Tracing Calculation [Calque Calcul] Between

Nicolas Abraham and Jacques Derrida

by Laurie Johnson

To calculate the loss—is this the challenge that Nicolas Abraham has given to Jacques Derrida? Between 1959 and 1975, the year of Abraham’s unexpected death, they were close friends, sharing what Elisabeth Roudinesco describes as “a marginal position in relation to the dominant philosophical discourse of the day, and an almost identical syntax” (599). Yet it can hardly be said that they participated together in an intellectual movement in the same way that Abraham and his wife Maria Torok—and, latterly, Nicholas Rand—had done. Indeed, while texts such as De la grammatologie, L’écriture et la différence, and La voix et le phénomène (1967) elevated Derrida to a position of eminence among French theorists, Abraham’s work—of which, during his lifetime, only a fraction was published in essay form—was virtually unknown outside French psychoanalysis until the publication of Cryptonymie: Le Verbier de l’Homme aux Loups in 1976, the year after his death. Interestingly, Derrida himself may have contributed to the marked disparity between the levels of recognition that Abraham’s work received before and after his death. He refers rarely, if at all, to Abraham in his own work before 1975. Then, in two interviews at the end of the same year, he refers directly to Abraham’s work; he writes the foreword to Cryptonymie in the following year; within four years he writes another essay, “Me—Psychoanalysis,” to introduce the English translation of Abraham’s “The Shell and the Kernel;” and, in the last two decades, references to the ideas of a crypt within the ego and the anasemic character of psychoanalytic language are made—usually, though not always, in connection with Abraham’s name—in La carte postale, Psyché, The Ear of the Other, Donner la mort, Donner le temps, and elsewhere. What Roudinesco describes as an “identical syntax” might seem to us, when laid out in this way, more like a compensation or a reaction-formation in the direction of Derrida’s own project.

Yet nothing is gained by asking whether Derrida’s interventions contributed to Abraham’s belated recognition. Since his death, immediately prior to the publication of his most famous account of failed mourning, it has been almost impossible for the responses to Abraham’s work to divorce the theory of the crypt from his name—and, therefore, from the life for which this name purports to have signed. Remarkably, of the many occasions on which Derrida refers to Abraham and his work, after his death, there are—to the best of my recollection—none which refer directly to this death. As Peggy Kamuf noted soon after the publication of Abraham and Torok’s collection of essays in 1978 (L’écorce et le noyau), Derrida’s foreword to Cryptonymie bears down so heavily upon the term which Abraham and Torok take as the title of this work, and upon the

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1 This essay was first published online in PMC (10.3, May 2000).
names of the analysts, that his words “cut through to the stone so that we can read them as epitaph” (33). “Writing on Abraham’s crypt,” Derrida thus casts himself in the role of Abraham’s “eulogist” (34). The role of the eulogist is, of course, not to refer directly to the death, but to give praise and recall the life. Like the eulogy from which the eulogy takes its name—the bread of the Eucharist that is distributed among those who do not participate in communion—it keeps the body of the dead alive. The “fantasy of incorporation,” as Abraham and Torok described it, is just such a refusal to mourn; a refusal by the ego, that is, to introject loss:

Incorporation is the refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost; incorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us. (Shell 127)

Incorporation produces the gap in the psyche which Abraham and Torok have called the crypt, a place where the lost object is to be kept alive within the ego. We gain nothing, then, by asking if Derrida contributes to Abraham’s recognition precisely because his interventions have performed the fantasy of incorporation as Abraham had described it in his own work.

To rephrase the question with which we are concerned here, is it possible under the spell of an incorporation to calculate loss? We have already seen that the question is complicated in the first instance by having as the particular object of loss the person who gave us the terms in which we have attempted to frame the question. As Kamuf asks, “was Abraham’s text dictated already from that ‘beyond-the-Self’ and beyond a grave, the unspecified circumstance which is finally his own death? What has Nicolas Abraham left us in his will?” (38). What Abraham has left us—the gift of his death—is, in short, loss. To incorporate “Abraham,” along with the work which carries this name as a signature, is to incorporate the theory of incorporation and expose the incorporation as a fantasy. Yet we recall that incorporation is, in Abraham’s words, a “refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost”—it is, in other words, a denial of the fundamental relation of the Self to the other. With the fantasy of incorporation exposed to the ego as a fantasy, it should dissolve, were it not that the ego believing itself to be replenished by incorporation would then have to recognise its own fundamental emptiness in the face of the other. The ego confronts a simple enough choice: loss of the (indispensable) other or loss of the Self. As Derrida notes in his foreword to Cryptonymie, the crypt is a “monument” to this impossible choice between two “catastrophes,” since it is erected upon the contradiction that has forced the ego into this choice yet it continually holds the choice over for deferral:

it remains that the otherness of the other installs within any process of appropriation (even before any opposition between introjecting and incorporating) a “contradiction,” or ... an undecidable irresolution that forever prevents the two from closing over their rightful, ideal, proper coherence, in other words and at any rate, over their death. (xxii)

All references to Cryptonymie are from the English translation, The Wolf Man’s Magic Word, by Nicholas Rand. Where I refer to Cryptonymie by the French title, I will be discussing the original text although I cite the translation here for convenience. Where I later refer to The Wolf Man’s Magic Word by its English title, I will be discussing Rand’s preface to the translation, which does not of course appear in the original.
We note here that when Derrida translates Abraham’s theory of the crypt, the relation to the object of loss is grounded in a notion of property. He states the case concisely in *Given Time*, when he refers to his own comments on *Cryptonymie*: “Here again, it is a matter of the limits of a problematic of appropriation—and the question of the gift will never be separated from that of mourning” (n.13, 129). Similarly, in *Aporias*, he lists the impossible work of mourning—the impossible choice between incorporation and introjection—as he explains it in the foreword to *Cryptonymie*, and the question of the “gift as the impossible” as it is raised in *Given Time*, among the aporetic non-concepts which put to the test the “passage” and the “partitioning” (partage) between opposite sides of a border or limit, in such a way that the multiple figure of the aporia “installs the haunting of the one in the other” (15-20).

Later, in *The Gift of Death*, Derrida will fold the question of this haunting over onto the question of the responsibility it implies. The “gift” and “mourning” may be of a kind—both impossible, aporetic, vaulting over two sides of a border, and so on—but the “gift of death,” or the “act of giving death” when understood as sacrifice (as in the sacrifice demanded by God of Abraham) can suspend “both the work of negation and work itself, perhaps even the work of mourning” (65). For Derrida, the key ideas here are “secrecy and exclusivity [non-partage]” (73). Abraham is no tragic hero, for tragic heroes can bemoan their lot. Instead, Abraham’s silence, that is, his inability to speak of his duty is the true measure of this duty, his “singular relation with the unique God” (74). In making this observation, Derrida interrogates Søren Kierkegaard’s claim that “ethical exigency is regulated by generality” (60).

Yet what interests me most here is the way in which Derrida approaches the “gift of death” as a (non-)concept. While the impossibility of the gift and death (in the work of mourning) are spelled out elsewhere in advance, they are brought together here in such a way that the boundary between these two non-concepts is subjected to scrutiny: aporia of aporias. This “boundary” is of course merely a mark of contingency, or of having to impose the limit to what one can write about anything within any single moment of writing. Yet here, in *The Gift of Death*, this boundary is problematised not only by what Derrida writes about the singularity of the ethical relation in each and every case—“Every other (one) is every (bit) other [tout autre est tout autre], every one else is completely or wholly other” (68)—but also by this writing itself. David Wills notes in the translator’s preface to *The Gift of Death* that this text is not “intended, as it might seem, to be the second volume of *Given Time*; it is instead a different reflection within a series on the question of the gift” (vii). Shall we assume for a moment that the translator can ever know what is “intended” of a text—although we shall return to this question soon enough—then we must be struck by the assertion that this text is not, “as it might seem,” a continuation of *Given Time*. If this text is altogether “different,” then the interrogation of the “gift” and “mourning” through the “gift of death” must therefore “seem” more like an appropriation than a continuation, or else (or also) the aporias of the gift and of mourning may be thought to “haunt” this later text.

In translating Abraham’s theory of the crypt, Derrida had already confronted just such a “haunting” across the limits of appropriation, as this problematic is itself one of the things he appropriates. When he performs the formation of the crypt by keeping the body of Abraham alive, at least in the figure of the “corpus” of his written work, he raises the question of the gift not only as it applies generally to the ego’s refusal to reclaim that part of itself that was invested in the lost object, but also in the specific sense that his performance appropriates this very corpus. Since it is a function of such appropriation that an undecidable irresolution prevents the closure of either introjection and/or incorporation over death, Derrida’s performance might also be seen as a deferral
of that death through a calculation of the loss in advance. Here I am thinking not only of the numerous references to Abraham’s work after his death, but also of the calculated mourning and the work of translation performed in the last major work completed by Derrida before Abraham’s death: Glas (1974). In this paper, I shall identify fragments of an appropriation which underline—or undermine—the calculations in Glas, as they hide themselves within these very terms, “calculation,” “glas,” and others. Although I will not go so far as to say that these calculations anticipate Abraham’s death, we shall see that they establish a particular relation to his theories of translation and mourning: a relation that carries across the threshold or limit of his death in such a way that in Derrida’s subsequent performance, even as recently as The Gift of Death, the loss that this performance is calculated to incorporate is obscured by a loss that has already insinuated itself into the structure of calculation.

The crossing of this threshold leaves its mark in the two interviews that Derrida gave at the end of 1975, which are reproduced in Points as “Between Brackets I” and “Ja, or the faux-bond II.” While these interviews deal in the most part with Glas, it is also possible, I suggest, to read them as eulogia to Derrida’s recently deceased friend, in anticipation of the foreword to Cryptonymie. In them we find Derrida articulating the ways in which the mourning-work in Glas has not only been a work on mourning, as the “practical, effective analysis of mourning,” but has also been worked upon by mourning (48). Then, in a noticeable change of tense, he shifts into the present with the following passage which seems to refer to something other than this Glas that has already been completed and whose calculations have been done with:

> Without them, beyond the philosophemes and post-philosophemes (so refined, polished, recombined, infinitely crafty) that treat all the states (which have worked themselves into a great state) of death, nothingness, denegation, idealization, interiorization, and so forth (I am thinking here of a place and a moment of my self in which I know them too well, in which they know me too well), I am trying to experience in my body an altogether other relation to the unbelievable “thing which is not.” (48-9)

From having-been worked upon by mourning to experiencing in the present (in one’s presence) another relation to the “thing which is not” (the absent remainder of death), Derrida shifts into a mode of non-response to the milieu of the interview that he calls “improvisation” (49). However much the finite machinery of the interview may limit or reign in the impromptu, the same machines “always end up forming a place that is exposed, vulnerable, and invisible to whoever tries out all the clever ruses” (49). He describes the way in which the interviewee cannot help but “betray his defenses” by allowing himself to be “restricted by the situation” into an appropriate selection from the mass of possible discourses (50). In this way, Derrida betrays his defenses, and it is by the end of the paragraph describing how “the speaker defends, confesses, betrays himself only by exposing his system of defense” that he also exposes a part of himself in a passage that in the context of the current discussion may sound rather like regret: “whoever decided that all of this deserved to be published or that anything deserved to be published, or rather that between a secret and its publication there has ever been any possibility of a code or a common rate in this place?” (51) Immediately he does this, however, Derrida snaps his defenses back: “How did we get here? Ah, yes, the mourning for mourning, to the point of exhaustion” (51). This “ah, yes” is nothing, of course, like the “vast and boundless yes” that is cited at the end of Glas, and to which he turns in the interview at this moment, and yet it has everything to do with the ends or
the limits of Glas. In that this “ah, yes” is not the movement of a response or of a responsibility to an other, or insofar as it diverts the trajectory of a discourse that may have revealed the trace of the secret that is concealed by one’s defenses, this “ah, yes” amounts instead to a calculation.

Yet Derrida has already alerted us to the limits of calculation when he describes the “principal themes” of Glas in terms that sound remarkably like those in which—in the foreword to Cryptonymie—he would describe the problematic of appropriation:

reception (assimilation, digestion, absorption, introjection, incorporation), or non-reception (exclusion, foreclosure, rejection, and once again, but this time as internal expulsion, incorporation), thus the theme of internal or external vomiting, of mourning-work and everything that gets around to or comes down to throwing up. But Glas does not only treat these themes; in a certain way, it offers itself up to all these operations. (41-2)

In order to offer itself up to these operations, however, Glas will have been calculated to fail in its calculations or to offer itself up as non-receivable or unreadable; which is another way of saying that it will have been necessary for it to take in the other, since the possible modes of readership, or the possible “reading effects,” must be factored into the calculations of a text that seeks to become inaccessible to them. In order for the reading of Glas to be “taken in” (duped), in other words, it must have been “taken in” (incorporated) by the text, in advance:

The neither-swallowed-nor-rejected, that which remains stuck in the throat as other, neither-received-nor-expulsed (the two finally coming down to the same thing); that is perhaps the desire of what has been (more or less) calculated in Glas. Naturally, the important thing (for me in any case) is not to succeed with this calculation. (43)

The other of Glas is in every sense of the word beyond its calculations, which is why these calculations manifest desire—always the fantastic wish to include what they can never include. Since his language here anticipates the foreword to Cryptonymie, there can be no doubt that Derrida has Abraham and Torok’s work on his mind throughout the interview. Yet we might also suppose that his description of Glas in terms that are to be articulated in more detail in Cryptonymie is not entirely a reworking of an earlier text in terms of a later one. We know that Abraham and Torok had been working on their book for about five years—the introduction to Cryptonymie gives us this figure as its first words (lxx)—so what Derrida may be hinting at here is that his calculations in Glas also include (or at least desire) the theory of the crypt.

Yet the “important thing (for me in any case),” as Derrida admits, is that these calculations do not succeed, or rather, as he adds, “the calculation only succeeds in/by failing” (43). We are brought here to the edge of a precipice, when confronted with a calculation attempting to be unreadable by incorporating its possible reading-effects, yet which also includes a crypt—the very condition of unreadability—among its possible reading-effects. However, the theory of the crypt, including what Nicholas Rand in his translator’s introduction to The Wolf Man’s Magic Word calls the method for making “the unreadable readable,” guarantees that the crypt will not close out reading altogether (lx). Importantly, at around the time that Derrida hints at the importance for Glas of the theory of the crypt, he is also preparing to write in the foreword to Cryptonymie that this theory and the method that it names can be found operating under different names in Abraham’s work from as early as 1961. The “hieroglyphic model,” as he calls it, is
at work “everywhere (it is often evoked in The Magic Word),” but it is something more, and something other, than an “analogical” model, since the text to be deciphered, even as a “proper” name or body, is treated as something that is “not essentially verbal or phonetic” (xxix). Out of Abraham’s earlier work on translation, and from his early work on the “broken symbol,” Derrida extracts the lineaments of a model that is already equipped to receive the crypt as a harbinger of words as “word-things.” The desire of Glas to include the theory of the crypt is thus also a desire to incorporate this theory—and the body of concepts through which Abraham arrives at this theory—in the form of “word-things.”

From the beginning of the interviews that he gives in 1975, Derrida provides an example of a word that Glas omits even as it seems to have been necessary. The word is “crampon” (hook), which refers to what Imre Hermann calls the “clinging instinct” (cramponnement) and specifically to what Abraham, in his introduction to L’instinct filial, calls “de-clinging” (dé-cramponnement), the initial traumatic separation (6). In Glas, as Derrida points out, the word should have been impossible to ignore when, in an insert to the Genet column, he brings everything “down to living in the hook of the cripple; the cluster, the grapnel are a kind of hooked matrix” (Glas 216bi). The hook in the original is given throughout as “crochet,” even when Derrida lists the numerous grap- or crap- words which tie the word “hook” to the concept of clustering. He notes in the interview that the “crampon” should have imposed itself in Glas on everything that ties or holds together—on the relation “between the two columns or colossi,” for example—or on every reference to the fleece, since a key component of de-clinging is the reluctant release from one’s grip on the bodily hair of the mother, or especially, he adds, “in the passage from gl. to gr. and to cr that moves all throughout the last pages and the last scenes, and so on” (7-8). Yet he also freely admits in the interview that in writing Glas, he will have been unable to extricate the written text from the embraces, the brackets or parentheses, or what Abraham calls “parenthemes,” of the mother that it clings to with its written hooks—its emphatic marks and punctuations (9). Gregory Ulmer takes up this point in “Sounding the Unconscious,” suggesting that Glas may be “read as an anasemic scene performing certain aspects of, and relationships to, the drive of research as clinging to or detachment from the mother” (99). What Ulmer adds to Derrida’s improvised reflections on the relation of Glas to the mother is that by Abraham’s reckoning the drive of research is chief among the substitutive acts by which the mature individual carries on the desire for the mother, “a quest for an object that is not proper to him” (qtd. 99). His point is of course that a theory of the clinging instinct, a theory of the crampon, is arrived at by just such an educative activity, in the search for that which cannot be grasped: the unconscious.

Abraham calls “anasemic” those words or concepts which direct us away from what they would usually mean, pointing us instead toward the source of meaning, the formation of the unconscious, and so on. Such words, like the crampon in this case, thus refer to themselves not in the sense of a one-to-one correspondence with a here-and-now—Derrida spends much of the first interview in 1975 problematising the idea

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3 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has read Glas on the model of the crypt’s “counter-fiction: to analyse the cryptonym, to spell the author’s signature. The debris of d-words is scattered all over the pages” (24). In “Glas-Piece: A Compte Rendu,” Spivak reads Glas as a site not unlike the crypt within the ego, in which Derrida’s name is held and is repeatedly writing itself as a thing. Yet she notes that this rewriting of the name expresses a desire: “his own autobiographical desire”—to write one’s own name everywhere in the folds of the text and not just on its surface (24).

4 Page numbers from Glas follow the system employed by John P. Leavey, Jr., in Glassary, whereby the letter or letters after each page number indicate the column from which each quotation is taken (a or b), and whether the source is included in Glas as an insert (i).
of a “here-and-now”—but, in a sense, in no sense at all, or, as Ulmer states the matter, in “a certain pre-sense, as opposed to the focus of phenomenology on presence” (99). What these words describe, then, is the degree to which the source of meaning treats words more like things than words in their relation to the unconscious. Importantly, in his “Introduction to Hermann,” Abraham uses a term to describe the pre-originary status of the relation of such words to meaning that resonates sharply with echoes of the Derridean arche-trace: he calls them “arche-models” (qtd. 99). In Hermann’s use of the crampon, Abraham finds the exemplary arche-model, as it is a concept that underwrites all other anasemic-psychoanalytic terms—it is, as Derrida has stated the case, “archi-psychoanalytic.” Yet in Glas, as Derrida confesses in the interview, this arche-model has been subjected to the process it describes—substitutive clinging—in such a way that the word itself becomes the word-thing that will not be made a word. The crampon, this arche-model, in its absence from Glas, remains as what Abraham and Torok call an “archeonym” in their own introduction to Cryptonymie (Ixxi).

The cat, then, would seem to have been let out of the bag: the Glas-secret would appear to have been revealed. Has it? I want to consider at the last here that even the crampon functions in the mode of the defensive “ah, yes” that I discussed earlier, and that what Derrida says when this defense is momentarily eased will merely hint at an entirely other unspeakable word that has been glossed over by Glas. The cat, indeed, is still very much something to which Derrida clings. Gayatri Spivak notes in “Glas-Piece: A Compte Rendu” that the Genet column allows itself to be “dis-integrated” by virtue of the “sleight of hand” with which it connects its numerous fragments, and we observe that among the first of its “monstrations” is the chain of words beginning with “cata”: Catachresis, catafalque, cataglottism.

They seem linked, but the accompanying lexical entries show that they are not really. Cata- in the first is “against,” in the second “cat” (name of a war-machine by catachresis) or “to see,” in the third “research.” . . . Here the very language is kept catachrestic, and this chain of words might be its signal. Indeed Derrida quotes the dictionary entry that points out that the French name of language—langue or tongue—is a catachresis. (39)
This “cata” is what is known in linguistic parlance as a bound morpheme, since it can not stand free floatingly as a word. Such binding is of course one of the Glas-themes which leads us to assume that the text clings to the idea of clinging. Yet we also note that the cat which clings in the form of a bound morpheme does not become so bound without introducing into the word it forms a deceptive uncertainty with regard to what Abraham and Torok call the word’s “allosemes” (Cryptonymie passim). We must not forget however that this deception is staged for us by Glas, floating the “cata” free as a word-thing that opens out a gap within binding, or that performs for our benefit the de-clinging at the source of the meanings of words. When Derrida reflects upon Glas in the interview and observes the necessary absence of the word-thing crampon from its pages, he does so in the knowledge that the calculation of a certain de-clinging has been performed within the uncertainty of Glas from the outset. This crampon, then, is a calculation that Derrida adds in the interview to the possible reading-effects that will have been already included in the calculations made in Glas. We will not be surprised to see that at a point in the interview when his defenses have been momentarily eased, Derrida recovers himself and his calculations with the following: “Where were we? Oh yes, the cramp” (24).

So what has he said that requires a recovery from him in the interview? We are probably no longer surprised to find that at this point, Derrida has sidetracked himself with what Abraham has said about “mourning as concerns the loss of clinging” (24). De-clinging lends itself to anxiety precisely because of the “whirlpool-like character” that belongs to the instincts, since their effects are constitutive of the topical structure that is also threatened by their desiring drive. He notes that this push-me-pull-you is what Abraham terms the “doubly cited movement” of anxiety in Hermann’s theory (qtd. 24). Derrida’s anxiety becomes apparent as he is drawn into the whirlpool-like contours of a text which cites one text in order to cite another—he performs, in this sense, his own doubly cited movement:

But, once again, read Nicolas Abraham’s “glossary.” This is how it ends: “‘Oh! But that is something I’ve always known . . . How could I have forgotten it?’ If we have our way, this is what the reader will now refer to with a single word: to hermannize.” (24)

The next words we read from Derrida are the calculated recovery: “Where were we?”

I want to focus here upon a word to which Derrida resorts as he feels himself drawn into this doubly cited movement of anxiety: he refers to Abraham’s “Introduction to Hermann” for the only time that I am aware of, anywhere in all of his writings, with Abraham’s own word for his mode of reading Hermann, as a “glossary.” Using this cue, I want also to consider another glossary, written by Abraham between 1950 and 1951. This glossary, A Glossary of Paradigmatics, was written, though not finished, while he was still very much under the sway of Husserl, and the project was obviously abandoned as he began to be more interested with psychoanalysis and the sources of meaning overlooked by the phenomenological attitude. It is thanks to Torok and Rand, who have written an essay on this Glossary as a postscript to Abraham’s early essays on poetry published in Rhythms: On the Work, Translation, and Psychoanalysis, that we know that of the existence of this unfinished work. Importantly, they also claim that Abraham “had no intention of having the Glossary published without an accompanying text to breathe life into its terms” (134). Again, we confront this question of whether a translator (or an editor for that matter) can know “intention,” a question that returns with particular force, as we shall see, because the structure of translation is precisely
what the **Glossary** analyses. Before exploring this question more closely, I want to consider that Derrida could have known of this unpublished document, given his close friendship with Abraham over a substantial period of time.

Recall now the two moments in the interviews in 1975 when, as I have pointed out, Derrida’s defenses are eased and his anxieties exposed. There was a momentary concern over who decides that anything deserves to be published, or “that between a secret and its publication there has ever been any possibility of a code or a common rate in this place?” (51); and there was this perhaps unintentional dropping of a name of an unfinished, unpublished document, apparently intended by its author to remain a secret. As we have seen, Derrida would later record in **The Gift of Death** that secrecy, as in “Abraham’s silence” is essential in understanding the ethical singularity of responsible relations. Of course, this Abraham cannot be mistaken for the author of the **Glossary**, but it should also not be mistaken for the father of Isaac. After all, this Abraham is a far different character than the father castrator who is the subject of the Hegel column from pages 40 to 45 in **Glas**. The difference between the Abraham discussed in **Glas** and the Abraham discussed in **The Gift of Death** may be identified as the difference between Hegel’s and Kierkegaard’s Abrahams: the former is the castrating primal founder of a people; the latter is a pathetic figure incapable of making himself understood. Yet we should not lose sight of the degree to which this difference is measurable here because the two are presented to us by Derrida in texts that I identify as crucial markers in his relationship with a friend whose name is also Abraham. Given this context, when we hear Derrida discuss Abraham’s silence, are we not struck by what must seem a rueful gesture: to be able to continue to speak, to write, to publish, or more precisely, to be able to speak of his friend’s secrecy, and just perhaps . . . to publish his secret.

Thus, we arrive at my key point: Derrida’s anxiety in these interviews in 1975, soon after the death of his good friend, centres not on whether he has been in any way complicit in his friend’s relative anonymity, but that he feels that somehow he may have told the world more than he should have? We know of course that the existence of the **Glossary** would remain a secret until the publication of **Rhythms** by Rand and Torok in 1985. Surely, ten years earlier, Derrida had no cause for concern. Yet his subsequent meditations on the gift of death seem now to suggest to us that the issue of Abraham’s secret is crucial in understanding Derrida’s own singular relation with his deceased friend. As I have argued elsewhere, much of the rest of **The Gift of Death** uses the discussion of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, in part, as a refusal to mourn for another recently departed friend, Emmanuel Levinas. Yet I also note that the third section, entitled “Whom To Give To,” is something of the odd chapter out, since it suspends the discussion of Patočka’s work to focus on Kierkegaard’s Abraham. My point is that Derrida will momentarily suspend his refusal to mourn Levinas in order to re-assert an ongoing performance of incorporation (a prior refusal to mourn), but the temptation to combine the two is forcefully resisted, by imposing the limit of chapter breaks between them: the singularity of each relation is maintained.

Now, let us turn our attention for a moment to what Torok and Rand let on about the **Glossary**. We are told that the project was intended to provide “an analysis of the various structures of translation as well as a new technique of translation” (134). This analysis identified the work to be translated as “paradigmatic” and the work that turns toward this other work as “paradeictic,” though, as Torok and Rand point out, both of these works could be described as paradeictic since even the supposedly paradigmatic work was turned toward another work within translation, a chimeric other work or an ideal model (136). This ideal model may well be read as the prototype for what was to

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become the “arche-model” or “anasemia” of Abraham’s later work, and might thus be described as the arche-model of the theory of the arche-model, the arche-model par excellence. Little wonder, then, that in the closing sections of Cryptonymie, Abraham quips, “We have basically always done paradigmatics” (qtd. 135). There is nothing in this that should be a cause of Derrida’s anxiety, since he seems to have gone out of his way in the interviews to avoid direct reference to the term “arche-model,” and even when he later draws connections between Abraham’s last projects and earlier material, this chronology is traced back no further than 1961. Yet let us look closely at what Torok and Rand call the “centrepiece” of the Glossary, its entry on the ideal model of translation, which Abraham calls calque:

An essentially alloglottic paradeictic work displaying references to all the elements of a complete model. Calque presupposes a reflexive experience of the original poetic universe. In principle, it accomplishes the isotopia and homeo-syntopia of all poetic levels while producing the equivalent of all the horizontal and vertical elements. (qtd. 143)

Symptomatic of its phenomenological attitude, this arche-model of arche-models is, it is true, directed toward an original universe rather than a pre-originary one, yet as the condition for the possibility of what has traditionally been conceived in poetics as the original of a translation, calque creates the initial movement toward the pre-originary that characterises Abraham’s later work.

Reading the centrepiece, though, are we not struck immediately by what Derrida would call its glas-effects, and by the degree to which it voices so many concerns that Glas thematises or takes as its object? Isolating the inserts in the Genet column from pages 149 to 160 would be enough to demonstrate Derrida’s suspicion of translations that are deaf to the “+L effect (consonant +L),” to the extent that what he looks for in a translation is not only the carry-over of the form of words from one text to another, but also the remains of this division. As the entry calque suggests, such a remainder is inscribed in the process of translation itself, as the a priori of the division, and that what translation does is leave the trace of this a priori in the separation of the original from its copy. The word calque is French for a tracing, though it is inflected here in a way that would suggest an anasemic dimension, pointing instead toward the source of the tracing. In Glas, of course, the word is never used, but the other French word for a tracing—tracé—appears as the homonym for the verb “to trace” (tracer), indicating, like Abraham’s calque, both the tracing itself and its source within a single word and its allophones (68b, 79b). Furthermore, the word tracé is the object of one of the text’s key calculations, when it is inverted to form the deviation or gap (écart) whose traces (trace d’écart) are left as a remainder of the glas-effect (passim).

Yet this calque is not only thematised by Glas as an absent term whose presence is hinted at in the same way as the crampon. The term itself has, I suggest, been very carefully included within Derrida’s calculations—indeed, we hear its echo within the word “calculation” itself, in calcul, and in calculer. If we return to the opening pages for a moment, to the clinging and de-clinging “cata-,” we note carefully what Derrida points out to us from these passages: not that the cat is itself errant—he will return to that point later—but that the “ALCs sound, clack, explode, reflect, and (re)turn themselves in every sense and direction, count and discount themselves” and so on (2bi). I emphasise now something that he states in the interview in 1975 as an aside, between brackets as it were: “and since you ask me about Glas, I put in brackets the fact that “claqué,” the word and the thing, as one says, is one of the objects of the book” (40). If
this object of Glas, the “claque,” reflects and (re)turns itself in every direction, we see not only the movement from the ALC to the CLA of the clack—and, indeed, of the “clamor” whose German form Klammern is one of the forms of the crampon—but also the (re)turn to the ALC of the calque. Taking this another step further, we can see the many turns and soundings of the glas-effect: “class” is a key word in the sounding of glas; and ça (“it/id,” “savoir absolu,” and just about everything to which Glas “comes down”) especially with the “hook” turned, as Derrida suggests in 1975, is the CA; to this we can add that “Glas” thus sounds the (re)turn of the “calque.”

Derrida’s anxiety in the interviews in 1975 may well be attributable, then, to his knowledge that with the publication of Glas a part of Abraham’s secret Glossary had also been published (albeit cryptically) not long before his death. After this death, in 1975, Derrida will have been acutely aware that Abraham’s legacy and his will may already have been compromised. Of course, the question of his will has already been traversed by the issue of “intention” which Abraham’s own unpublished, untranslated material interrogates. This may well be the reason why Derrida so abruptly raises the question in 1975 of who gets to decide, “between a secret and its publication,” what code is to be brought into play. In his own singular relation with Abraham, a specific responsibility inheres, which cannot be reduced to the simple question of what a dead author intended. We must remember that, for Derrida at least, Abraham’s death is not, in the end, really about his “death,” even (or, especially) when this death is inseparable from his name and the works that it signs. Derrida has always been certain that one of the things that remains most uncertain is our relation to death, since the question of this relation is a limit that attempts to close over the threshold. This is stated in Aporias: “The relevance of the question of knowing whether it is from one’s own proper death or from the other’s death that the relation to death or the certitude of death is instituted is limited from the start” (61). The loss that Abraham asks Derrida to calculate is not to do with his death, but is a loss in the body of his work that Abraham seemed to want to impose upon this corpus. In the end—or, rather, vaulting across the threshold of this end—Derrida’s calculations in Glas, as in the glas-effects of calculation as such, already incorporate this loss insofar as they have incorporated the whole of the body of work which contains the secret of its pre-origins (its incomplete arche-model: the Glossary and its centrepiece, calque). In the end, all later calculations, and the calculation of loss, answer to these glas-effects.

Works Cited


