

## Double Signature

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What is Derrida doing in *Glas*? His own most developed response to this question, delivered decades later at a Cerisy-la-Salle conference on Genet, somewhat surprised his audience by privileging the notion of the countersignature in his account of the book.<sup>1</sup> For, as he himself signals, it was not in *Glas* but in *Signéponge*, his contribution the following year to another Cerisy conference, that he had elaborated on the notion (C21–2). Moreover, his gloss on the concept in ‘Countersignature’ has a very different accent from *Signéponge*. Derrida approaches the question via a reflection on the different meanings of the expression ‘the betrayal of truth’: truth can be betrayed both in the sense of falsified or counterfeited, and in the sense of revealed or manifested. This ambiguity echoes in that of the prefix ‘*contre*’, counter or against, which can mean both opposite and adjacent (C17–18). Insofar as a countersignature serves to authenticate a first signature, the meaning of proximity initially seems most prominent. Nevertheless, the possibility of betraying the truth that Derrida argues already exists within the signature extends into the countersignature: ‘the countersignature betrays the signature by counterfeiting it or, on the contrary, respects it by not imitating it, by not counterfeiting it, for example by signing very differently’ (C8). The countersignature betrays as much as it confirms the signature it countersigns.

‘Countersignature’ identifies this structural inseparability of betrayal and faithfulness as intrinsic to the relation between the two columns in *Glas*. The two columns ‘countersign each other’:

This abyssal double meaning of ‘counter’, of the contract, reflecting proximity or opposition, is of course at work in *Glas*, not only in the Genet column, but between the two columns, the Genet one and the Hegel one – and their spyholes [*judas*]. So many traitors. I would even say that this oscillating law rules their relations, for sometimes the two columns contradict each other, in an opposition whose dialectical formalization – itself evidently contested, queried in *Glas* – is revealed to us by Hegel, sometimes they do not contradict each other but rather wink at each other – the word *clin*, wink, like the word *class*, obviously echoing all the *cl* of the text. The Hegel column and the Genet column are not only opposed, they sometimes confirm and countersign each other, strangely, surprisingly, with slight displacements and occasionally even authenticate or betray themselves by betraying the other’s truth. (C19)

The two columns, then, countersign each other. But Derrida too countersigns each. How is his countersignature affected by the doubleness – both betrayal and faithfulness, opposition and confirmation – that he identifies at work between Hegel and Genet?

To explore this, we need first to establish the stakes of the countersignature that operates between the two columns, where the oppositions are considerably more obvious than the similarities. On the one hand, a heterosexual philosopher of the family; on the other, a homosexual, illegitimate writer. The opposition is reflected in the distinction Derrida posits between Hegel’s dialectics and what he calls Genet’s ‘galactics’. In the left-hand column, Derrida reads a long succession of passages

developing the 'law' of the family in Hegel's speculative dialectics, focussing in particular on the passage from the religion of flowers to the religion of animals and the shift from Judaism to Christianity, and bringing out that, for Hegel, the sublation by which something negates itself in order to allow a more conceptual or spiritual form to develop involves an ever-upward movement: 'Airy ascent of the concept.'<sup>2</sup> Hence Derrida's translation of the German term *Aufhebung* (sublation) by *relève*, whose literal meaning 'take up again' is lost in the English translation as 'relief'. Hegel's dialectics erects 'even the tomb' (E23/D32), a noun that in French is a homophone of the verb fall; the 'airy ascent of the concept' recuperates the (downward) movement in negating it. In other words, it eradicates the space of difference.

The principal difference whose eradication or repression in Hegel's thinking Derrida demonstrates is that of sexual difference. It is as the religion of the father-son relation that, for Hegel, Christianity raises Judaism to a higher level. Only in the passage from Judaism to Christianity, from Judaic duty to Christian love, does the concept of a loving father become possible (E31a/D43a); Abraham 'could not even love his son' (E42a/D58a). As the first religion with a familial structure, Christianity marks the highest religious point attained by the trinitarian dialectical process. But the image of the family enshrined in Christianity is that of the Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) rather than the Holy Family (Mary, Joseph, Jesus). Christianity couples the father with the son, not with the mother. The Holy Spirit (the Concept) *is* the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. The mother has no place that is proper to her.

For Derrida, Hegel's system is thus fundamentally based on the repression of sexual difference:

The opposition of father and mother is equivalent to all the other oppositions of the series. Equivalent, then, to *opposition itself* as it constitutes the structure of representation. (...) And if sexual difference as opposition relieves [*relève*] difference, the opposition, conceptuality itself is homosexual. (E223a/D312a).

The oppositional thinking of the heterosexual philosopher of the family, in other words, is one that accommodates only one sex: ‘Homosexual enantiosis’ (E224a/D314a).

In contrast, Derrida reads Genet as proposing a ‘galactics’, that is, a system of the Milky Way or *Voie lactée*, in French a homophone of *Voix lactée* or Milky Voice. The illegitimate, homosexual Genet is someone through whom the mother speaks. Derrida uses the same verb *relever* in relation to Genet (E9b/D12b). But whereas Hegel’s dialectical movement sought to produce the distinction between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ (and the recuperation of the fall), Genet’s operation produces the *undecidability* of high and low, of elevation and fall, of masculine and feminine, of erection and castration. For Derrida, Genet sounds the *glas* or deathknell of phallogocentrism (E226b/D315b) insofar as he makes it impossible to detach the phallus from castration. Derrida reads the series of explicitly homosexual, ithyphallic encounters which fill Genet’s texts as staging a long succession of *undecidable* sexes: ‘a double, undecidable sex activates itself sheathing father and mother all at once’ (E247–8b/D345b). Insofar as it does not oppose the sexes, *Glas* implies, Genet’s writing is sexually different from Hegel’s. It offers a privileged site of exploration of what Derrida calls ‘*antherection* [*l’antherection*]: the time of erection countered [*contrée*], overlapped by its contrary – in (the) place of the flower. Enanthiosis

[*Enanthiose*]’ (E130b/D183b). Not an ‘anti-erection’ but an ‘antherection’, a space of difference that is not one of opposition. By adding a *h* (as here in *anthérection* and *énanthiose*), Derrida signals the operation of what he names the ‘anthologic of the undecidable [*anthologique de l’indécidable*]’ (E126b/D177b). At issue is an alternative logic, one in which ‘the question of the flower, the anthological question’ (E13b/D18b), finds its voice.

With the flower, we reach the specific question of the signature, which historically marked an important border between philosophy and literature. The former considered the philosophical work as fully detachable from its author, as a logical, rational, conceptual output in which the singularities of the author have no place. The philosopher signs his/her work outside the text proper, on the cover or in the publishing contract that appropriates the work by identifying it as produced by a proper name. As Derrida signals from the outset, Hegel’s signature does not appear within his text: ‘His signature (...) will envelop this corpus, but no doubt will not be contained therein [*comprise*]’ (E1a/D2a). Nonetheless, by his choice of words to describe a key moment of the dialectic, Derrida suggests that Hegel’s text itself bears signs of its author: ‘Absolute knowledge gives itself time. It imposes a gap in signing himself [*Il s’impose un écart en se signant*]’ (E229a/D319a). However, in French, *se signer* also means to make the sign of the cross, that is, to sign ‘in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’. Hegel’s dialectical system (consistent with the genealogical system of filiation that has dominated Western history, in which the father’s property and proper name are transmitted from father to son) signs in the name of the Father.

Insofar as he does not consider his name essential for his discourse, then, Hegel – philosophy – signs in the name of the father. Literature, on the other hand,

names the privileged space where the author's singularities can be freely inscribed within the text. A literary text is signed in the larger sense of bearing a 'style' (another term with floral connotations exploited throughout the text) specific to its author, as well as of containing the author's signature as much as being contained by it. One of *Glas*'s nuggets, or remnants, of literary theory emphasizes this explicitly: 'A text "exists", resists, consists, represses, lets itself be read or written only if it is worked (over) by the illegibility of a proper name' (E33b/D45b). How does this difference between philosophy and literature intersect with sexual difference? What might a sexually different signature represent? For Derrida, Genet's work is exemplary in this respect:

Genet, by one of those movements in *ana*, would have (...) silently, laboriously, minutely, obsessionally, compulsively, and with the moves of a thief in the night, set his signatures in (the) place of all the missing objects. In the morning, expecting to recognize familiar things, you find his name all over the place, in big letters, small letters, as a whole or in morsels deformed or recomposed. He is no longer there, but you live in his mausoleum or his latrines. You thought you were deciphering, tracking down, pursuing, you are included [*compris*]. He has affected everything with his signature. He has affected his signature. He has affected it with everything. He himself is affected by it (he will even be decked out, later on, with a circumflex). He has tried, he himself, properly [*proprement*], to write what happens between affect and the *seing*. (E41-2b/D58b)

Genet sets his signatures ‘in (the) place of all the missing objects’: he signs in the place of loss, a loss with specifically maternal connotations. *Seing*, a key signifier in *Glas*, is an arcane term for signature and homophonous in French with both *saint* and *sein* (breast); moreover, as an illegitimate child, Genet bears his mother’s surname. The Genet column thus invites reading as an exploration of what it might mean to sign ‘in the name of the mother’. It suggests that signing with her proper name would merely set the mother up in opposition to the father, constitute her as an alternative identity that would efface the difference and ultimately amount to the same as signing with the father’s name. In contrast, Genet’s signature does not serve to consolidate property; he signs ‘with the moves of thief’. His attempt to write ‘properly’ what happens ‘between affect and the *seing*’ is not an appropriative gesture, a simple transfer of property. Not only does Genet sign by leaving his signature behind (rather than taking something away), but his signature undermines rather than consolidates identity, leaving bits (‘morsels’) of his name all over the place. He signs even with bits that are not part of his name, notably the circumflex he adds to his surname in *Journal du voleur*. In a passage quoted extensively in *Glas*, the statement that the narrator’s mother’s name was ‘Gabrielle Genet’ immediately leads on to a development of the ‘deep sense of kinship’ he feels with the plant ‘*genêt*’ and, in a footnote, spells out the link between his surname and the plant’s name, replete with circumflex: ‘The very day he met me, Jean Cocteau called me “his Spanish *genêt*”’ (E182–3b/D254b).

Genet thus signs antonomastically, or ‘anthonomastically’, with a *nom commun* (common noun) instead of a *nom propre* (proper name). In other words, Genet signs *improperly*, with a replacement or inappropriate name. But his signature goes further still in troubling identity rather than consolidating it. Derrida famously

reads the insistent presence of words with the letters *gl* throughout Genet's texts as remnants of his mother's first name, Gabrielle: *glaiëul*, *glaviaud*, *glaiue*, *algues*, *galerie*, *aigle* (which sounds like Hegel in French), and of course the word *glas*. The deathknell announced by the title is that of the proper name itself: 'the *glas* of the proper name [*glas du nom propre*]' (E20b/D27b).

GL, then, stands for a practice of naming that does not name, undermines identity in the very process of constituting it. GL accepts definition only as a linguistic phenomenon produced at the back of the throat; it escapes or exceeds the attempt to define it in any other sense. The passage that most elaborates on GL, a passage right in the middle of the book whose layout visually places GL at the centre of the right-hand column, develops the impossibility of constituting it as a centre of meaning:

### GL

I do not say either the signifier GL, or the phoneme GL, or the grapheme GL. Mark would be better, if the word were well understood, or if one's ears were open to it; not even mark then.

It is also imprudent to advance or set GL swinging in the masculine or feminine, to write or to articulate it in capital letters. That has no identity, sex, gender, makes no sense, is neither a definite whole nor a part detached from a whole

*gl* remains(s) *gl*

(E119b/D167–8b)



*gl* is absolutely undecidable: neither masculine nor feminine, part nor whole. To sign in the name of the mother is to sign undecidably, troubling rather than confirming identity, property, meaning. The answer to the question ‘what might a sexually different signature represent?’ is thus: nothing. Like the flower. The ‘anthographic text’ is one that tolls the end of signification:

In *no longer* signifying, the signature (...) no longer belongs to or comes from the order of signification of the signified or the signifier.

Thus what the tolling of the knell [*glas*] emits is the fact that the flower, for example, inasmuch as it signs, no longer signifies anything.

(E31–2b/D42–5b).

We can thus infer from Derrida’s reading of Genet that a practice of language that signifies nothing, signifies only the end of signification, is an operation signing ‘in the name of the mother’.<sup>3</sup>

Derrida privileges the ‘circumflex accent’, sometimes present, sometimes absent when Genet plays on his name, as emblem of the instance that signs undecidably, maternally. A circumflex is a marginal diacritic sign; indeed, Derrida quotes from the linguist Ivan Fónagy, whose work is primarily concerned with the question of the arbitrariness or motivation of the linguistic sign, for whom the circumflex is a ‘fruitless complication’ of spelling (E230b/D321–2b). Historically, it was the vestige of a previous *s*, the sign that a letter had been dropped or had ‘fallen’. Long before the quotation from *Journal du voleur* where Genet’s narrator makes the link with the plant *genêt*, Derrida makes reference to a missing *s*. In a *judas* or spyhole that elaborates on how, in Genet’s *Miracle de la rose*, the very Christian

scene of Harcamone's sacrificial death is supplemented by a scene of Dionysian excess, Derrida develops the impossibility of identifying any centre to Genet's writing:

Since this is a writing of decapitation, it has no centre. And it would be a snare, a supplementary decapitation, to see everything agglutinated, agglomerated [*s'agglutiner, s'agglomérer*] around a principal sucker, be it virgin/castrated like a flower (...) or the whole family structure of the mother tongue properly and lovingly slit at the throat, at the glottis, erected/excreted, in the depths of a grotto or a forge [*égorgée, églottée, érigée/excrétée, au fond d'une grotte ou d'une forge*] (sounds of 'sobs [*sanglots*], 'tramps [*cloches*: also, bells], 'a 'bugle' [*clairon*] making one page clack [*claquer*]; then the following: '... a huge crucifix. All the kids who were being punished that day were waiting at the door for their turn to be sentenced...'; then the following: '... their unwashed asses. They would say of a youngster whose toenails were too long: "His nails [*ongles*] are curling." They would also say: "Your crap basket [*panier à crotte*]" ("craps" [*crottes*] when he heard it, the child adding the infamous s).').

Why would the s be a mark of infamy? What is at stake in this

(hi)story of infamy (E71-2b/D100-1b)

At the same time that Derrida states that it would be a trap to see this writing with 'no centre' as centred on the 'whole family structure of the mother tongue', the insistent echo of the *gl* (and the *gr*, *cl* and *cr* sounds that simultaneously extend and undermine its privilege, as emphasized above in bold) is unmistakable. The absence of an *s* becomes manifest in a context where a specifically maternal absence or loss resonates.

Later in *Glas*, the circumflex beckons towards this maternal absence with a slightly different emphasis, one where the question of emphasis, of accent, is precisely at issue. ‘The circumflex accent (that is how I shall call what distinguishes him from the author and is raised higher than he)’ (E172b/D240b): Derrida selects the circumflex as shorthand for the textual instance that interests him, neither simply author nor narrator, but an origin *in the process of becoming detached from itself*. Derrida most explicitly glosses this in the Hegel column, quoting the philosopher to the effect that the artist’s work, ‘by being able thus to cut itself off and fall (to the tomb) from him, *is not his equal* [*ne lui est pas égale*: is not the same as him; also, he is not indifferent to it] (...) By his withdrawal the artist consequently raises himself above his remain(s) and in the same stroke detains it as a small part, a morsel of himself’ (E257a/D359a). The work is both a whole detached from the artist *and* part of him. The ‘circumflex accent’ (whose typographical form itself figures the simultaneously up and down movement of the flower) functions as Derrida’s shorthand name for the operation of Genet’s signature: that of an undecidable instance ‘between the elaboration and the work’, between the process and the product. ‘Improper then is the flower name, the accent of the *genêt* that is hardly pronounced. The circumflex with which it decks itself out is a sort of pastiche head or headgear, and is stitched [*cousu*] in (the) place of a living wound that signs’ (E188b/D262b).

However, just as Genet signs with a proxy or improper name, Derrida’s name for him in turn is improper. The decision to call him an ‘accent’ is necessarily a gesture of both fidelity and betrayal. Derrida follows a passage describing how *gl* works with the following short paragraph: ‘That is where (it is necessary) to put the accent in case you desire to understand, to hear something about writing, to decipher or to decircumcise the text you sound, the text-consonant [*qu’on sonne*]’

(E234b/D327b). Like Sartre in *Saint Genet*, for example, Derrida offers his own particular view of what Genet does generally in writing. But ‘putting the accent’ means accentuating one part of the whole, speaking partially. At the very moment that he stresses his interpretation, he (unlike Sartre) stresses its limits; any stress, any accent, is inevitably unfaithful to the whole it seeks to countersign.

To what extent, then, is it Derrida’s accent, rather than Genet’s, that is heard in *Glas*? And to what extent does he hanker after an unaccented – unsigned – writing?<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that one of *Glas*’s most autobiographical moments evokes the decisive influence of the Torah, a writing in two columns and ‘without accent’:

One of those taxing operations, in my eyes the most theatrical, consisted, as I have said, in raising the two parted columns, in bearing them at arm’s length to present, from afar, the text to the crowd of the faithful, as if they could read, learn, verily purchase, at such a great distance, a book – the first – that was thick, dense, difficult, heavy, unaccented [*sans accent*]. (...) The chant was never interrupted. (...)

Maybe the children who watched the pomp of this celebration, even more those who could lend it a hand, dream about it for a long time after, in order to organize all the pieces and scenes of their lives.

What am I doing here? Let’s put it that I am working on the origin of literature by miming it. (E241b/D336–7b)

Of the Torah’s many aspects, Derrida accentuates the fact that it has no accents; the scroll used for liturgy contains neither accents (or cantillation marks, also called trope) nor vowels. The link is obvious between *gl* (as consonants with no vowels or other

indication to help the reader decide on their pronunciation) and the Hebrew Bible. But the chanting whose effect Derrida recalls here precisely involves vocalising the text, adding the vowels and accents that determine how it is chanted. *Glas* is, indeed, a ‘*texte qu’on sonne*’ in both senses as translated in the previous quotation: it ‘sounds’ out, particularizes, a ‘text-consonant’. It is Derrida’s ‘interpretation’ of Genet, in the sense that a violinist interprets the music s/he performs. The accent that resounds in *Glas* is as much determined by the childhood experience recounted in this passage, for example, as by Genet. Moreover, the autobiographical ‘truth’ that the book contains in turn defies delineation. Derrida’s careful formulation does not specify whether he is included among the ‘children’ on whom the scene is posited as having had a determining influence. Nor is his linking of the scene to what he is doing ‘here’ an unequivocal gesture, given the uncertainty that attaches to the words ‘here’ and ‘now’ from the very first sentence of *Glas*. How Derrida is implicated in *Glas* remains thoroughly indeterminable.

‘What am I doing here?’ That is indeed the question. How does Derrida’s countersignature replicate or contradict what it countersigns? To date, analysis of Derrida’s signature in *Glas* to date has focussed on the moments at which he draws attention to it in the right-hand column.<sup>5</sup> As well as the final words *débris de* that in effect sign off the book, these include the word *déjà*: ‘(to) read the *déjà* [*already*] as a siglum. When I sign, I am already dead’ (E19b/D26b); and the word *derrière*:

*Derrière*: every time the word comes first, if written therefore after a period and with a capital letter, something inside me used to start to recognize there my father’s name, in golden letters on his tomb, even before he was there.

*A fortiori* when I read *Derrière le rideau* [*Behind the Curtain*]. (E68b/D95b)

Yet Derrida's choice of his surname, specifically identified here as that of his father (who had died in 1970, and whom Derrida was mourning while writing *Glas*), to countersign Genet's signature with his mother's first name merits further attention. The 'father's name, in golden letters on his tomb', presumably also includes his first-names, Aimé or Haïm. These names are never directly mentioned in *Glas*; however, their traces are visible when, just after stating that there is 'always – already [*déjà*] – more than one – *glas*', Derrida claims that he writes '(on) no singular text, no inimitable signature'. The mother 'appropriates everything, but because she has nothing that is properly hers. She gives/takes for loving/hating but is nothing [*Elle donne/prend à aimer/haïr mais n'est rien*]' (E150b/D210b). In this context of the lack of property associated with the mother (such that anything and everything can be identified with her or as hers), *aimer/haïr* inevitably calls to mind *Aimé/Haïm*. Paradoxically, even the father's name can substitute for the mother.

How, then, to read Derrida's conspicuous use of his father's surname to reaffirm Genet's use of his mother's? Is it a signal that *any* hermeneutic exercise must speak in the name of the father? That any attempt to 'think, conceive, grasp' the other must indeed involve dominating it, as in his gloss on Hegel, where 'a being thought is a being controlled' (E38a/D53a)? Derrida expressly seeks not to follow the example of Sartre 'in 1952, when the ontophenomenologist of the liberation (...) insisted on handing back to you, right into your hand, to a safe place, the "keys" to the-man-and-the-complete-work, their ultimate psychoanalytico-existential signification' (E29b/D40b). To do so would be to 'arrest' Genet again: to still his movement, but also to police him. One notable passage, where the uncertain reference of the first person pronoun brings Derrida's own critical position into question, associates a

double structure with resistance to any attempt to explain the text from a position of authority:

If I write two texts at once, you will not be able to castrate me. If I delinearize, I erect. But at the same time I divide my act and my desire. I – mark(s) the division, and always escaping you, I simulate unceasingly and take my pleasure nowhere. I castrate myself – I remain(s) myself thus – and I ‘play at coming’ [*je ‘joue à jouir’*]. (E65b/D91b)

Just as doubling the text means that it is fully present nowhere, and hence impossible to pin down, so the ‘I’ is itself divided between Derrida and Genet, on whose text in two columns, *Ce qui est resté d’un Rembrandt...*, *Glas* is modelled. Like Genet, Derrida thus pre-empts a ‘castrating’ reading by his reader. But here Derrida is the reader as well as the read. Can his double text avoid castrating its object?

Derrida’s concern to achieve a non-masterful reading of Genet is extensively thematized in one sequence too long to analyse in detail here (E203–6b/D284–8b). From the outset, this passage profoundly destabilizes the boundary between ‘giving’ (*donner*) and ‘taking’ (*prendre*). Derrida comments that he does not know if he has sought to ‘*comprendre*’ (comprehend, but also contain or include) Genet. Far from an external – and superior: earlier, he problematizes the expression to write ‘on’ someone (E36b/D50b) – vantage-point of ‘*maîtrise*’ or mastery that would programme ‘the rule of production or the generative grammar of all his statements’, that is, pin down the ‘*matrice*’, matrix and womb of his text, Derrida claims that he will not ‘take [*prendre*] from him or teach [*apprendre*] him his mother’. Rather, he metaphorizes the relationship to Genet’s text to which he aspires as that of a ‘dredging machine’ to the sea, one that engages with its object in a partial rather than totalizing

way, penetrates it without appropriating it, grasping only ‘bits’ (*morceaux*) of it.

Above all: ‘*On ne prend pas la mer.*’ The sea/mother cannot be ‘taken’.

Yet Derrida remains acutely aware of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of achieving a non-appropriative relationship to Genet’s text. He justifies his reading by saying that he will not ‘surprise [*surprendre*] his text with a toothed matrix. It is *his* object’. He wonders if ‘an object [can] comprehend [*comprendre*] what it is the object of’, and explicitly registers the double-sided nature of the ‘gift’ that writing on his friend represents: ‘I wormed my way in as a third party, between his mother and himself. I gave him. I squealed on him. [*Je l’ai donné.*]’ As the translation makes explicit, *donner*, to give, also means to inform on someone. This suggestion that Derrida’s explanation of the role of the mother in Genet’s writing is necessarily a betrayal echoes later in the passage, when he highlights the impossibility of determining whether a gift is given or received. ‘He makes himself a gift. [*Il se fait cadeau.*]’ This sentence means both that Genet gives himself a present, and that he makes himself into a present. It closely echoes the ambiguous way Derrida first introduces the question of the flower: ‘Genet has made himself into a flower [*Genet s’est fait une fleur*]’ (E12/D17). *Faire une fleur* also means to do someone a favour, gift them an advantage; Derrida’s phrasing suggests that Genet both does himself a favour, and makes himself into a favour (for someone else). The link is thus made between the ‘anthologic’ and an undecidable gift, one that especially concerns the relationship between author and work. Derrida describes Genet as simultaneously someone ‘generous, detached, spendthrift’ and the ‘most consistent miser in all the annals of literature’. The least generous is also the most generous. The undecidability of Genet’s writing emerges as a consequence of a profound undecidability on the part of the author, who has forged a place in writing for an experience that ‘has no place.’



Nevertheless, at issue here is the *emergence of the difference* between man and work. Derrida writes that Genet's work 'is not equal to him', anticipating on the already-quoted line from Hegel that the artist's work 'is not equal to him' (E257a/D359a). The fact that the work bears witness to its own 'elaboration', to the process of its detachment from its author, does not dictate the terms of the subsequent relationship between author and work. The undecidability of Genet's intratextual signature is not incompatible with the extratextual signature on his passport used to corroborate or countersign an identity; it does not affect his 'author's rights', or prevent him from drawing his royalty payments. In that respect, Genet countersigns Hegel. The powerful echo of his signature within his work, marking a clear inscription of its origin, does not mean that the author is reducible to his creation.

*Glas* is unfaithful to Genet, then, insofar as Derrida's reading of the 'anthologic' of his writing is appropriate only to the Genet, or a Genet, instantiated in the work. But it is unfaithful too in a different respect. 'He makes himself a present' repeats the sentence directly preceding the sequence under discussion: 'I counterband erect for her [Derrida's mother], after all, with the remain(s) of which I make myself a gift' (E203b/D284b). Here, unlike Genet, Derrida is clearly in the place of the recipient, not of the gift. A different ambiguity nevertheless operates. The French syntax makes it impossible to decide if the present he gives himself is the remains (*reste*) or his own mother (*elle*): '*Je contrebande pour elle du reste dont je me fais cadeau.*' By affirming how the mother's name resounds endlessly in Genet's writing, Derrida does not merely insert himself into Genet's relationship with his mother; he also inserts his own mother between Genet and himself. This is strikingly manifest at the level of the signifier: directly across from the statement that he wormed himself in between Genet and his mother, a spyhole describes how Pegasus was born from

Gorgo's throat, *la gorge de Gorgo* (E203/D284). In this context, the capital letter draws attention to the similarity between Medusa's name as 'Gorgo' and that of Derrida's own mother, Georgette. (An anagram of 'Georgette' was also evident in the earlier description of the mother tongue as '*égorgée, églottée, érigée/excrétée, au fond d'une grotte ou d'une forge*' (E72b/D101b).) The shift throughout *Glas* from *gl* to *gr* and *cr* as highlighted by Derrida in his early glosses on the text,<sup>6</sup> and the insistence throughout the book on the *reste* or remains that sticks in the throat, the bit or bite that cannot be swallowed, can thus be argued to operate the dissemination of Derrida's mother's name as much as of Genet's. Furthermore, Derrida himself would later draw attention in *The Post Card* to the anagrams contained in Esther (another of Georgette Derrida's firstnames), one of which is *reste*.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, the missing letter, the remains of the remains, is *h*. Just as Genet's circumflex is the sign(ature) of an absence, so the *h* that Derrida adds to words to render Genet's 'anthologic' is the missing part of his own mother's name. Derrida both imitates and betrays Genet's signature by countersigning him also in the name of his own mother.

But what of Hegel? In 'Countersignature', Derrida describes the ethics of his writing in terms of the imperative always 'to say "yes" to the work that comes before me and that will have been without me' (C28). However, he only discusses Genet (and Ponge) in this respect; he says nothing of how this imperative affects the left-hand column. Does his countersignature operate there, too, and if so, how? Is the left-hand column also double: both endorsement and criticism, affirmation and betrayal, of Hegel?

Echoes of Derrida's concern that his reading not violate Genet can be heard towards the end of the left-hand column when Derrida asks what it might mean to

read Hegel 'badly', first in the 'main' body of the text: 'So what happens when Hegel's text is not read, or when it is read *badly*?' (E227a/D317a); then in a spyhole:

what is it not to read Hegel or to read him badly, or rather the text *Sa*? Is this negativity comprehended, included [*comprise*], and at work in the text *Sa*? (...) It is impossible to *know* if such a feint is possible. Rather, such a feint can only be *known* impossible if knowledge presupposes the hierarchized opposition of the true and the false, of the infinite and the finite. A finite feint cannot remove itself from *Sa*'s infinite authority or proceedings.

What would it mean not to comprehend [*comprendre*] (Hegel) the text *Sa*? If it is a matter of a finite failure, the failure is in advance included, comprehended [*comprise*] in the text. If it is a matter of an infinite fault or lack, one would have to say that *Sa* does not think itself, does not say itself, does not write itself, does not read itself, does not know itself, which no longer means anything, by definition. *Sa* always ends by being full, heavy, pregnant with itself.

So the hypothesis of a bad reading, here, has no place. It has not even taken place [*n'a même pas lieu*]. One must let it fall [*tomber*], in the margin or epigraph [*exergue*], as a margin or epigraph, as a remain(s) [*reste*] about which one does not *know* if it *works*, in view or in the service of whom of what. (E231-2a/D323-4a)

Derrida agrees, then, that Hegel's system is comprehensive, all-inclusive, in that it leaves no room for any knowledge outside itself; the only possible outside to Hegel's system is one that cannot be known. Any attempt to counter Absolute Knowledge on

its own terms is doomed to failure; the question is whether it constitutes a betrayal of Hegel's text to seek *not* to comprehend it, to read it other than on its own terms. An implicit answer to this question follows in the form of a quotation from Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*: 'Hegel is also supposed to have died with the words upon his lips, that there was only one man who had understood [*compris*] him, and he had misunderstood [*mal compris*] him...'  
(E231-2a/D323-4a). A 'bad' reading, Derrida thus suggests, betrays Hegel, does not understand him, yet is faithful to him in betraying him.

How does this correspond to Derrida's own practice in *Glas*? The book in effect adopts two different approaches to Hegel's system. The first, carried out in the 'main' part of the column, seeks indeed to 'comprehend' Hegel, to read him 'from the inside' (E108a/D151a), with the grain of his text. This careful, faithful reading nonetheless constitutes a betrayal insofar as it shows that the philosopher's goal of a comprehensive, self-contained system of knowledge remains subject to an otherness that it can neither assimilate nor conclusively reject. Derrida establishes different ways in which the existence of an outside intrudes on Absolute Knowledge. For example, Hegel's fascination with Antigone derives from the 'fundamental role within the system' of the 'impossible place' she occupies. She represents an 'unclassable' [*inclassable*] figure (E151a/D211a) that cannot be accommodated within any of the 'categories intrinsic to the system', leading Derrida to ask if it is not 'always an element excluded from the system that assures the system's space of possibility' (E162a/D227a). The column culminates in the analysis of the passage from the religion of sun to the religion of flowers, with an explicit consideration of something contained within Hegel's thought that escapes the annular structure of the dialectic. Derrida himself privileges this moment as a 'critical point of the

anniversary' that concerns 'what is at stake [*l'enjeu*]' in the Hegel column (E241a/E337a). 'What is at stake' is indeed to do with an anniversary (also the French word for birthday); it involves an originary gift, 'the irruptive event of the gift [*don*]', a present that consumes itself in its giving but without which 'the dialectical movement and the history of Being could not open themselves, engage themselves in the annulus of their anniversary' (E242a/D337a).<sup>8</sup> A gift is what makes philosophy possible, although it does so by instituting a circle of exchange within which no pure gift can no longer take place:

So the gift, the giving of the gift, the pure *cadeau*, does not let itself be thought by the dialectics to which it, however, gives rise. The giving of the gift understands itself here before the for-(it)self, before all subjectivity and all objectivity. But when *someone* gives *something* to *someone*, one is already long within calculating dialectics and speculative idealization. I give *me*, I make me the gift [*je me fais cadeau*]. To whom? (E243a/D339a)

Hegel's work, then, recognizes the existence of something it cannot *think*, the gift that makes philosophy possible but which has no place within it. (Unlike literature, where the gift continues to echo?) Insofar as it contains something it doesn't contain, understands something it doesn't understand – insofar, in other words, *as it is not philosophy* – Hegel's work countersigns Genet's.

And Derrida? 'I give *me*, I make me the gift': Derrida breaks into the first person at the very moment he relates the subjectivisation of the gift to the advent of philosophy. How should we read this inscription or irruption of Derrida himself? What kind of gesture is at stake in identifying the traces of an outside to philosophy

within Hegel's text? Leslie Hill, for example, reads it primarily as a critical gesture. His discussion focuses not on the gift that Derrida identifies as making philosophy possible, but on the *reste* that persists within it and makes it impossible. Immediately after the question about what happens if Hegel is read 'badly', Derrida highlights the philosopher's use of the adverb 'yet' (*noch/encore*), pointing out that it is only 'read on the condition of not being read' (E228a/D318a). It registers the existence of a time (a 'next-to-last not yet') that can never be present and therefore cannot be integrated within the system; a time, in other words, that can never be known and can *only* be read. For Hill, this time (the time of spacing itself, in deconstruction's terms) sticks in the throat of philosophy: 'The circle cannot close (...). Even as it carries on, as it must, and in order that it carry on, as it must, the dialectic still falters, gags' (RI282).

Hill thus places the accent on the critical or negative aspect of Derrida's reading of Hegel, showing that Absolute Knowledge can never be fully self-contained. Yet Derrida has his own "philosophical" ambition', which he relates in 'Countersignature' to his attempt in *Glas* 'to think a remaining or a surviving that doesn't fall into the philosophical category of ontology, substance, being, existence, essence, etc.' (C31). Far from a rejection of the conceptual, *Glas* is an attempt to think in a way that does not let itself be ensnared in the conceptual/non-conceptual binary. The book's very structure, I would argue, is evidence that Derrida endorses Hegel *as philosopher* (his ambition to think as rigorously as possible), as much as he endorses Genet's literary celebration of the *reste*. He countersigns Hegel's philosophy in thinking its limits.

The complexity of Derrida's endorsement of Hegel is exemplified in another first-person passage in the left-hand column, a rare moment when the first person is used undecidably between Hegel and Derrida. The passage considers the extent to

which it constitutes a violence to Hegel's text to interpret his analysis of the 'Abrahamic cut' (as evidenced in circumcision and the sacrifice of Isaac) in terms of castration (E41-2a/D57-8a). Derrida argues that, on the one hand, what Hegel says about the 'Abrahamic gesture' corresponds closely to the concept of castration. But he also asks if the concept of castration (obviously unavailable to Hegel himself) enables us to read something that Hegel himself, or indeed Abraham, could not read, or does anything different from 'placing them, like Hegel, in relation to the process of the *Aufhebung*, of truth, of the law' (E42-2a/D58-9a). When presenting Hegel's claim that his system already contains the 'conceptual structure' of castration, the text abruptly shifts from the third to the first person: 'I have always said that, Hegel would respond to the doctors of castration. (...) That is what I have done since the works on Judaism and Christianity (...) And all of you cannot even understand what you want to say by castration if you do not take charge of all the idealism of speculative dialectics' (E43a/D60a).

This unexpected 'I' most obviously serves to endorse Hegel's claim that nothing can be conceptualized outside speculative dialectics. But it necessarily also inscribes a parallel between Hegel's practice and Derrida's. This appears all the more surprising in that the passage in question deals with Judaism, and specifically with Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. It raises the question of how Derrida positions himself with regard to Hegel's Christianizing and idealizing conception of the father-son relation, especially at a time of mourning for his own father. He certainly does not challenge it discursively. On the contrary, he introduces his own signature into the discussion – in a way, however, that resists an unequivocal interpretation. A few pages later, the discussion of the privileged position of Jewishness made possible by Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son contains the single inscription in the left-

hand column of the expression in which Derrida recognized his father's name. The substantive difference between the Jews' tabernacle and the later Christian one is that the former is a 'signifier without a signified'; there is 'Nothing behind the curtains [*Rien derrière les rideaux*]. (...) No center, no heart, an empty space, nothing' (E49a/D69a). At the very moment Derrida deals with the aspect of Jewish signifying practice that for Hegel marks it as incompatible with the dialectic (because irreducible to the distinction true/false), his surname resonates. But it does so without the capital letter that enables him to 'recognize' his father's name. The father's name echoes as a singularity that escapes the universalizing dialectic in which the proper name functions to consolidate identity, delimit property.

It is at the level of writing rather than of argument, then, that Derrida signals limits to Hegel's attempt to identify and circumscribe an essentially 'Jewish' practice. The analogy between the Jewish 'signifier without a signified' and Genet's anthographic writing is unmistakable. Moreover, traces in the passage of Derrida's *mother's* name further challenge Hegel's attribution of property to the Jews. Derrida highlights how Hegel has recourse to a 'Gorgon' to illustrate the materiality that, in the case of the Jew, never lends itself to the spiritualizing activity of the dialectic: 'The head of Medusa, one of the three Gorgons, is between dashes. Like the Gorgon, the Jew materializes, petrifies everything he sees and everything that regards him, that raises, for example the eyes, toward him' (E45a/D63a). The Jew resists the pursuit of absolute knowledge: *like* the Greek Gorgon, the mother, the flower, etc. If, within the logic of Hegel's system, a Greek mytheme is needed to describe an essentially 'Jewish' figure, the lack of property that Hegel considers the defining characteristic of the Jews cannot be proper to them.



Nonetheless, although Derrida thus challenges the exclusivity to the Jews of Hegel's characterization of them, he appears to endorse the view that a lack of property is the Jews' distinguishing property. Perhaps most surprising of all is another ambiguous appearance of the 'I' on the left:

That the absolute familiarity of the *Geheimnis* proper is thus empty of all proper content in its vacant center would signify that the Jewish essence is totally alienated. Its ownness, its property [*son propre*] would be infinitely foreign to itself.

So he cannot enjoy (this) [*(en) jouir*]. Since everything is obtained through the favour of a transcendent and separate God, what the Jew enjoys is under the seal of expropriation. What I enjoy [*ce dont je jouis*] does not belong to me. My life and my body are not mine. (E50a/D70a)

Again, the abrupt shift from 'he' to 'I' calls attention to itself, this time aligning Derrida not with Hegel/philosophy but with the alienation or lack of property that Hegel identifies as proper to the Jew. Derrida appears, indeed, to identify as Jewish insofar as *being Jewish troubles any identity*.

It seems, then, that Derrida endorses Hegel insofar as Hegel identifies the undecidable with the Jews, but challenges the idea that this constitutes an exclusive property, even according to Hegel. *Glas* could even be argued to offer Derrida's own (idiosyncratic) version of a 'Jewish reading' of Hegel.<sup>9</sup> For Hegel, the risk of a 'Jewish reading' was that the Jews could not grasp the Christian father-son relationship, could not conceive that the Father and the Son would be both two *and* one, because they 'count, they calculate', that is to say, they cannot account for the incalculable (E84a/D118a). Yet there is a tension between his positioning of Judaism as an antithetical religion and his rejection of it as essentially non-dialectical. The unclassifiability (lack of property) of the Jews that Hegel excludes from the dialectic is what makes his philosophy possible. Derrida brings this out not discursively or

conceptually, but by practising an uncertainty, an undecidability that cannot be recuperated within Hegel's thinking.

This returns us to Derrida's other approach to Hegel, a more treacherous (or treacherously faithful) reading of Hegel. If the column's main line of argument betrays Hegel by reading him faithfully, the spyholes read Hegel against the grain, unfaithfully, exploring how Hegel's work may bear his signature in other ways by focussing primarily on 'the handwritten or oral remarks added by Hegel (...) in the margin of his principal text' (E14a/D19a). In particular, the discussion of Antigone is interrupted at precisely the point where her unclassifiability is at issue by a very long spyhole, composed nearly entirely of private letters written by Hegel, including to his sister, Christiane, letters that Hegel would have considered as irrelevant or external to his philosophy. Derrida states that he is interested in these letters because they engage what he is 'tracking here interminably under the name signatory' and notes that 'the signature most often makes its vowels jump in order to abridge itself, Semitically, to HGL' (E152a/D212a). Far from opposed to Genet's signature, Hegel's is composed of the *gl* of Genet's mother's name and the *h* that signals the operation of his 'anthologic'. Derrida does not comment explicitly on Hegel's somewhat surprising use of his surname to sign letters to his intimates. Nor does he explain the significance of inserting the spyhole into the discussion of Antigone. However, a later spyhole emphasises the link between Antigone's and Christiane Hegel's family situations:

Christiane Hegel had – she too – two brothers. The one called Hegel then had only one sister and only one brother (Georg Ludwig, officer in the army of Wurtemberg, who died in 1812, after the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, during the

Russian campaign. Nothing is known of his burial place. He bore the father's first names.). (E177a/D247a)

The familial comparison in the context of a discussion of the names of Hegel's family suggests that Hegel's work was affected by his personal circumstances more than his system can acknowledge. In addition, the names are heavily overdetermined. As Derrida points out, Hegel is generally referred to solely by his (father's) surname. But the elliptical statement that the brother 'bore the father's first names' is thought-provoking. For Hegel himself shared one of these names: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. Moreover, 'Georg Ludwig' contains (and capitalizes) the letters GL. If, for Derrida, 'Hegel' does not 'bear the father's first name', is it because he bears the first name of Derrida's mother, Georg(ette). The final instance of an unexpected first person in the left-hand column also disseminates his mother's name. It disconcertingly introduces Derrida's family situation into the discussion of the family at its most ideal, when Hegel speaks of ether as the medium that enables spirit to relate to itself in the family: 'The middle [*milieu*] through which my family produces itself is no longer inorganic like air or earth' (E118a/D167a). This medium is that of ether, as the line literally opposite the 'definition' of *gl* in the right-hand column recalls: 'the ether again becomes absolute' (E119a/D168a). Ether is scarcely an insignificant signifier: it is Esther with a missing *s*. Derrida signs his mother's name improperly, inappropriately, with a common noun/name, at the very moment when Hegel is arguing that the family fully accomplishes itself in its own negation.

Derrida's countersignature in *Glas* is thus double in every dimension. He countersigns both Hegel and Genet, faithfully and unfaithfully in each case. The *h* with which he systematically supplements Genet's *gl* can be read both as an

equivalent of the ‘circumflex accent’, an echo of Genet’s maternal signature, and as Hegel’s initial, a reminder that any interpretation, any attempt at reading, must to some extent speak in the name of the father (Haim). However respectful of its object it seeks to be, however ‘literary’ its mode of inquiry, the right-hand column *also* involves or partakes of (an expression that in French could be translated by ‘*relève de*’ ...) philosophy. On the one hand, Derrida adds a *h* to Genet; on the other, he points to the absence of the *s* in Hegel. He draws attention to the exclusion of the undecidability on which the dialectic depends, and whose traces nevertheless remain as an indigestible otherness within it. He counters Hegel by developing the implications of those traces, by showing (logically) how his work contains something other than logic: that is, by *reading*. But insofar as his discussion of Hegel itself inscribes an undecidability, bears his own signature – insofar, in other words, as it is *written* – the left-hand column has elements of a literary performance.

Derrida’s countersignature, then, profoundly troubles the opposition between Hegel and Genet, between philosophy and literature, showing how each bears the trace of the excluded other by which it is defined; at the same time, it reconfirms their difference. As such, *Glas* offers an emblem of his deconstructive project. A major difference exists between *Glas* and *Ce qui est resté d’un Rembrandt* in that one column extends far beyond the other in Genet’s text, whereas in *Glas* they are meticulously the same length. Derrida does not take sides for Genet’s literature over Hegel’s philosophy. He does not endorse Genet’s signing in his mother’s name over Hegel’s signing in the name of the Father. Rather, he signs ‘between the two’ – in the names of both his father and his mother.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Contresignature’, translated by Mairéad Hanrahan, *Paragraph 27: 2* (2004), 7–42; henceforward abbreviated to *C*. For an excellent exposition of

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‘Countersignature’, see Leslie Hill, *Radical Indecision: Barthes, Blanchot, Derrida, and the Future of Criticism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 274–324; henceforward RI.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, translated by John P. Leavey, Jr., and Richard Rand (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 23a; *Glas* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1981), 31a. Page references will henceforward be given in the text to these editions, preceded by E and D respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Does this reading not make the mother into an alternative transcendental signified? What justification is there for reading her – rather, for example, than the flower – behind all the parts of Genet’s text? Derrida addresses this question directly: ‘The mother would present for analysis the term of a regression, a signified of the last instance, only if you knew what the mother names or means (to say), that with which she is pregnant. Now you would be able to know it only after you had exhausted all the remain(s), all the objects, all the names the text puts in her place (galley, gallery, executioner, flowers of every species are only *examples* of her). To the extent you will not have thoroughly spelled out each of these words and each of these things, there will remain something of the mother (...) you will not have exhausted’ (E116–7b/D163–5b). The mother, then, is both the whole that the text endlessly refers back to *and* a part no more privileged than any other, just as the flower is both the poetic object par excellence, a privileged rhetorical figure, *and* a figure of rhetoric as a whole (for a discussion of this aspect of the anthologic, see Simon Morgan Wortham, “‘The fidelity of a guardian’: the ‘double keeping’ of Jacques Derrida”, *Parallax* 12:3 (2006), 85–98; and Claudette Sartiliot, ‘Herbarium, verbarium: The Discourse of Flowers’, *Diacritics* 18:4 (1988), 68–81). The whole is never fully

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present or contained in any part. And any part, insofar as it can precisely be detached as a whole, is also greater than the whole of which it is part.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida elaborates elsewhere on his accent, recalling the impression created by his schooling that one ‘entered French literature only by losing one’s accent’, and his desire that it be indiscernable from the writing of his texts that he was an ‘Algerian Frenchman’ (*Monolingualism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin*, translated by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 45–6). Somewhat surprisingly, he appears to consider what he calls ‘pure’ French (educated Parisian French) as unaccented, never questioning the hierarchy that posits the sociolect of the elite as the unmarked norm rather than one accent among others, although he is manifestly uncomfortable with his own feeling that any accent is incompatible with the ‘intellectual dignity’ necessary for public speaking.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Jane-Marie Todd, ‘Autobiography and the Case of the Signature: Reading Derrida’s *Glas*’, *Comparative Literature* 38: 1 (1986), 1–19; and Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Saving the Text* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Entre crochets’ (the first of two interviews with D. Kambouchner, J. Ristat and D. Sallenave, first published in *Digraphe* in 1976 and 1977 respectively), in *Points de suspension: Entretiens* (Paris: Galilée, 1992), 13–36; 16.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 71.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the philosophical implications of this gift, see Simon Critchley, *Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 18–26.

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<sup>9</sup> For Derrida's complicated relationship to Judeity, see for example *The Monolingualism of the Other*; 'Circumfession' in *Jacques Derrida*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); *Judeities*, edited by Joseph Cohen and Raphael Zagury-Orly, translated by Bettina Bergo and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).