on the metaphysical category of the aesthetic or the supposed autonomy of poetic language or discourse, Derrida's modest yet radical purpose in this response 'was to reconsider the minimal conditions of possibility of what in the Western tradition has come to be known as literature'. If there was something distinctive about literature in general for Derrida, it derived 'from the remarkable diligence with which a literary work, radicalising a feature inherent in all inscription as such, could always point to itself, among others, as a so-called literary text'. Leslie Hill, 'On the Persistence of Hedgehogs', in *Philosophy and Poetry: Continental Perspectives*, ed. Ranjan Ghosh (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 235–47.
81. Heidegger, 'Why Poets?', in *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 212.
82. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, pp. 62–3.
83. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 176. It is unlikely that Blanchot read this particular essay given the publication date of this lecture course, but we have seen that similar statements were made by Heidegger in earlier works such as *Being and Time* and 'The Origin of the Work of Art'.
84. Derrida, *Of Spirit*, p. 57.
85. See Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 57–64.
86. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 59.
87. Ulrich Baer, *The Rilke Alphabet*, trans. Andrew Hamilton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 126.
88. Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*, trans. Reginald Lily (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 29.
89. Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), pp. 39–40.
90. Ibid., pp. 44–5, 65.
91. Ibid., pp. 74–5.
92. Ibid., pp. 49–50.
93. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, pp. 84–5.
94. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, pp. 16–17.
95. Derrida, '*Geschlecht II*: Heidegger's Hand', p. 446.
96. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 69.
97. Derrida considers the unacknowledged changes to *Death Sentence* in 'Living On', in *Parages*, pp. 127–9.
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98. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 52.
99. Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, pp. 307–29 (p. 316).

100. I am here referring to the abridged 1950 edition of the text with the subtitle 'new version' in French; in this passage, a few words from the first version published in 1941 have been removed: 'and although [the stone] was still stonelike' (*Thomas l'Obscur* (1941), p. 318 (my translation)). This omission in the later version signals a shift towards a much more fragile world. In an earlier draft of this novel, written during the 1930s, the narrator explicitly refers to 'nature' several times in a much longer description of the trees, plants, insects and animals inhabiting a timeless imaginary universe (*Thomas le Solitaire*, pp. 258–66).
101. Timothy Clark, 'A Green Blanchot: Impossible?', in *Blanchot's Epoch*, ed. Hill and Holland, pp. 121–40 (p. 123). See also Timothy Clark, 'Maurice Blanchot and the End of Nature', *Parallax* 16, no. 2 (2010): 20–30.

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