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Not One of My Moments

Sarah Wood

Abstract

This essay imagines Derrida by starting from the first page of *Glas*—read in terms of extinction and global warming. On that page we come across the imperative ‘stay and think’ and the rest of the piece addresses the condensations and displacements by which that staying and thinking are imagined and enacted. An unimaginable ecological crisis faces us today. Hearing, dreaming, and reading emerge from *Glas* as distinctively strange and necessary forms of agency that can sustain our efforts to think (and act) non-destructively in response.

*

‘*reste à penser*’¹

Jacques Derrida 1974, 7ai.

‘It’s an imperative’²

Hélène Cixous, Leeds 2007.

‘*We may say without qualification that
nothing great has been accomplished
in the world without passion*’.

G. W. F. Hegel 1975, 73.

‘It seems too vast, you would like to
take photographs of the Great Eastern
Sun and keep them as a memory, rather
than staring directly into the light’.

There is no ‘after’ reading: not in the sense of getting over something. You dream of writing the history, the back-story, working out the relationship of certain particles of writing or streaks of writing-agency. They appear, but resist coming to rest. They trouble the words and sentences that are to hand and remain obstinately unsynchronised. Their image—we are here to *imagine Derrida*—stays you, it *holds you up*, even returns, but does not stay to answer. Something more is required, another agency and another conception of action. We will find it in accounts of reading in and about Derrida’s *Glas*, in dreams and at work in life. That is to say, we cannot finally find it, though it can be experienced and something can come of it.

This is a piece about reading *Glas*, written in an age of global warming and disappearance of ice, when the Imperial Eagle is officially identified as vulnerable to extinction (see Carson and Peterson 2016, and *IUCN Red List 2016*). It’s more than time—it’s imperative—to find new rhythms between the proverbial coldness of reason, and reading, understood here as a mobilising responsiveness that’s not necessarily human or even recognisably alive. The processes of condensation and displacement that characterise the inventive forces of imagination, at its wildest and strongest in dreams, are also movements indispensable to thinking (see Bersani 1977, 47). Since Derrida’s death in 2004 there have been an increasing number of developments in and around deconstruction that respond to global warming, mass extinction and other forms of environmental trouble.³ This is a piece about *Glas*, a text that investigates the imperative in general, partly and crucially by means of articulating and responding to imperatives. *Glas* has been described as an effort to think about ‘what underlies the formation of categorical imperatives, to examine the necessity that compels us to generate and rely on imperatives, to interrogate just what it is that commands, that calls, for assent and obedience’ (Lukacher 1987, 1199). *Glas* also thinks about and reads in terms of heat and cold, solid ice and running water. There isn’t time not to read, so better get started: ‘—*Allez!*’ (Derrida 1974, 235b)

Instead of Reading *Glas*, I Talked on the Phone

I was walking along talking to my elder daughter on the mobile, fretting about the bit of the first page of *Glas* where there is an eagle caught in the ice; it’s caught up in Hegel’s name, in philosophy, partly on account of the sound. Hegel, *aigle*, eagle, [ɛgl]. A bird caught, one wants it to be free, I told her. But the ice is melting. Now we know it is not good for the

things in the ice to be free. We need ice *as such*. And birds are going extinct, this is a fact.⁴ In *Glas* it's not necessarily an actual bird, it's also an imperial eagle—this gets very condensed, one might say 'concentrated at a single point' (Pinkard 2000, 228)⁵—the symbol of the Prussian state, from the Holy Roman Empire and imperial Rome and going forward to Emperor Napoleon and so on. We also need birds as such, including eagles, that was understood.

And she said: So what happens when the ice melts and the bird flies out. The end of history?

That's it, I said. No more to say.

We moved on.

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Recollected Derrida

I hurried to catch up. I never did: no one ever could. Still, let's imagine that a long time ago I wrote something about not reading the first page of *Glas*, for a symposium at Kolding in Denmark, and Derrida read it.⁶ And so on for many years until the recent dream called

Meadow Remodelled

Unrecognisable; in the distance a huge road swept across to the ancient building that I knew. Cars: replete with cars. The space in which across which I had wandered was divided allotted or allotmented in particular it pained me to see the purple iris or flags growing now all one length in a rectangle, crowded together like pupils and the whole space in which I had lived immersed now seen a little from above was finite, not so large, unrecognisable apart from some traces, like the colour of the flowers, the memory of a river that once had banks now an artificial ribbon on a map and I had let this happen I had not prevented it I had looked elsewhere and the beautiful disorganisation of the structure had been destroyed. From everywhere I could hear cars, the road, from a single vantage point I could see it all.

traces I could smell here or there were heartbreaking especially the attempts to preserve a vague faded greenness here and here for example. It was contracted, torn open to view, hopeless. Hopelessly simple. Horror

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Hunted on the Internet For a *Glas* Swan

I found official published recognition of Mallarmé's swan as a poetic precursor to the eagle caught in '*glace et gel*' on the first page of *Glas*, in Ned Lukacher's fantastic 1987 review

in *Modern Language Notes*. Lukacher says pretty much everything necessary, including that ‘the greatest risk Derrida runs in *Glas* is that of not being read’ (Lukacher 1987, 1200). Lukacher formulates the energetic substance of *Glas* as follows:

The icy abstractions of Hegel's grand style, the frigid distance of what Bataille called Genet's "cold bad taste," will make *Glas* for many American readers the scholarly equivalent of the big chill. Heat and cold are not only terms to describe the reception of *Glas*, they are also the fundamental terms to describe the specific operation of the law of stricture in Hegel and Genet. It is the great achievement of *Glas* that it locates the heat within the glacial oeuvres of Hegel and Genet, the heat that is surreptitiously circulated, concealed, displaced, and the hydraulics of narcissistic desire that seeks to erect, to monumentalize the self within the crypt of language. (Lukacher 1987, 1200)

In this account *Glas* locates what remains also unlocatable, because it is circulated, concealed, displaced and so on. *Glas* also takes on the movements of narcissistic desire as it ingeniously and indefatigably moves in on language with identifications that are bolder, more unexpected and more sustained than are, shall we say, usual. This action of identification and narcissistic opening is needed to think, and especially to think about and with the weird displacements and obscure coagulations of agency that have got earth to the point where the number of wild animals has halved in the last 40 years and the movement to a catastrophic man-made change in global temperatures continues.⁷

So, the swan, Mallarmé's bird is sentient: ‘His neck will shake off the white agony space / Inflicted upon the bird for his denial, / But not this horror of earth where his wings are caught [*Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie / Par l'espace infligée a l'oiseau qui nie, / Mais non l'horreur du sol ou le plumage est pris*]’ (Mallarmé 1982, 44-7). Once you have heard of and heard this suffering of the swan, no matter that it is not ‘real’, you cannot be deaf to the horror undergone by the eagle caught in the ice. Doesn't real acknowledgement of one agony involve an action that virtually includes the life of all agonies: the living and the non-living, the swans and the eagles, the bird Poetry and the bird Philosophy? Imaginative action mobilises and activates. ‘Agony’ and ‘action’ are axiomatically connected through the proto-Indo-European root **ag-*, meaning ‘to drive, to draw out or forth, to move’. ‘Axiom’, the statement of self-evident truth, itself comes from the same root, via Greek *axioma* ‘authority’, literally ‘that which is thought worthy or fit’,

from *axios* ‘worthy, worth, of like value, weighing as much’, from the proto-Indo-European adjective **ag-ty-o-* ‘weighty’. Extinction and global warming are worth thinking about, no? They are subjects of gravity and significance. And thinking is what weighs, *penser* from Latin *pensare*, to weigh or consider.

There is a *gl* of *Glas*, it is well known, the glottal action of swallowing and not swallowing that closes off the circulating resonances and endless reading possibilities (see Lukacher 1987, 1200). *Gl* makes possible the hydraulics of narcissistic desire. There is also *ag*, a sound like ach, ack or agh, or Genet’s *je m’éc...*, that calls to mind gagging or choking. To gag someone, transitively, is to stop their mouth by thrusting something into it. But it’s not clear that thinking is transitive (Wood 2014, 29-30). No matter how heavy or light the material thinking takes on may be, how do you know, in the end, what you are thinking about, or whether you are thinking at all? There is always a funny kind of emptiness about thinking. The action or agony of *ag*, drive, drawing out, drawing forth, or movement is unilateral, not because it is subjective—subjective opposed to what, exactly?—but because it is not guaranteed to be in relation to anyone or anything at all in particular. (The risk Derrida takes in *Glas* is of not being read, Lukacher remarks.)

I’ve been thinking about extinction: half the so-called animals are extinct and the human species is not exempt from the same pressures of heating, melting, unflushable dumping of inassimilable poisons and other environmental destructions, extractions and overloads that have got people thinking about relocating to Mars or putting an elite on ice for the far future when things might look more promising.⁸ What the first page of *Glas* once seemed to offer readers was the chance to think in the context of the oeuvre, narcissistic desire and the self. ‘For us, here, now: from now on that is what one will not have been able to think without him [*Pour nous, ici, maintenant: voilà ce qu’on n’aura pu désormais penser sans lui*]’ (Derrida 1986b, 1a/1974 7a). But how are we to stay and think these days, when heat is on the loose and extinction needs to be recognised as something other than death? Death, which has quietly or clumsily organised our thinking all this time, now seems by contrast quite palatable.

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Read Hillis Miller Reading *Glas*

The most recent commentary on the first page of *Glas* is by Hillis Miller. His work has in recent years been notable for developing relations between deconstructive thinking and awareness of the irreversible global effects of climate change (see Miller 2010, 2011 and 2016). Miller’s reading of *Glas* does not take up the environmental theme in any very

explicit way. He can, however, be said to be imagining Derrida, and *Glas*. Compared with more austere deconstructive readings like Lukacher's or Andrej Warminski's,⁹ Miller's essay recuperates reading *Glas* into intersubjective, subject-and-object, autobiographical and anecdotal (albeit somewhat traumatic) experience. 'Interior images' is a key term and the text includes a number of images of his personal copy of the book: the cover, the title page with a dedication from Derrida, the *prière d'insérer* with a corner missing, and a shot of the opening page. Taking up Keatsian idiom, Miller returns to his first 'looking into' *Glas* in 1974, when it seemed to him verily a 'new planet' (Miller 2016b, 133). Exploring that planet is an almighty effort,

in addition to trying to make sense of the words on the page, all sorts of somatic and affective responses were involved, as well as a constant unsuccessful attempt to create a coherent mental image based not only on the way the words are arranged on the page (in two columns), but also on the bewildering complexity of what the words say. (Ibid., 129)

The essay is full of insight and learning, to the point of being an indispensable exegesis. It also documents the failure of its own drive to make or find a coherent mental image for reading the book. What it does come up with by the end is 'a composite image, a collage or montage, of a pile of debris such as you might find in the town dump or in a garbage can or in a waste basket' (Ibid., 146). As he puts it elsewhere—not in relation to *Glas* but with something of the same exhausted lucidity—we are 'collectively living on a planet that is becoming one gigantic garbage dump' (Miller 2016a, 187). Miller's 'heroic and on the whole unsuccessful attempt to figure out just what Derrida is saying, just what the words mean' (Miller 2016b, 139) ends with a pile consisting

of faeces; of a Rembrandt torn into regular squares; of the works of Hegel similarly fragmented; of a dead body (Derrida's own: he was obsessed with the question of his own remains, in all senses, including his unpublished manuscripts); of a fragmented poster of an imperial German eagle; of debris falling and then rising again as a tower and simultaneously as a colossus. (Ibid., 146)

Miller arranges *Glas* as an image of disarray and derangement. Nothing in the waste basket is moving or animated. The essay composes the oeuvre, the book, the page and format, the

3ft tower of proofs from Galilée in relation to a discreet, restrained and somewhat objective pathos of reading and failing to read.

Glas also describes the relation between reading and writing from the point of view of living, if not personal, experience. The experience is both immersive and partial and cannot be fully accounted for by a critical narrative or argument because it is ‘structurally interminable’: a living animal language-body is endlessly caught in what it tries to write its way clear of (Derrida 1974, 130bl; .1986b, 148bi. Translation modified). Derrida describes an *agony*, the ‘agony of metalanguage’, an anguish or terror that is ‘structurally interminable. But as effort and effect. Metalanguage is the life of language: it always beats its wings like a bird caught in a subtle glue’. We are in the agony of extinction. This is a living horror on a scale we cannot contemplate. We need not images and pathos, but the argh, aggro and urgency of dreams and writing-agency that can articulate, render thinkable, the agony of imagining.

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Heard Cixous Speak Two or Three Words From the Other Side

Until I heard Hélène Cixous (2007) retranslate ‘*reste à penser*’, the phrase that begins the second insert, judas or *jalousie* set into the left side of the left hand column of the first page of *Glas*, I’d had no idea that it might not mean, as the English translation has it: ‘remain(s) to be thought’. I thought (if it can be called thinking, that was so unthinking) that the phrase referred to an unfinished task, prompting the reader to begin or resume work on thinking:

reste à penser: ça ne s’accentuer pas ici maintenant mais se sera déjà mis à l’épreuve de l’autre côté. Le sens doit répondre, plus ou moins, aux calculs de ce qu’en termes de gravure on appelle contre-épreuve.

remain(s) to be thought: it (*ça*) does not accentuate itself here now but will already have been put to the test on the other side. Sense must conform, more or less, to the calculi of what the engraver terms a counterproof. (Derrida 1974ai; 1986b, 1ai)

But instead let’s respond to the imperative:

‘*reste à penser*’

‘stay and think’

(Cixous 2007)

Cixous, in a couple of spoken sentences, made or let be heard a strange unlocatable sociability of thinking. (Following for a moment the iterations of *en* in the *reste à penser* insert we might say she *enthought* it.) She said: ‘It’s an imperative: stay and think. Stay and think. Stay with me, read with me, think with me, live with me, die with me’. There is a being-with that does not depend on full presence, or on being of the same kind, or species, or being alive or dead or animate or inanimate. It can’t be pointed to, cited as proof, without problematising all the identifications in the scene. It even troubles identification itself. She spoke out of, or drew forth towards us, a dream. We dream, Freud knew, with our ears. The phrase came forth easily. But still, it came from far away and was headed futurewards. It carried or was borne along by an enchantment from who knows where, call without provenance, nightingale to all the emperors. It worked at the level of narcissistic desire. The utterance reiterated and drew out the phrase. This movement of extension, with all its risks, is indispensable. It begins with love of language and a capacity to identify, more or less fearlessly, with its movements.

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Imagined Derrida Now

The first page of *Glas* points to a certain emblematic, embalmed Hegel. The model philosopher is preserved in the ice, fixed as he is for those who have read him ‘only a little’—frozen, pale, stiff, known for ‘magisterial coldness and imperturbable seriousness’ (Derrida 1986b, 1a). But how did he get there? The book begins mid-sentence and perhaps like the reader, this Hegel has at some point been thrown in and got stuck. An emblem, before it is an image or object that serves as the symbolic representation of an abstract quality, action, state of things or class of person, is something *thrown in*. It arrives thanks to outside intervention. It is an insert—from Greek *emblema*, ‘an insertion’, from *emballein*, ‘to throw in’. An emblem remains perceptibly other than the context in which it appears and it retains, despite having been inserted there, a certain strangeness that Derrida notices. The words *reste à penser* are also dropped into *Glas*, without a capital R that one would expect to begin a sentence. It is, like a name, aphoristic. *Glas* brings another way of beginning into sentences.

Cixous drew attention to *reste à penser* as a singular imperative and retrospectively it became as if someone, or something, had been speaking the words all along. She gave voice with confidence. It was an intervention. True confidence is confidence in nothing. She took intimate dictation not from *Glas*, not from Derrida himself but from the unlocatable place

the insert calls ‘the other side [*l’autre côté*]’—a place (like the insert itself, or like a dream) a little to one side of the proper. This was in order to let the imperative move forward as it had to. We write, when we are serious, for the other side:

I think one also writes for the dead. ... Every name is the name of someone dead or of a living someone whom it can do without. If the destination of writing is names or one writes to call up names, then one writes also for the dead. Perhaps not for the dead in general, ... rather one writes for a specific dead person.
(Derrida 1988, 53)

But that’s not where it ends.

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Thought About Sexual Difference

Glas thinks, and invites us to think, but does not set out to sublimate thought. Sexual difference comes into this. Derrida insisted that ‘the figure of the philosopher, for me, is always a masculine figure’ and that ‘philosophy, since its inception, has always been linked to a paternal figure’ (Dick and Kofman 2005, 97). The persistence of this link between philosophy and the father can be thought of as what happens when idealisation and anthropomorphic identification dominate thinking. A lineage and a tradition of thinking may be preserved but its movement becomes fixated in determined ways. Freud explains how this happens and the destructiveness and cruelty unleashed in the process:

The super-ego arises, as we know, from an identification with the father taken as a model [*Vatervorbild*]. Every such identification is in the nature of a de-sexualisation or even of a sublimation. It now seems as if when a transformation of this kind takes place, an instinctual defusion [*Triebentmischung*] occurs at the same time. After sublimation the erotic component no longer has the power to bind the whole of the destructiveness that was combined with it, and this is released in the form of an inclination to aggression and destruction. This defusion would be the source of the general character of harshness and cruelty exhibited by the ideal – its dictatorial ‘Thou shalt’ [*gebieterischen Sollens*] (Freud 2001, 54-55).

That day at Leeds, Cixous read ‘*reste à penser*’ very directly.¹⁰ She uttered it and glossed it as something other than one more academic superego injunction. There was no question of sublimating the erotic component of thinking. No sentiment, effigies or role models. The imperative to stay and think retained the irresistible intimacy of a thinking that dreams (that is, a thinking made up of condensations and displacements as well as

significations). The *ça* that the insert goes on to refer to is the *Es* or id whose passions live us. A passion for letters and sounds can hear and read all kinds of things in this *ça* by Jacques Derrida.

Cixous' reading-writing-thinking proves itself by seeking and affirming contact with what the insert goes on to call an 'other side [*autre côté*]', and the otherness of this other side makes it more suitable to be addressed than to be taken as a model or cited as a proof. Love of language comes into this. You entrust yourself to a movement of thinking in which meaning is not an ideal given from above, nor can it be frozen, fixed, rescued or freed by those who know how, as one might imagine a more or less progressive history of philosophy working by means of a little reading, much decoding, the proper expressions of ridicule and the appropriate manifestations of respect. As in dreams, proper names melt—no one owns this movement—but don't vanish entirely. What happens can't be recognised and greeted properly without some reference to the order of names. It emerges that the conformity in the English '[s]ense must conform' feels rather too harsh and super-egoish, too unresponsive, as a translation of Derrida's '*sens doit répondre*'.

The heated calculation of writing cannot be extracted from a movement of reading to become an authority. The counter-proof is not another kind of philosophical proof, nor a polemical intervention. The term counter-proof comes from printmaking, where what matters is not the transmission of meaning but the transferability of marks from one surface to another—'reading' in the most mechanical sense.¹¹ French *sens*, 'meaning', is also sentience, sensory perception, instinct, direction, the responsiveness of the reader-writer to an other within themselves. A lot of this goes on in the ear, where a host of *sons*, sounds (not sons-of-the-father) accompany *sens*, unworried by the kind of contradiction Derrida notes between the phonically similar operations of a text letting itself be assigned (*enseigner*, also 'taught') and signed, *signer*. And while we are taking up the invitation issued by the first pages of *Glas* to restore eros to Hegel by reading him and especially by reading his name, I'd like to add that although in French the ornithological eagle, like the eagle-lectern of the academic, is a noun gendered masculine, the military and heraldic *aigle*, the emblem or ensign that would lend its 'imperial or historic power' to Hegel's name, takes the feminine. Thinking is neither masculine nor feminine and can be either masculine or feminine or maybe both, depending.

'What Actually Happens'

In his essay on *Glas* Hillis Miller finds

that what actually happens when I read a poem, a novel, a philosophical text or a critical text is the spontaneous generation of a quite definite imaginary space with appropriate feelings as well as a visual vividness not entirely justified by the words on the page. *Glas* is no exception. (Miller 2016b, 139)

‘Spontaneity’ and ‘generation’ can never be the same after reading *Glas*. This could be demonstrated in terms of the left hand column’s account of ‘here and now’, starting at the top of the first page, and from its discussion of the family and ‘the generic process’ in Hegel.¹² It is also true that reading *Glas* is a very intense experience of reading-transferences and enactments. Something accentuates itself, in you. You get caught up in, become an effect of *counterproofing*, new-editioning or transference. You take an impression from the other side, quickly, quickly before the writing has dried into sentences, or the sentences congealed into paragraphic arguments. You look into yourself. What’s happening, how did it touch you? What happened there? This makes *Glas* a particularly suitable work to study in this age of what Timothy Morton excellently calls ‘global weirding’ (Morton 2016, 5-12).

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Had a Laugh

Glas is an exhibition of word-things. In dreams, Freud says: ‘words and names [*Worte und Namen*] are frequently treated ... as though they were things, and for that reason they are apt to be combined in just the same way as are representations of things. Dreams of this kind offer the most amusing and curious neologisms [*komische und seltsame Wortschöpfungen*]’ (Freud 2001, 295-6; 1900, 301). Lyotard calls these comical strange creations or condensations *mots-choses* or ‘word-things’ (Lyotard 2011, 239). A word-thing is ‘opaque, dense, hiding its other side(s)’. An aura of ‘magisterial coldness and imperturbable seriousness’ persists around thinking and interferes with it happening. But in an insert later in *Glas* (‘about which’ Derrida adds ‘one does not know if it works’), Kierkegaard insists: ‘Hegel and Hegelianism constitute an essay in the comical’ (Derrida 1986b, 232ai). Tom Cohen has repeatedly called for a new climate comedy, often associated with a taste for aporia and the vivid sense of the fatuity of recuperating the unthinkable that has already happened (Cohen 2016, 21-22; 26-28; 31; 62). Timothy Morton’s comic spirit is perhaps closer to the ‘infinite circulation of general equivalence’ that troubles and inspires *Glas*. He

suggests that comedy has an important relation to the anarchic and the need to remove of what he calls philosophical copyright control on access to reality:

And once you get rid of the copyright control and once you get rid of Kant's nervous restriction on what access means; access for him is mathematizing philosophy, like everything is just extension and so if I know things mathematically I know them extensionally, right? If you take that away and, you know, a raindrop touching me, I'm also accessing it. I'm having a feeling about it, that's also accessing it. So if you take that away and you take the anthropocentric block, inhibition, away, what you get is that everything in the universe gets to access everything else, and the way that everything accesses everything is such that nothing is ever exhausted, everything is always completely sparkling with some kind of unfathomable, vivid, bristly reality, you know? And ultimately that's funny, it's like it's a comedy, it's not a tragedy, it's not horrific. (Morton and Obrist 2017, online)

Glas also carries traces of a silent activity, still minus a name, glimpsed in word-fragments and mute words, even working across what look like sentences. A name can exhibit and hide 'unheard-of, monstrous species of things' (Saussure qtd in de Man 1986, 37). Genet had an interesting line on literature as a kind of originary commentary on what is not to be said aloud or made explicit. For him, writing can be seen as a parade devoted to an absent word. Derrida describes in *Glas* the procedure of writing that avoids the explicit in order to bring about a specific writing-action without mastery. It takes the form of a kind of writing without writing. It comments 'without ever writing, ever pronouncing what you are nevertheless constrained to understand, on one scene or the other, and what, consequently, strikes much more strongly, so as not to be mastered in an act' (Derrida 1986b, 128-29bi; 1974, 147b). Everyone has come to the games to watch the struggle of an agon, a mental fight or a death-struggle to imagine Derrida or imagine extinction and what you get is parade or parrying-actions, the movements of drawing something out, or gathering-together. Still, even here, you might chance upon—not the thing itself—but 'the mad energy of a gift' (Derrida 1986b, 243a).

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Went to the Dictionaries

Sa accentuates itself, and it can do so without me. For example the reflexive verb *s'accentuer*: 'it [*ça*] does not accentuate itself [*s'accentuer*] here now but will already have been put to the test on the other side. Sense must respond, more or less, to the calculi of what the engraver terms a counterproof'. The reflexive form of *accentuer* has to do with marking and re-marking. *S'accentuer* suggests a kind of passive emergence into, or increase of perceptibility, that builds over time. Harrap gives us the following meanings:

- (contrast, resemblance) to become more marked, or apparent or pronounced;
- (tendency) to become more noticeable;
- (unemployment) to rise, to increase;
- (crisis) to increase in intensity.

Dictionaries can ramp things up rather than settle them.

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Read Freud, *The Ego and the Id*

S'accentuer, a French sound, begins *s'a*, which sounds like *ça*, 'this, it', this demonstrative pronoun, the name of the thing we are trying to think or think about, whatever it may be, here and now. Freud's account of what is called the id (or *ça* or *Es*) says that 'what we call our ego behaves essentially passively in life, and ... we are "lived" by unknown and uncontrollable forces' (Freud 2001b, 23). 'We shall now look upon an individual as a psychical id, unknown and unconscious, upon whose surface rests the ego' (Ibid., 24). The ego seeks to promote the influence of the things it has been modified by: 'external reality', perceptual experience and 'common sense' (Ibid., 25). The ego is a keen learner. It may want to check and steer the id, but still remains part of it, is derived from it, and takes its energy from it. The psychical parts here are more than a single whole, as Timothy Morton might say. The id remains impervious to external reality, perceptual experience and common sense. And yet, what Derrida says about *ça* and the counterproof suggests *the id reads*. Dreams are further evidence that the id can read.

As we have seen, in *Glas* *sa* is shorthand for *savoir absolu*, Absolute Knowledge, Hegel's challenge to the notion that philosophical understanding can be reached bit by bit in an accumulation of particulars. According to the account of philosophy in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: 'a mutual necessity' of apparently conflicting moments 'alone constitutes the life of the whole' (Hegel 1977, 2). To understand a philosophical system it is

therefore important to recognise the unity of ‘reciprocally necessary moments that take shape as a conflict and seeming incompatibility’. Hegel and Freud both insist on the superficiality of perception, external reality and common sense as measures of the truth. They invite us to read, for the sake of the system.

But something else also accentuates itself. It makes another kind of overture. *Accentuer* and *s’accentuer* are derived from Latin *accentus*, a song added to speech. *Ad*, before + *cantus*, a singing. You cannot write *about* this, beyond the odd remark, a bit of earth scattered as you run. To quote *Dissemination* again: ‘pointing out a single thematic nucleus or a single guiding thesis, [...] would cancel out the textual displacement that is at work “here.” (Here? Where? The question of the here and now is explicitly enacted in dissemination)’ (Derrida 1981, 7). At times one must refrain from posting signs, shaping arguments, or gathering thinking into the Thoughts of I. This is in order to hear. One gets access to the precise effects and workings of the primary process through the ear.

According to *The Ego and the Id*, when we hear language we hear—remains: ‘In essence a word is after all the mnemonic residue [*Erinnerungsrest*] of a word that has been heard’ (Freud 2001b, 21). Discussing the strange diagram of the psyche he seems to have first put to paper in a letter to Georg Groddeck, now re-appearing in print, Freud draws special attention to the importance of sounds. The ego ‘wears a “cap of hearing”—on one side only, as we learn from cerebral anatomy. It might be said to wear it awry’ (Ibid., 25). This means that when we think we hear straight, by the rules of the signification system, a sound that carries a meaning, a word, a sentence, no problem, I get it ... we’re not really hearing at all. We’re editing out what accentuates itself. And, in the Freud’s image of the psyche, the ego itself perches on top of and rises out of the energies of a mischievous, incoherent, pleasure-led id. What is us? Are we ever all here? Together now? How much of what follows here is, necessarily, a repetition of the displacement that constitutes and deconstructs egoic space? I don’t know: reading *Glas* means translating from an unknown language, we might call it Eaglish, without prior knowledge of the grammar or the lexicon.

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Read Genet

The ‘infinite circulation of a general equivalence’, as the first page of *Glas* describes it, is not restricted to the columns of *Glas*, or to language, or to abstract thought. According to *What Remains of a Rembrandt*, it passes even through the ‘fixed but not gazeless’ eyes of butchered sheep-heads (Genet 1968, 27). Genet describes the direct experience of an ‘immediate certainty’ about himself and a fellow train-passenger: the knowledge that ‘each-

other were only one, both *either* he or I *and* he and I' (Ibid., 19). The insight that 'every man is all the others' is not theory, philosophy or religion but something 'dreamed rather than thought' (Ibid., 21; 22). Everyday impressions of separate existences and species, or of categorical separation between living and dead entities, have become a series of mysteries to be explained.

A proper name, classically speaking, has a referent but no signified. *Glas* invites us to consider the challenge and stake [*enjeu*] of literary discourse as 'the patient, crafty, quasi-animal or vegetable, untiring, monumental, derisory too, but on the whole holding itself up to derision, transformation of his [Genet's] proper name, *rebus*, into things, into the name of things' (Derrida 1986b, 5b; 1974, 11b). *His* proper name, not *the* proper name—someone's name becoming no-one's name and back again is not something to be entrusted to the gelid discursiveness of theory. But then again, what is the process that names the game of literature? What is the name of the process? Who can speak about it? One might trust a Genet to carry off this writing-metamorphosis—but it's also well known that writers don't always necessarily care to blow the gaff: 'I do what I do not say, almost, I never say what I do' (Derrida 1986b, 227b) .

Instead of Reading *Glas* I Read 'Hypogram and Inscription' by Paul de Man

De Man reminds us that the opening of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the chapter on sense-certainty, is 'written all over *Glas*' (De Man 1986, 41). 'Hypogram', it is well known, is a term coined by Saussure in response to 'a strong hunch' that 'Latin poetry was structured by the coded dispersal (or dissemination) of an underlying word or proper name throughout the lines of verse' (Ibid., 36). Saussure abandoned his research because of a lack of historical evidence to corroborate his hunch but, mainly, de Man explains 'because he could not prove whether the structures were random, the outcome of probability, or determined by the codification of a semiosis' (Ibid., 37). To observe, alone, something the existence of which may have no guarantee in meaning may be terrifying, as hallucination may be terrifying. De Man suggests that Saussure's caution about publishing his research 'supports the assumption of a terror glimpsed'. De Man emphasises the effect the discovery of hypograms has on the assumption that language is hospitable to even the most ingenious or discreet forms of narcissistic appropriation. Rather:

the phonic, sensory, and phenomenal ground of poetic diction has been unsettled, for the laws for the dispersal of the key word in the text . . . are not phenomenally

or even mathematically perceivable. Since the key word is the proper name in all its originary integrity, its subdivision into discrete parts and groups resembles, on the level of meaning, the worst phantasms of dismemberment to be found in D. P. Schreber's *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken* [Memoirs of My Nervous Illness]. We would then have witnessed . . . the undoing of the phenomenality of language which always entails (since the phenomenal and the noumenal are binary poles within the same system) the undoing of cognition and its replacement with the uncontrollable power of the letter as inscription. (Ibid.)

Writing-agency gives readers and writers no ground, no basis for confidence in themselves. The *-gram* in 'hypogram' re-marks the agency of the letter. To identify its scatterings under the regime of a name or a secreted word would shelter language (and readers) from the effects of a 'cognitive dismemberment' that nonetheless continues to threaten the very notion of thought. De Manian inscription suggests there is something to be read which cannot be identified in advance—because it has no phenomenal presence and is not semantically determined (being non-cognitive). It may however produce effects of cognition, and may give rise to mimetic and proper-name effects.

'Inscription' might be one way to translate 'legend' on the first page of *Glas*: 'This is—a legend'. *Glas* is a worst-case scenario for reading because it pushes the regressive possibilities of identification with the name as hard as it explodes the notion of the 'proper' and also reminds us that, as Genet puts it: 'words don't give a fuck' (Genet qtd in Derrida 1986b, 233bi). One must have a certain courage to think this and not give up. But there is no need at this point to remain ignorant of, or be intimidated by, the agony of metalanguage and the indifferent agency of words.

I Read *Glas* Badly

We are almost at the end now. Bad reading generates lots of questions without answers: 'what happens when Hegel's text is not read or when it is read *badly*?' (Derrida 1986b, 227a) Again: 'what is it not to read Hegel or to read him badly or rather the text *Sa*? . . . It is impossible to *know* if such a feint is possible' (Ibid., 231ai). The hypothesis of a bad reading, in terms of *Sa*, 'has no place' (Ibid., 232ai).

However, towards the end of *Glas*, not-reading or reading badly does come back, as a kind of parade of reading where in fact no one is reading in the way you learn to in school or university, or even at your mother's knee. The text not being read is the Torah. The right

to a ‘more or less laborious reading of a morsel of text’ is for sale to only a few privileged individuals (Ibid., 241bi). The scrolls of the Torah are also held up and shown to the crowd, in a gesture that suggests something obviously inauthentic, impossible and unrealistic: as if they too ‘could read, learn, verily purchase, at such a great distance, a book—the first—that was thick, dense, difficult, heavy, unaccented’. Derrida told us at Kolding that he saw this ceremony himself as a child in Algeria. What happens next happens without what is classically recognised as reading. In *Glas* this reading without reading takes the form of witnessing the pageantry, and then dreaming about it:

Maybe the children who watched the pomp of this celebration, even more than 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 [*pour y agencer toutes les pièces de leur vie*].(Derrida 1986b, 241b; 1974, 269bi)

Dreaming carries strange agency. Derrida’s dream-work differs from Freud’s in its lack of undue emphasis on analysis, interpretation or the making-explicit of a dreamer’s wish. The composition or *agencement* of *Glas* takes condensation and displacement out of the hierarchical opposition conscious / unconscious that tends to dominate psychoanalysis. Derrida values and trusts the effects of processes of condensation and displacement over theoretical certainty and systematic coherence. He is ready to hold off interpretation as sense-making. He does not offer the kind of analysis that aims at identifying something already established for waking thought. ‘*Agencer*’ might be translated in various ways: to put together, to organize, order, harmonise, construct, to lay out or arrange—a museum, a room, the scenes of a pageant or play, a sentence, or pieces of one’s life. It is a word with a future. It has all sorts of things in it that are necessary to reckon with ecological reality, a reality that includes global warming with its dialectic-defying scalar disjunctions in time and space and its effects and causes that are too many and too complex to remain within the remit of any one field or discipline. You can’t yet imagine but you can condense and displace. Your thinking can be overdetermined and subject to shifts. You can be driven, subject to drawings-out and drawings-forth. You can enact. You can begin to be moved, including being moved to become interested by and passionate about precisely what you structurally and empirically cannot think, such as for example the thought of extinction.

To be continued

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Notes

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² Public comment, glossing ‘*reste à penser*’, from the opening page of *Glas*, at *Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida: Their Psychoanalyses*, a Critical Consciousness symposium, Leeds, 1-3 June 2007.

³ Timothy Clark comes to mind, also inspiring work by Timothy Morton, and Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook, Hillis Miller and other authors at the Open Humanities Press. They think about the effects passing between climate crisis and deconstruction, as well as thinking about what is happening to and on the planet in ways that include, but are not restricted to, what is known as deconstruction. They have cottoned on to being inspired by what many of us still tend to disavow.

⁴ For example, according to the authors of *The State of the UK's Birds 2016*, although the small population of Golden Eagles in Scotland (they are now no longer found in England) has increased by 15% since 2003, more than a quarter of the UK's bird species now meet one of the following criteria: ‘they are considered at threat of global extinction, they have shown severe historical (since 1800) decline in the UK, without subsequent recovery, or they have shown severe (greater than 50%) population decline or range contraction, over the last 25 years or a longer-term period stretching back to 1969’ (Sandy, Bedfordshire: RSPB, BTO, WWT, DAERA, JNCC, NE, NRW and SNH, 2017).

⁵ Recall if you will Hegel's famous description of Napoleon before the battle of Jena: ‘I saw the Emperor—this world-spirit—riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated [*konzentriert*] here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it ... this extraordinary man, whom it is impossible not to admire’ (Pinkard 2000, 228).

⁶ ‘Glossing *Glas*’, University of South Denmark, 24-26 May 2001.

⁷ See <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/sep/29/earth-lost-50-wildlife-in-40-years-wwf> and <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate-guide/climate-change/impacts/four-degree-rise> (accessed 19 May 2017).

⁸ The latest ‘Living Planet Report’ by the *World Wildlife Fund* highlights a global Living Planet Index which in 2016 showed ‘a 58% decline between 1970 and 2012. This means that, on average, animal populations are roughly half the size they were 42 years ago’ (McRae, R. et al., 2016). If this worries you, and you have a lot of money, the Cryonics Institute of Clinton Township Michigan, USA invites you to: ‘imagine a world free of disease, death and aging. At the Cryonics Institute, we believe that day is inevitably coming and cryonics is presently our best chance of getting there. Our mission is to extend human lifespans by preserving the body using existing cryogenic technologies – with the goal of revival by future science. But will it work? Research makes a powerful case for cryonics. Get the facts and decide for yourself’ <http://www.cryonics.org/> (accessed 07 May 2017).

⁹ See the reading of the beginning of *Glas* in ‘Reading For Example: “Sense-Certainty” in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*’ in Warminski 198, pp. 164-5.

¹⁰ Most of the talks are collected in *Paragraph 36: 2* (‘Cixous, Derrida, Psychoanalysis’). See also ‘Reading Matters’, in Wood 2016, pp. 85-101.

¹¹ OED cites Ephraim Chambers’ *Cyclopædia; or, an universal dictionary of arts and sciences* from 1728: ‘*Counter-Proof*, in Rolling-Press Printing, a Print taken off from another fresh printed; which, by being pass’d thro’ the Press, gives the Figure of the former, but inverted’. According to André Beguin (1927) a counterproof is ‘obtained by passing a freshly printed proof and a clean sheet of paper through the press’ (online).

¹² The discussion of the family begins on 1974, 10/ 1986b, 4 and continues throughout *Glas*.