

## styling against absolute knowledge in derrida's *glas*

jessica marian

Jacques Derrida's *Glas* (1974) is written entirely across two parallel columns, the left column focussing on a reading of selected works by the G. W. F. Hegel, the nineteenth-century philosopher of what Derrida will refer to as '*savoir absolu*' (absolute knowledge), and the other column, on the right, concentrating on a selection of the fiction and plays of Jean Genet, one of France's most avowedly marginal authors, a self-confessed "traitor, thief, informer, coward and queer."<sup>1</sup> *Glas* is one of Derrida's most stylistically experimental texts, disregarding linear argumentation and citation standards in favour of an approach which draws upon such elements as word-play, aural resonances and textual interruptions or supplements referred to as "judases". *Glas* is regularly grouped with *Éperons: les styles de Nietzsche* (1978) and *La Carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (1980) as roughly contemporaneous texts written in a non-traditional, somewhat literary style. In his 1980 thesis defence, Derrida located this group of three works within a "continued pursuit [...] of the project of grammatology", "an expansion of earlier attempts", whilst also alluding towards a felt need to attempt to develop a different style and performance of writing which would turn "towards textual configurations that were less and less linear, logical and topical forms, even typographical forms that were more daring, the intersection of corpora, mixtures of genera or of modes, changes of tone [...], satire, rerouting, grafting, etc."<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I read *Glas* with an eye towards exploring precisely this linkage between Derrida's philosophical project and *Glas*' highly experimental style—I argue that *Glas*' style is intimately linked with its philosophical project. Through an exploration of Derrida's extensive word and name play, his gesturing towards implied meanings, connotative and non-linear argumentation and dis/mis-use of standard practices of academic citation and referencing, I argue that *Glas* stages an attempt to circumvent the possibility of a complete, closed text and an absolute philosophical position and that this attempt to avoid the absolute demands this different way of writing. I suggest that *Glas* is styled around the “decapitating” of metalanguage through a rhythmic “plunging” and “extracting” of the remaindered or excluded element in and out of the text.<sup>3</sup>

*Glas* is not generally considered a hugely important work in Derrida's oeuvre, but it has been the subject of some excellent scholarship. Many readings of *Glas* have tended to focus upon only the Hegel column or only the Genet column. Notably, these works are more often produced by Hegel scholars or Genet scholars, rather than by Derrida scholars. Peter Krapp has succinctly summed up this phenomenon, noting the major collections of works on the side of Hegel and Genet respectively: he writes, “[t]he contributions to *Hegel after Derrida* [...] all but ignore *Glas* on Genet, while the texts assembled in a special issue on Genet for *Yale French Studies* [...] manage to do without Hegel.”<sup>4</sup> There is nothing essentially wrong with these approaches; certainly *Glas* is a critical work on both Hegel and Genet, even if an idiosyncratic one, which must have a place in the bodies of scholarship on these figures and which invites responses to the readings it makes of these figures. Given the relatively broad span of the *Glas*, there is, undoubtedly, also a need to localise and focus on certain aspects of the work. Many of these commentators have presented extremely incisive readings of (parts of) *Glas* and, commendably, engage with *Glas* in a considered manner, without, as Geoffrey Bennington has put it, “getting in a panic about ‘hectic wordplay’.”<sup>5</sup> However, a number of the articles which have focussed on the Hegel column seem to have done so on the basis of an implicit assertion that the Hegel column is the only column *worth* reading; one is struck by the force with which Stuart Barnett and Simon Critchley repeatedly seek to assert that *Glas* “is not a self-indulgent exercise in textual free-play” but rather—and note the moralistic language—“a rigorous and detailed examination of Hegel”,<sup>6</sup> a “devotional labour of reading”, and a “profoundly *ascetic* text.”<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, some of the analyses that have focussed on the Genet column of *Glas* have tended, more or less consciously, to draw a direct equivalence between the “textual strategies” of Genet and Derrida,<sup>8</sup> with the more or less implicit outcome

being that they place Derrida very firmly on the side of Genet. James Creech contests that “*Glas* is such a magnificent intellectual achievement [...] because it is so exquisitely attuned to [the] very project of Genet.”<sup>9</sup> The problem with choosing to focus on only one of *Glas*’ columns is not simply that one-half of the text is obscured, but rather that it encumbers a more full consideration of how the columns *relate* to one another. I am interested in pursuing such a consideration of the columns’ relation to one another and am particularly interested in paying attention to the text’s judases, which are often overlooked in many discussion of *Glas*, and which I believe are a key site for the presentation of this relation.

In the essay “Countersignature” (2004), Derrida plays on the double meaning of the French word ‘*contre*’ (roughly comparable to ‘against’ in English) which “can equally and at the same time mark both opposition, contrariety, contradiction and proximity, near-contact”.<sup>10</sup> Derrida explains, “[o]ne can be ‘against’ [‘*contre*’] the person one opposes (one’s ‘declared enemy’, for example)”, and also ‘against’ [‘*contre*’] the person next to us, the one who is ‘right against’ us, whom we touch or with whom we are in contact.”<sup>11</sup> This simultaneous relation of *opposition to* and of *touching* or *leaning upon* can be extended to the consideration of the relation between the two columns of *Glas*. Indeed, Derrida suggests as much, writing that “[t]his abyssal double meaning of ‘counter’ [‘*contre*’] [...] is of course at work in *Glas*, [...] between the two columns, the Genet one and the Hegel one—and their sypholes [judas]”, “for sometimes the two columns contradict each other [...] sometimes they do not contradict each other but rather wink at each other.”<sup>12</sup>

What is at stake in this paper is neither a consideration of Derrida’s relation with or to Hegel, nor Derrida’s encounter with Genet. Rather, I am interested in a consideration of how the columns of *Glas* come to relate *contre* one another and I pursue an analysis of how the philosophical work of *Glas* is intimately linked with its written and compositional style.

## WORD AND NAME PLAY

Genet’s taking of his mother’s surname is a point repeatedly returned to throughout the right hand column of *Glas*. Genet was born in 1910 to twenty-two year old Camille Gabrielle Genet, a single woman usually described as either a governess or a sex-worker, and an unknown father; Genet was abandoned at thirty weeks old rather than only a few days after delivery and thus took his mother’s surname. For this reason, Derrida describes Genet’s birth-story as an “immaculate

conception.”<sup>13</sup> Derrida repeatedly plays upon the similarity of the name ‘Genet’ and the plant called ‘genêt’, “a plant with flowers—yellow flowers (*sarothamnus scoparius*, *genista*; broom, *genette*, *genêt-à-balais*, poisonous and medicinal [...]).”<sup>14</sup> Derrida writes that “the mother’s name would be [...] the name of a plant or a flower, except for one letter [...] for a circumflex.”<sup>15</sup> In English the evergreen shrub is known as the ‘Scotch broom’ or ‘common broom’ (because of its broom-like appearance). Thus, ‘genêt’ is figured as the *common* or *improper* cryptonym of ‘Genet’—“it is not proper because it is common”<sup>16</sup>—which of course is itself already, in a different sense an improper name, because it is not the name of the father. Derrida draws attention to Genet’s frequent naming of his characters after flowers and writes that where “the proper surnames return to [...] flowers, these flowers are cut from the mother.”<sup>17</sup>

Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément similarly emphasise the maternal-feminine power of Genet’s texts: “What is inscribed under Jean Genet’s name, in the movement of a text that divides itself, pulls itself to pieces, dismembers itself, regroupes, remembers itself, is a *proliferating, maternal femininity*.”<sup>18</sup> Drucilla Cornell writes that “[i]n *Glas*, she [the mother] is inscribed in the name of Jean Genet, the blossoming flower”<sup>19</sup> and contrasts this to “Hegel’s sanctimonious statements about the place of Woman in his system”, so that *Glas* is understood as presenting “in the second column pieces of Genet’s texts which pull apart the very erection of feminine identity that Hegel tries so patiently to secure.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Cornell has proposed that “[p]erhaps there has never been a more careful deconstruction of Hegel’s phallogocentrism than that given to us in Derrida’s *Glas*.”<sup>21</sup>

Such an assessment of the Hegel column is not ungrounded. Through a protracted engagement with first, the notion of the family, especially the Christian family as focussed through the Holy Trinity of the father-son-holy spirit, and second, with Hegel’s (mis)reading of the Antigone myth, Derrida emphasises a strain of Hegel’s writing which in the first case, entirely excludes women and the maternal, and in the second case, constructs an ideal feminine identity which depends upon and reinforces women’s exclusion from subject-hood. Derrida suggests that the model of the Christian family may be “exemplary for speculative onto-theology.”<sup>22</sup> The key familial relationship of the Christian family is between father and son, with its necessary third element, the spirit. The spirit of Christianity is the father/son filiation, “the relation of father to son, of son to father”, thus, “the Spirit is the whole”, it forms the relation in which all terms of reference are

enclosed.<sup>23</sup> *Glas* ruminates over the theorising of this speculative Christian family for the most part of one-hundred pages—the focus remains fixed on the father-son filial relation. In dramatic contrast to the extended focus on the mother on the other side of the page, the position of the mother with respect to this holy familial trinity becomes conspicuous in its absence which is also its exclusion. Later on in the left column, the analysis shifts towards a consideration of Hegel's reading of *Antigone*. As Patricia Jagentowicz Mills writes, "Hegel's interpretation of Sophocles' play *Antigone* is central to an understanding of woman's role in the Hegelian system."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, *Antigone* becomes for Hegel the paradigmatic figure of womanhood and woman's unique responsibility towards ethical family life.<sup>25</sup> Hegel's reading of *Antigone* stresses a series of coupled oppositions, "divine law/human law, family/city, woman/man"<sup>26</sup> and places great emphasis on an insistence of the pure, asexual relation of the sister and brother, a point of major interest for Derrida (for reasons which will become increasingly clear in this article). One of Hegel's key claims about *Antigone* (and one which notably contradicts most scholarship on *Antigone*) is that she never leaves the sphere of the family because "[t]he development of human consciousness outside the family is specific, limited to man. Woman can never aspire to [...] individuality; she cannot attain particularity."<sup>27</sup> *Antigone*, model of womanhood in general, is positioned as incapable of individual subjectivity; now, women in general are excluded from subject-hood in the Hegelian system. The Hegelian system, as presented in *Glas*, is thus a system moded towards a masculinist position, aligned entirely with the perspective of the father (and the son)—women and mothers are either excluded all together, or else constructed as a general ideal object in a way which only reformulates and reiterates their exclusion. On such a basis, Cornell has interpreted the two columns of *Glas* as staging a deconstruction of the Hegelian dialectic and a reinscription of the mother through Genet's flowers, the enacting of "[t]he fall of Hegel", whereby "[t]he phallus falls and with its fall goes its claim that its turgidity elects it as the transcendental signifier."<sup>28</sup>

It is well recognised that Derrida's signature can be found repeatedly throughout *Glas*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to "[t]he debris of d-words [...] scattered all over the pages"<sup>29</sup> and indeed many commentators have recognised the aural resonances between 'Derrida' and words and phrases like 'déjà', 'derriere', 'debris da', 'de dos', 'da', 'Dionysos Erigone Eriopétale Réséda', as well as the play on the initials of Genet's lover, Jean Decarnin, J.D., and the siglum of déjà, D.J.<sup>30</sup> However, it seems that few of *Glas*' commentators notice that these cryptonyms of Derrida's name appear almost exclusively in the right-hand column of the

text—the Genet column.<sup>31</sup> And yet given that the Genet column has been so strongly linked to the feminine and the name of the mother, it seems important to remember that ‘Derrida’ is not only Jacques Derrida but also a (the) name of a (the) father, Haïm Aaron Prosper Charles (Aimé) Derrida. As we find in one of the judases in the Hegel column, “I am my father my son and myself. My name is my father.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the Genet column ends (in as much as we can say it “ends” when there is no full-stop) with one such signature of the father’s name—“Today, here, now, the debris of [*débris de*].”<sup>33</sup> Thus, the final words of the Genet column are literally made in the name of the father.

Moreover, even as the general discourse of the Hegel column at first appears to so radically exclude the feminine, and especially the maternal, I want to argue that there are in fact mothers’ names scattered throughout. Derrida asserts in the beginning of the left column that “In order to work on/in Hegel’s name, in order to erect it [...] I have chosen to draw on one thread [...] It is the law of the family: of Hegel’s family, of the family in Hegel, of the concept of family according to Hegel.”<sup>34</sup> What follows in Derrida’s analysis would seem to focus more on the latter two items in that list, “the family in Hegel” and “the concept of family according to Hegel”. As mentioned already, there is a focus on the Christian family thought specifically through the father-son relationship to the exclusion of the mother and an extended discussion of Hegel’s ideal woman-figure, Antigone, constructed specifically in terms of her familial role and duty. But the first and constant question raised throughout the left column of *Glas* is “what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?”<sup>35</sup>; this is at once a question of Hegel’s legacy, and also of what remains left-over outside of the Hegelian system.

It is in this frame that Derrida reintroduces aspects of the biographical and the private into the consideration of Hegel’s system, he literally (re)introduces “Hegel’s family”. Whilst the consideration of the link between speculative onto-theology and the Christian model of the family has wholly excluded the Mother, that is, the Virgin Mother Mary, Derrida inserts a judas which notes the numerous Maries or Marias (or Marys) in Hegel’s life: “Marie Magdelan were his mother’s first names (Maria Magdalena Louisa, born Fromm), Marie his daughter’s (Susanna Maria) and his wife’s (Maria Helena Susanna).”<sup>36</sup> This judas goes on to describe how Hegel, on a trip to Dresden in 1821, viewed a painting entitled *Madonna of Burgomaster Meyer*, of which “[h]e always took the original—that he regularly saw in Berlin—for a copy and the copy that he had just seen in Dresden for the original.”<sup>37</sup> The judas also briefly quotes from a letter of Hegel’s written



in 1822: “Good morning, dear Maria, from the sunshine of Marianburg, i.e. Magdeburg, whose maid [Magd] is Holy Mary, to whom the cathedral is or was dedicated. ‘[...] It is more difficult to get out of Magdeburg than into it [...]’.”<sup>38</sup> In drawing attention to a range of Maries, Marias and Marys in Hegel’s life, the judas in a sense “betrays” the surrounding discussion of the filial relation between the father and the son by forcing a reintroduction of the maternal.

Moreover, Derrida plays on the homonymic relation of “*Mehr*” (German, “more”) and “*mère*” (French, mother). Raising the notion of “surplus, this more (*deises Mehr*)”, Derrida writes “this *Mehr* does not take itself into account, cannot give rise to an objective calculus, to a discursive explanation [...] The relation it enters without ever belonging there, no analysis can account for according the ways of comparison to analogy. No explanatory statement (*Erklärung*) can say here, ‘this is equal to that’.”<sup>39</sup> It seems these comments about the *Mehr* could equally made about *la mère* in relation to the Hegelian system: she enters a relation without ever belonging there (she does not belong because she has been excluded); where it may be said that the father equals the son,<sup>40</sup> no such explanatory statement can say ‘she equals to that’. Further, this associating of the *mère* with the notion of surplus is linked to the question of the remains—and what has remained excluded from and outside of the Christian/Hegelian model of the family is, precisely, the mother. Later in the Hegel column, a similar play is made on the words “*Materie*” (German, matter) and “*mater*” (Latin, mother).<sup>41</sup> Thus, in the Hegel column, the column so strongly associated with the father, patriarchy and phallogocentrism, noteworthy (re)inscriptions of the maternal and the feminine can be found.

What we have seen then is that Derrida signs in the name of the father in the Genet column and that names of the mother(s) are to be found the Hegel column. The dominant terms of recognition and analysis have been reversed—the relation of the two columns *contre* one another, as in opposition to one another, begins to appear also as a relation of being *contre*, in near proximity to or touching one another.

## DESIRE, FETISH AND SEXUAL CONNOTATION

A similar effect can be identified with respect to the notion of desire as it operates in *Glas*’ two columns and the judases through a range of more or less implicit connotations drawn by Derrida.

The Hegelian system is held to ascribe all things a proper place—this extends to Hegel’s treatment of sexual difference. Derrida writes that, in Hegel, “[t]he separation of the two sexes’ presents a very singular structure of separation”<sup>42</sup>; indeed the sexual difference is essentialised according to the physical characteristics of the sexual organs. The difference in the physical characteristics of the two sexes operates as an apparently rational basis for a series of gendered hierarchies. The “remaining enclosed” of the female organs is directly linked with feminine passivity such that “[t]he clitoris is inactive feeling in general”; meanwhile, for the male organ “the essence consists in the difference”, in its difference from the “indifferent”, inactive female organ.<sup>43</sup> The male sexual organ *actively* differentiates itself; thus, “[t]he sexual difference reproduces the hierarchical opposition of passivity or activity, of matter to form.”<sup>44</sup> The difference of the sexes is overcome through copulation: “Copulation relieves the difference.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, copulation advances specifically through marriage, “the being-one (*Einssein*) of the spouses”<sup>46</sup> which is precisely, “the *Aufhebung* of the sexual difference.”<sup>47</sup> Marriage is intrinsically linked with the family—“marriage is the first moment of the family”<sup>48</sup>—and with monogamy, a point which Derrida repeatedly emphasises, quoting multiple passages from the *Philosophy of Right*: “Marriage, and essentially monogamy, is one of the absolute principles on which the *Sittlichkeit* [ethical life] of a community depends”, and, “In essence marriage is monogamy’.”<sup>49</sup> This of course accords in many ways with the association of the Hegelian system with the Christian family. Thus, with respect to the question of desire, the rational Christian family man Hegel is seen to be advancing an inherently heterosexual, heteronormative and again, phallogocentric system.

At a contrast, Genet the criminal and homosexual presents a multiplicity of fragments which develops as “a theory or an event of general equivalence: of subjects [...] of terms, of contraries exchanged without end.”<sup>50</sup> Derrida describes the inmates of Genet’s prison stories “who stand up straight, resembling one another and substituting for one another in silence like letters on the page, one in place of another, one counting for another.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, the Genet column of *Glas* foregrounds the circulation of all objects without any proper place, the substitutability of objects without essence. This general substitutability and circulation is linked in *Glas* with a fragmentation of desire and a multiplicity of lovers, much in contrast to the Hegelian conceptualisation of the ethical unity of desire achieved through copulation/monogamous marriage. Unlike Hegel, Genet’s desire does not lead towards the rational sublation of difference through marriage—on the contrary, Derrida quotes Genet, that, “[m]y excitement [émoi]



is the oscillation from the one to the other', the undecided suspense between two opposite [...] significations."<sup>52</sup> This desire is thus also a non-phallic desire—it is not structured around a singular and essential object but follows the circulation of multiple and substitutable fragments. In this sense Genet's queer desire is foregrounded as an "irrational" desire. Again this contrast between Hegel and Genet has been understood as part of a general process of deconstructing the Hegelian system, Clare Blackburn for example has discussed how "Genet's illegitimacy, criminality, homosexuality and vagabond tendencies opposing the Hegelian values of family, (heteronormative) civil society and Christianity" can "destabilise the apparent solidity [...] of the system."<sup>53</sup>

However, again, I want to argue that desire is not just figured in so straightforward a manner in *Glas*, that Hegel's desire for rationality is undercut by the intrusion of elements of Hegel's personal and private life and that the apparent irrationality of Genet's desire based in the play of boundless substitution is challenged by the problem of the fetish.

Mid-way through the discussion of Hegel's interpretation of Antigone, the text is interrupted, by twelve pages of extracts from Hegel's letters, as another Judas. The letters are addressed to numerous figures: his close family friend Nanette, his fiancée/wife Marie, and his friend and fellow theologian Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. The first letters are addressed to Nanette Endel, introduced in a brief introductory passage as "the young woman who lodged in the family house. If one is to believe a remark of Bourgeois [Bernard Bourgeois, a prominent French Hegel scholar], she 'had inspired [in Hegel] a feeling perhaps of love [...]' [...]. Nana could always play the sister."<sup>54</sup> This suggestion is highlighted in the extreme in the selected letters; Hegel writes,

How much I am obliged to you for [...] being good enough to compensate me by written conversation for the loss of your company [...] an imperious fate grudgingly restricts me to this alone. But it is conquered by my power of imagination [...] the sound of your voice, the soft glance of your eyes, and all else of which life boasts over written words.<sup>55</sup>

Further on: "I am surrounded on all sides by objects which remind me of you"<sup>56</sup>; "As soon as you stopped holding me to piety, it was all over"<sup>57</sup>; "I have every reason to assume that longer associations with you would have liberated me more and granted me a greater capacity for merrymaking"<sup>58</sup>; "We would have surely

danced a lot—like the evening before my departure. I have turned in circles ever since.”<sup>59</sup> Next are poems written by Hegel to his fiancée Marie. Terry Pinkard, writing Hegel’s biography, has described these poems quite well; the poems are “not exactly the basis of Hegel’s reputation in the history of thought; it is a more or less humdrum, semi-Romantic” style.<sup>60</sup> Hegel uses the image of the phoenix to symbolise love as the union of two people which results in a common personality and commitment; “the phoenix symbolises the way in which what divides two lovers falls away as genuine love takes over and re-institutes itself over and over again.”<sup>61</sup> A series of extracts from letters between Hegel and Niethammer follow, which detail Hegel’s desire to not announce his engagement and to delay the wedding (and Niethammer’s discouragement of this). Then, reproduced in *Glas*, are two letters written by Hegel to Marie on the evening before their marriage, apparently in response to some disagreement or argument. Hegel reiterates that their love is their becoming one—“distinguishing your love for me and mine for you [...] would separate *our* love: this love is solely *ours*, merely this unity, this bond”<sup>62</sup>—however, the second letter ends on a rather sinister note. Hegel writes,

[Y]ou know there are evil men who torture their wives merely so that their behaviour, along with their patience and love, may be constantly tested. I do not believe that I am that evil. Yet although no harm ought ever be done to such a dear human being as you, I could almost be free of regret for having hurt you [...] be consoled that what may have been unkind and harsh in my replies will vanish through the fact that I feel and recognise ever more deeply how thoroughly lovable, loving, and full of love you are.<sup>63</sup>

This lengthy section of extracts from Hegel’s letters is usually ignored in responses to *Glas*. However, I believe that these letters actually play an important role in breaking up and dislocating the larger discourse of the Hegel column and in introducing contradictory elements into the seemingly total system of the Hegelian dialectic (and notably, since these are Hegel’s personal letters, these elements are drawn upon as *immanent* to that system). This assemblage of letters brings to light Hegel’s multiple romantic interests, Marie *and* Nanette—so Hegel is perhaps no longer practicing monogamy. Hegel is also seen to be reticent about announcing and advancing with his engagement to Marie—so possibly Hegel is neglecting his ethical duty towards marriage. Further, Hegel’s love entails not just union, but potentially unkindness and the threat of violence.

This section also includes an interesting short remark, in which Derrida writes: “Marie (one of three).”<sup>64</sup> Who would be the third in this equation? The answer is given in the very first line of the judas: “one would have to name here Christiane”, Hegel’s sister<sup>65</sup>. It is informative to read this judas in tandem with another found a little later on in the text which focusses on Christiane’s mental illness as explained (again) through Hegel’s letters, some addressed to Christiane and others to their “cousin Göriz”, who apparently assisted Hegel in managing his sisters treatment and affairs during her illness. As a sort of introduction to these letters, Derrida notes some of Christiane and Hegel’s biographical details in a highly selective and suggestive manner—he writes, “Hegel’s sister, Christiane, committed suicide in 1832, shortly after the death of her brother. She had been confined in 1820 in the lunatic asylum of Zwiefalten [...] Her ‘nerve troubles’ began in 1814 (after the death of Georg Ludwig [their father], when Marie Hegel is expecting her first boy).”<sup>66</sup> Through the judas, Derrida builds an insinuation towards the possibility of a romantic or sexual desire between this sister and this brother. This is especially noteworthy given its location within a discussion of Hegel’s reading of Antigone, which has asserted and celebrated the unique a-sexual relation between the brother and the sister: “The brother-and-sister relationship—a *nonsexual* relationship”<sup>67</sup>, “Brother and sister ‘do not desire one another’.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed as Sina Kramer has discussed, “a current of desire thus runs underneath” the discussion of Christiane in *Glas*, alluding to “an incestuous desire for the sister that subtends the claim Hegel makes that recognition is only possible between the brother and the sister because there is no sexual desire between them.”<sup>69</sup> In this light, Hegel’s desire takes on a distinctly different colour; it is polygamous, un-Christian, incestuous, violent, perverse, entirely transgressive and irrational.

Meanwhile, on the Genet side, the circulation and substitution of objects produces only fragments. If we are to understand Genet’s fragments as opposing and perhaps deconstructing Hegel’s system this itself raises a new problem—would this privileging of the fragment simply amount to a fetishizing of the fragment, a making of the fragment the essential object? This problem is figured in a key passage where Derrida quotes from Genet’s *The Thief’s Journal*; the extract is quite lengthy, but it bears extended quotation:

“Get started!”

‘With a gesture of his lively hand, he motioned to me that he wanted to undress. As on other evenings, I kneeled down to unhook the cluster of

grapes.

‘Inside his trousers was pinned [*épinglé*] one of those postiche clusters of thin cellulose grapes stuffed with wadding. (They are as big as greengage plums; elegant Spanish women of the period wore them on their loose-brimmed, straw sun bonnets.) Whenever some queer at the Criolla, excited by the swelling, put his hand on the fly, his horrified fingers would encounter this object, which they feared to be a cluster of his true treasure, the branch on which, comically, too much fruit was hanging.

‘The Criolla was not only a fairy joint. Some boys in dresses danced there, but women did too. Whores brought their pimps [*macs*] and their clients. Stilitano would have made a lot of money were it not that he spat on queers. He scorned them. He amused himself with their annoyance at the cluster of grapes. The game lasted a few days. So I unhooked the cluster, which was fastened to his blue trousers by a safety pin [*épingle de nourrice*], but, instead of putting it on the mantelpiece as usual and laughing (for we would burst out [*éclations*] laughing and joke during the operation), I could not restrain myself from keeping it in my cupped hands and laying my cheek against it. Stilitano’s face above me turned hideous.

“Drop it (*ça*), you bitch!”

‘In order to open the fly, I had squatted on my haunches, but Stilitano’s fury, had my usual fervour been insufficient, made me fall to my knees. That was the position which, facing him, I used to take mentally in spite of myself. I didn’t budge. Stilitano struck me with his two feet and his one fist. I could have escaped. I remained there.

“The key’s in the door,” I thought. Through the fork of the legs that were kicking me with rage I saw it caught in the lock, and I would have liked to turn it with a double turn so as to be locked in alone with my executioner. I made no attempt to understand the reason for his anger, which was so disproportionate to its cause, for my mind [*esprit*] was unconcerned with psychological motives. As for Stilitano, from that day on he stopped wearing the cluster of grapes. [...]

‘The cluster of grapes on the mantelpiece disgusted me [*m’écœurait*]. One

night Stilitano got up to throw it into the shithole. During the time he had worn it, it had not marred his beauty. On the contrary, in the evening, slightly encumbering his legs, it had given them a slight bend and his step [*pas*] a slightly rounded and gentle constraint, and when he walked [*marchait*] near me, in front or behind, I felt a delicious agitation because my hands had prepared it. I still think it was by virtue of the insidious power of these grapes that I grew attached to Stilitano.<sup>70</sup>

Here the cluster of grapes pinned over Stilitano's genitals clearly replaces the phallus. Like the phallus, it is a detachable object and primarily an object of signification. It is quite obvious that the cluster of grapes becomes a fetish object for the narrator, who imputes the grapes an 'insidious power' and finds himself unable to keep from holding it in his cupped hands, as some precious object, and laying his cheek against it. In response, Stilitano's demand—"Drop it, you bitch"—is perhaps a remainder/reminder of that radical substitutability and circulation of objects so strongly associated with the Genet more generally—do not touch it, do not keep it in your hand, this is no privileged object, just drop it. Stilitano (and Genet) disavow the fetish through the assertion of substitutability and circulation which denies a single privileged object. But the passage also specifically describes Stilitano's violent response as "so disproportionate to its cause"—thus, there is also a sense that the economy of substitution has the potential to engulf itself in its own movement of fetishizing and phallus-gazing. If the cluster of grapes is to be *made* to fall ("Drop it, you bitch"), its substitutability becomes an essential trait, which must be rigorously defended; thus, the cluster of grapes becomes both nothing and everything, it becomes untouchable, even sacred. The economy of desire based upon a general equivalence of objects and their endless substitution seen to be operating in the Genet column is thus problematised. This is a key problem in *Glas* because it suggests that the fragment can no more be privileged as the grounds for a deconstruction of system or totality.

What I have sought to draw out is not simply that the judases stage a reversal of terms; it is not a matter of Genet becoming Hegel-like or of Hegel becoming Genet-like, rather it has to do with a destabilising of the categorical and classificatory tools used to determine a position with regard to Genet or Hegel or how they might be made to relate in this text. Derrida engages an indirect style of argumentation which favours plays on names and words and implied meanings or connotations. This destabilising movement is not, in *Glas*, simply an end in itself. Rather, it is linked with an attempt on the part of Derrida to avoid

the taking of an absolute position. This is an attempt to negate the *possibility* of an absolute position, to eviscerate the position of absolute knowing. Insofar as Derrida situates Hegel as the philosopher of absolute knowledge (*saviour absolu*) this also would mean an attempt to avoid the Hegelian position. But the Hegelian position cannot be avoided simply by aligning oneself with Genet, conceptualised as an absolutely oppositional figure to Hegel—for this too, would ultimately be to assume a position of absolute knowledge. The logic of Hegel’s dialectic already pre-empts absolute difference.

By destabilising and undermining linear argumentation and interpretation, the two columns are locked in undecidable situation wherein one is unable to choose if they stand *contre* (in opposition) to one another or *contre* (in proximity) to one another. Thus, *Glas*’ indirect, evocative and complex style works towards the disruption of the self-realisation of a position of absolute knowing.

#### CITATION/EXCLUSION

Across *Glas*, one can perceive an occasional omission of quotation marks and a constant exclusion of page references in accordance with established academic citational standards. Derrida quotes or references Genet and Hegel, and a number of others including Kant, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Freud, Saussure, Poe, Bataille and Mallarmé freely, at length, verbatim or not, sometimes without using quotation marks, and always without citational details such as page or paragraph number. This practice, I argue, has three important effects: first, it produces a kind of confusion of voices within the text whereby it becomes difficult to distinguish Derrida’s writing from Genet’s or Hegel’s or Kant’s and so on; second, it makes it extremely difficult for the reader to discern if and when a quote has been abbreviated, altered, or cut-up; and third, it undermines the possibility of a closed, complete or self-contained text by blurring the boundaries between this text and those from which it quotes.

Marie Maclean has argued that, “[t]hroughout *Glas*, a game with the first person is constant in the right-hand (Genet) column”, and that, “one is often left deliberately unsure whether the voice we hear is Genet speaking, or whether it is that of Jacques Derrida.”<sup>71</sup> Whilst discussions of voice have tended to appear only amongst the Genet-inflected analyses of *Glas*, this effect is no less true of the Hegel column. The lack of page references and inconsistent use of quotation marks, as well as the extreme length of some quotations, many of which tend



not to be preceded or followed by any kind of related commentary or reflection, makes for a difficult reading experience in which direct quotation, paraphrase, summary, commentary and argument can appear indiscernible from one another. As Magedera writes, the omission “of quotation marks and page references which would allow the citation to be precisely located outside of *Glas*,” causes the citations to “no longer function [...] as externally verifiable proofs”, in turn undermining “the strict division between citation and commentary.”<sup>72</sup>

Related to this, the lack of citational details leads to an inability on the part of the reader to discern if and when Derrida has cut, abbreviated or decontextualized any particular quotation. Indeed, Derrida writes of his citations as “necessarily truncated, clippings [*coupures*], repetitions, suctions, sections, suspensions, selections, stitchings [*coutures*], scarrings, grafts, pastiches, organs without their own proper body.”<sup>73</sup> Moreover, without citational information, it becomes difficult to know which texts Derrida does and does not quote from. Tina Chanter has very astutely pointed out a rather conspicuous absence.<sup>74</sup> Chanter draws attention to a combination of moments within the Hegel column: first, the Hegel column features an extensive discussion of sexual difference and the husband/wife relationship; second, the text makes numerous mentions of and allusions to Hegel’s master/slave dialectic; and third, Derrida includes a relatively brief but rather jarring discussion of Hegel’s appalling views on Africa and slavery (drawn from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*). With this combination of points in mind, Chanter argues that “it is notable that Derrida does not refer to Hegel’s suggestion [in *the System of Ethics*] that the master/slave relation be understood in relation to the difference between the sexes”<sup>75</sup> and draws attention to the fact that Derrida “specifically discounts this text from his consideration, claiming that, of the texts that treat of ‘the struggle to death for recognition,’ the ‘only one to explain struggle within a problematic of the family’ is the *Philosophy of Spirit*.”<sup>76</sup> Chanter draws upon an analysis by Christopher Arthur who explicates that a few close pages of the *System of Ethics*, develop the following argument: “The relation of master and servant is rooted in natural facts (at page 125) but it can acquire the stability of a social form, it can be ‘ethical’ (at page 126): this is seen in the family (at page 127).”<sup>77</sup> Thus, Arthur argues that Hegel draws an “explicit linkage of the master-slave relation and marriage”<sup>78</sup>, that Hegel “makes connections between lordship and marriage”<sup>79</sup>, that “he conceptualises the family on the basis of the development of lordship and bondage.”<sup>80</sup>

It is perhaps useful to reproduce the moment in *Glas* that Chanter draws attention to:

Here intervenes the struggle to death for recognition. It is most often known under the form given it by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Now previously three texts had treated of it: the *System of "Sittlichkeit"* (probably earlier, just a little bit, than the Jena *Philosophy of Spirit*), the Jena *Realphilosophie* (almost contemporaneous with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*), and the *Philosophy of Spirit*. This last one is the only one to explain struggle within a problematic of the family.<sup>81</sup>

Chanter argues that Derrida's failure to address the master/slave-husband/wife relation in the *System of Ethics* "is one of the sites at which Derrida might be said to be afflicted, consciously or unconsciously, by a blind-spot when it comes to thinking through the relation of sexual difference and slavery."<sup>82</sup> Derrida's omission constitutes, it is suggested, a failure of argumentation, a hole which renders the argument non-comprehensive, too easily disproved, incomplete, un-total. But it seems important to point out that that the *System of Ethics* is specifically mentioned at precisely the moment when it would seem to be most pertinent, and then immediately and actively dismissed. Perhaps we can read this omission, to some extent, as an active *exclusion*.<sup>83</sup> In doing so, we might consider that this exclusionary gesture sends the critical reader out, away from *Glas*, in the direction of other texts and inter-texts.

Following this logic, I would like to suggest another Hegelian text relating to the linkage of the master/slave dialect with the relation between husband and wife—one pointed out by Arthur, in the same commentary Chanter draws upon. It is another letter, written by Hegel to his friend Caroline Paulus in July 1811 (a few months before Hegel and Marie's wedding in September). Hegel relates his happiness; Marie interjects with comments in the margins. In one moment, Hegel refers to Caroline's husband, Professor Paulus, as "the lord and master."<sup>84</sup> In the margin of the letter, Marie adds,

Despite the length at which *my* lord and master goes on in his epistle, and as humble as the little corner he assigns me may be, I nonetheless know that the good Caroline Paulus will not lose sight of me. I have already raised my little voice in the course of my master's discourse. But each time I respectfully silenced myself again, though I would gladly have confirmed

many a thing at greater length.<sup>85</sup>

The connection made here between husband and wife, and master and slave, could hardly be clearer. There is also a clear relevance to *Glas*' discussion of the Hegelian family/Hegel's family and to the text's important use of Hegel's personal letters. This letter and its marginalia do not appear anywhere within the pages of *Glas*, but the letter can be (re)read in light of *Glas* and the letter can (re)inform our readings of *Glas*.

What I am seeking to suggest is that the exclusionary gesture in *Glas*, which is veiled by the text's dis-use of citational practices, functions to turn the text's inside out. The critical practice of reading *Glas*, which necessarily engages with *Glas*' subtexts and inter-texts, undermines the possibility of encountering *Glas* as a closed, complete or self-contained text. The boundaries between this text, those from which it quotes, those it names, and even those it excludes begin to seem less clear. Indeed, as Marian Hobson has argued, in *Glas*, "large portions of alien texts are held in suspension", such that "[w]hat is being read may appear as a kind of phantasmatic production out of what is not there, or rather is somewhere else."<sup>86</sup>

This exclusionary gesture seems particularly important in light of the way in which *Glas* engages with the conceptualisation of the Hegelian family and with Hegel's reading of Antigone, and specifically draws attention to Hegel's exclusion of the figure of the mother and of female subjectivity respectively. As has been mentioned, Hegel's dialectical system is found to rely upon such exclusions. Kramer refers to this aspect of the Hegelian system as its "constitutive exclusion"; her term denotes "the structure and process by which a political body is constituted through the exclusion of some difference that is intolerable to it and against which it defines or constitutes itself."<sup>87</sup> As Kramer discusses, this question of constitutive exclusion "reverberates throughout Hegel's system because of the way in which the system is organized: each part reflects the whole, a philosophical strategy of mastery."<sup>88</sup> If, in the Hegelian dialectic, the system's construction depends upon exclusion, it is striking to consider that in *Glas*, the exclusionary gesture instead seems to work upon system's *deconstruction*.

## FAILURE, THE REMAINS AND TRANSCENDENTAL PLUNGING

*Glas* is permeated by a smattering of self-reflexive comments that anxiously

question the text's entire project and lament a seemingly unavoidable impending failure. In the right-hand column: "Are you going to fall precipitously into the trap?"<sup>89</sup>; "I do not know if I have sought to understand him. But if he thought I had understood him, he would not support it [...] What a scene [...] He would feel himself already entwined [...] I wormed my way in as a third party"<sup>90</sup>; "Anyhow, the scene will end badly"<sup>91</sup>; "I win and lose, in every case."<sup>92</sup> In the left-hand column: "what happens when Hegel's text is not read, or when it is read *badly*?"<sup>93</sup>; "what is it not to read Hegel or to read him badly"<sup>94</sup>; "What would it mean not to comprehend (Hegel) the text"<sup>95</sup>. Throughout *Glas* there is a clear sense that in order to confront Hegel as the philosopher of absolute knowledge, it is necessary to account for the failure to escape Hegel and the circle of absolute knowledge—Derrida writes, "[e]verything [...] precomprehends itself, strictly, in the circle of [absolute knowledge], which always comes back to the circle, presupposes its beginning, and only reaches that beginning at the end."<sup>96</sup> In other words, there is a sense in which *Glas* must fail.

This notion of failure is related to the motif of the "remains". The first line of the Hegel column reads: "what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?"<sup>97</sup> The first line of the Genet column makes reference to Genet's "*What remained of a Rembrandt torn into small, very regular squares and rammed down the shithole*" (*Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et foutu aux chiottes*) and then reads: "As the remain(s)."<sup>98</sup> Although rather cryptic, the "remains" is probably the most important and the only consistent motif that appears across *Glas*. In *Glas*, Derrida searches for the remains, posing the question: "Isn't there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system's space of possibility? [...] The system's vomit."<sup>99</sup> As this paper has sought to explore, in *Glas*, woman, the mother, sexual desire, the fragment and the wife-slave are all found to "remain".

The difficulty for *Glas* is to deal with the problem of the fetishizing or transcendentalising of the remains, which could see them recuperated under the logic of absolute knowledge. With this in mind, I want to focus on one concluding image in *Glas*. In the Genet column, in a judas, is found the following comment: "I do not cease to decapitate metalanguage, or rather to replunge its head into the text in order to extract it from the text, regularly, the interval of a respiration."<sup>100</sup> I have argued that throughout *Glas*, Derrida attempts to undermine the possibility of a position of absolute knowledge and that this effort is constantly at risk of being absorbed under the system of absolute knowledge. With this in mind,

my interest in the above passage has to do with Derrida's style in *Glas*. In *Glas*, Derrida has sought a different way of writing. This is a style of writing which disregards linear argumentation, instead drawing upon such techniques as word/name play, connotation and implied meaning, and which repurposes standards of traditional academic and philosophical writing to do with citations and the referencing of one's sources. One of the most common questions raised in response to *Glas* relates to its status as either a work of philosophy or of literature, but what this question misses is that Derrida is seeking something which *remains* between these two categories. *Glas*' style is one of a movement of transcendental plunging by which the excluded remains ("the system's vomit") are taken up and then replunged into the field of their previous exclusion. This is a fundamentally immanent form of resistance and critique. *Glas*' style is inextricably tied to the attempt to eviscerate the philosophical position of absolute knowledge—one finds arguments to be contradictory, words with multiple meanings, names and signatures in inappropriate places, texts and contexts outside the text itself, and one encounters the possibility of failure at every turn.

—University of Melbourne

## NOTES

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4. Peter Krapp, *Déjà vu. Aberrations of Cultural Memory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 200.
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8. Ian Magedera, "Seing Genet, Citation and Mourning; a propos *Glas* by Jacques Derrida" *Paragraph* 21:1 (1998, 40).
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10. Jacques Derrida, "Countersignature". Trans. Mairead Hanrahan. *Paragraph* 27:2 (2004, 11).
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22. Derrida, *Glas*, 33a.
23. Derrida, *Glas*, 31a.
24. Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, "Hegel's Antigone" *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*. Ed. Patricia Jagentowicz Mills. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996, 59.



25. Mills, "Hegel's Antigone", 59.
26. Derrida, *Glas*, 142a.
27. Mills, "Hegel's Antigone", 84; also see Derrida, *Glas*, 188a-191a.
28. Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation*, 155.
29. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Glas-Piece: A Compte Rendu" *Diacritics* 7:3 (1977, 24).
30. John P. Leavey, Jr., "This (then) will not have been a book..." *GLASsary*. Ed. John P. Leavey, Jr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, 112-22; Spivak, "Glas-Piece", 24; Geoffrey Hartman, *Saving the Text: Literature, Derrida, Philosophy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, 32, 33, 94, 103; Marie Maclean, *Name of the Mother: Writing Illegitimacy*. London: Routledge, 1994, 209; and many others.
31. I owe this insight to a comment made by Mairead Hanrahan at the London Graduate School's 2014 Summer Academy.
32. Derrida, *Glas*, 24a.
33. Derrida, *Glas*, 262b.
34. Derrida, *Glas*, 4a.
35. Derrida, *Glas*, 1a.
36. Derrida, *Glas*, 61ai.
37. Derrida, *Glas*, 61ai.
38. Derrida, *Glas*, 61ai.
39. Derrida, *Glas*, 67.
40. See Derrida, *Glas*, 24a.
41. Derrida, *Glas*, 70a.
42. Derrida, *Glas*, 110a.
43. Derrida, *Glas*, 111-12a.
44. Derrida, *Glas*, 113a.
45. Derrida, *Glas*, 111a.
46. Derrida, *Glas*, 131a.
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48. Derrida, *Glas*, 124a.
49. Derrida, *Glas*, 124a.
50. Derrida, *Glas*, 43b.
51. Derrida, *Glas*, 38b.
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53. Clare Blackburn, "(Up) Against the (In) Between: Interstitial Spatiality in Genet and Derrida" *Parrhesia* 3 (2007, 30).
54. Derrida, *Glas*, 151ai.
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59. Derrida, *Glas*, 155ai.
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62. Derrida, *Glas*, 159ai.
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65. Derrida, *Glas*, 151ai.
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69. Sina Kramer, "Derrida's 'Antigonanette': On the Quasi-Transcendental" *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 52:4 (2014, 536).
70. Derrida, *Glas*, 210b-212b.
71. Maclean, *Writing Illegitimacy*, 207.
72. Magedera, "Seing Genet, Citation and Mourning; a propos *Glas* by Jacques Derrida", 36.
73. Derrida, *Glas*, 168b.
74. Tina Chanter, "'What color is mythology?' Antigone's Achievement of Self-Consciousness Through a Failure to Recognize the Humanity of Slaves" *Labrys, études féministes/ estudos feministas* 23 (2013).
75. Chanter, "What color is mythology?"; and see Derrida, *Glas*, 135a.
76. Chanter, "What color is mythology?"; quoting Derrida, *Glas*, 135a.
77. Christopher Arthur, "Hegel as Lord and Master" *Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy: A Radical Philosophy Reader*. Eds S. Sayers and P. Osborne. New York: Routledge, 1990, 38.
78. Arthur, "Hegel as Lord and Master", 40.
79. Arthur, "Hegel as Lord and Master", 39.
80. Arthur, "Hegel as Lord and Master", 39.
81. Derrida, *Glas*, 135a.
82. Chanter, "What color is mythology?"
83. Chanter herself made this suggestion at the London Graduate School's 2014 Summer Academy.
84. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel, the Letters*. Trans. Clark Butler and Christine Seiler. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984, 247.
85. Hegel, *Hegel, the Letters*, 248.
86. Marian Hobson, "Derrida's Irony" *Derrida's Legacy: Literature and Philosophy*. Eds Simon Glendinning and Robert Eaglestone. Oxon: Routledge, 2008, 111.
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89. Derrida, *Glas*, 27b.
90. Derrida, *Glas*, 203b
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92. Derrida, *Glas*, 66b.
93. Derrida, *Glas*, 227a.
94. Derrida, *Glas*, 231a.
95. Derrida, *Glas*, 231a.
96. Derrida, *Glas*, 226a.
97. Derrida, *Glas*, 1a.
98. Derrida, *Glas*, 1b.
99. Derrida, *Glas*, 162a.
100. Derrida, *Glas*, 115b.