



J'accepte: Jacques Derrida's Cryptic Love by Unsealed Writing

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Abstract

This article focuses on the autobiographical ghost that dwells in “Envois” and the multiple ways he/she/it interferes in Derrida’s concept of *écriture*. Read through love letters sent as postcards with the image representing Socrates writing in front of Plato, Derrida’s writing, I argue, definitely becomes a cryptic writing (*écriture cryptique*) both in the sense of *kryptô* (Gr. coded) and *secerno* (Lat. set apart). I endeavor to show that “Envois”—largely autobiographical and entangled in his life events—is a harbinger of the secret that Derrida takes for a fundamental feature of democracy in his later works. And yet the secret is of his own, as he notes when writing “Envois”: “Nobody will never know what the secret I write along with is. And that I say this will not change anything” (Peeters, 2010, p. 367).

Keywords: autobiography; love; crypt; secret; writing.

At the moment I leave “my” book (to be published)—after all, no one forces me to do it—I become, appearing-disappearing, like that uneducable specter who will have never learned how to live. The trace I leave signifies to me at once my death, either to come or already come upon me, and the hope that this trace survives me. This is not a striving for immortality; it’s something structural. I leave a piece of paper behind, I go away, I die: it is impossible to escape this structure, it is the unchanging form of my life. Each time I let something go, each time some trace leaves me, “proceeds” from me, unable to be reappropriated, I live my death in writing. (Derrida, 2007, pp. 32–33)

When a philosopher confesses that he lives his death in writing, such a confession entails two problematic issues. He seems to admit that the immense philosophical writing he is widely known for might or even should be read as an autobiographical project. But, since death is “the always-already-there” (Derrida, 1989, p. 117) of his life, to quote the formula from Derrida’s first book, autobiography can only appear as a spectre that haunts his writing. Crudely speaking, a man who once lived and was named Jacques Derrida hovers over

the words he uses. Hence, his ghost also haunts those who refer to his philosophical concepts: dissemination, trace, hauntology, survival [*survie*], *animots*, just to name a few. In the last interview, originally published in *Le Monde* three weeks before his death, Derrida says: “one has not yet begun to read me . . . even though there are, to be sure, many very good readers (a few dozen in the world perhaps, people who are also writer-thinkers, poets)” (2007, p. 34). Then, how and where to begin from? To begin to read Derrida, I argue, means to familiarize oneself with his spectral presence that haunts Derridean philosophy.

One of Derrida’s permanent obsessions might be rendered in these terms: my proper language will have never belonged to me. It expropriates me every time I come to life through my writing. I am my own ghost. However, writing from within such a belief clearly necessitates a methodical self-staging. This article particularly focuses on the presence of autobiographical ghosts that dwell in “Envois,” the first part of *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Derrida, 1987). However, as it is a part of a larger research project on the relation between auto/biography and philosophy, I will start by describing the highly problematic status of auto/biography in philosophical discourse using Nietzsche as an example. Indeed, auto/biography, I argue, may be seen as a ghost that haunts modern philosophy, while a philosopher is not expected to directly refer to his life experience when doing philosophy.¹ From this perspective, “Envois” is of particular relevance. Discussing Derrida’s text, I will follow three steps. First, choosing a biographical approach to “Envois,” I will focus on a love affair that seems to act as a trigger for Derrida’s *écriture* and largely responds to what he refers to as a secret. Then, working on Richard Rorty’s assumption that Derrida “is trying to create himself by creating his own language game” (1989, p. 133), I will discuss how his approach to love interferes in his fundamental concepts such as *différance*, trace and dissemination. Finally, I will endeavour to show that Derrida’s writing, performed by love letters sent as postcards and, as a result, challenging the distinction between the private and the public, becomes a cryptic writing [*écriture cryptique*]. It is both coded [*krypto*] and set apart [*secerno*]. Thus, unlike Rorty, who seems to highlight that “Envois” resists any procedure of reading, I will indicate a specific code in Derrida’s text. Using the notion of the crypt, I will show that Derrida’s love follows what Abraham and Torok refer to as “the cryptonymic procedure” (Abraham & Torok, 1986, p. 21).

¹ My ongoing research on what I refer to as “auto/biographical philosophy” mainly concerns male philosophers (Bataille, Blanchot, Derrida, Nancy and Stiegler). The question about auto/biography in philosophy should be posed, I believe, with gender sensitivity and bearing in mind sexual difference. From a general perspective, I would be inclined to argue that the absence of auto/biography in philosophical discourse coincides with the absence of women in the history of philosophy, which results from women’s social and cultural condition. As long as the power of reasoning (and philosophizing) is defined as male, the question of *bios* (biography and biology) appears as female. In my research, however, I intend to go beyond this *general* perspective, paying attention to how *particular* and heterosexual male philosophers define, are determined by and refer to their masculinity in their writings and how they describe their relationships with women. It would be highly interesting and useful to apply this approach in relation to *particular* female philosophers to see not only how they come to philosophy as women and how they become women-philosophers, but also how they refer, *if ever*, to their femininity. Do they have the same strong will to write themselves through their philosophical projects as male philosophers do? From this perspective, Catherine Malabou’s philosophical project is of crucial interest in my research.

A reflection that has been with me for a while is that we simply ignore the biographies of philosophers as something external to their philosophy, whereas we are perfectly familiar with the biographies of writers or artists as something that might explain some fragments of their oeuvre. In fact, it is common knowledge that the life of a philosopher has nothing to do with *his* or *her* thought. We seem to be quite post-Romantic in our ways of thinking thought itself. Romanticizing thought, we somehow take it for granted that life in its contingency does not affect it at all. As a result, detecting ties between life and thought when dealing with a philosopher would imply frivolous psychologizing of philosophical concepts or seeing in the history of thought nothing but a sad reflection of personal affairs. It is as if the very right to auto/biography as an inherent part of the oeuvre was an effect of being (qualified as) a writer. It is as if, when dealing with a philosopher's writing, our academic practices of analysis, for their seriousness' sake, condemn as a matter of course and in the name of some invisible philosophical authority any kind of simplest questions that one could ask when thinking of writers: what were they like? What were they thinking about when they wrote this or that? What was the role of their significant others in their thought? If such questions appear as ill-chosen ones just because they target a philosopher and not a writer, one might see here the incontrovertible evidence of an interdiction that it would be interesting to investigate.

Jacques Derrida often questioned the absence of auto/biography within philosophical discourse. When giving quite a spontaneous lecture at New York University in 1996, he pointed out that traditional philosophy defines biography as external to philosophy. When Heidegger, Derrida says, was asked: "What was the life of Aristotle?", he replied: 'He was born, thought and died.' And all the rest is a pure anecdote" (Dick & Ziering Kofman, 2005, p. 60). From this perspective, stepping into philosophy through auto/biography binds us to invoke ghosts and question an absence that is almost palpable. Heidegger himself, with his *Schwarze Hefte*, may be a salient example of this.

Were we to believe that to philosophize, *generally* and *particularly*, *simply* and *essentially*, is to learn to live, which would ultimately mean to learn to die (Derrida, 2007, p. 24), it is striking that we are somehow taught, when learning to live, not to pay too much attention to the life experiences of our teachers. We learn how to live from those who are supposed not to have (had) their lives. And if they have one, we are willing to consider it a reflection of their philosophy and, as a result, to recognize their *intellectual biography* in which life becomes both understandable and relevant only when it stems from a philosophical doctrine. *Materially* speaking, the lived [*le vécu*] is not a lesson to be learned from. It gives way to the idea of life. However surprising it may seem, life as such may be seen as a ghost that haunts what Derrida refers to as "traditional" philosophy.

And yet, "traditional" here seems to refer less to philosophy as an ensemble of texts that are at our disposal whenever we want to learn to live. It rather refers to what we want these texts to mean for us. Philosophy defined as "traditional" is, in fact, a strange way in which

we maintain that philosophy *matters* and overlook the *material* conditions of its production as something *immaterial* to philosophy. The invisible ghost of autobiography that hovers over philosophy strangely has a *material* presence.

Nietzsche is perhaps the first who made this ghost speak through philosophy so loudly. Certainly, in his autobiography Nietzsche writes: “I am one thing, my writings are another” (2007, p. 36), while in the preface to his most personal text he says: “But let us leave Mr Nietzsche: what is it to us that that Mr Nietzsche has got well again” (2001, p. 4). But both to Nietzsche and those who read his writings because they wish to learn to live and want to understand why he writes such good books, to recall the title of a chapter from his autobiography, it seems that the *simple* fact that Nietzsche has got well again does *matter*:

This book might need more than one preface; and in the end there still be room for doubting whether someone who has not experienced something similar could, by means of prefaces, be brought closer to the *experiences* of this book. It seems to be written in the language of the wind that brings a thaw: it contains high spirits, unrest, contradiction, and April weather, so that one is constantly reminded of winter’s nearness as well as of the *triumph* over winter that is coming, must come, perhaps has already come... Gratitude flows forth incessantly, as if that which was most unexpected had just happened—the gratitude of a convalescent—for *recovery* was what was most unexpected. “Gay Science”: this signifies the saturnalia of a mind that has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure—patiently, severely, coldly, without yielding, but also without hope—and is now all of a sudden attacked by hope, by hope for health, by the *intoxication* of recovery. (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 3)

Nietzsche philosophizes with gaiety because he has recovered. His science has been gay since his painful headaches unexpectedly stopped for a moment. The sickness of Europe, which he sees as “a patient who owes the utmost gratitude to his incurability and to the perpetual changes in his affliction” (2001, p. 49), is first his own.

I do not claim that Nietzsche’s recovery is *essential* to understand his philosophical thought. I rather suggest that it is *of the essence*. It is both an example and exemplar of how a singular subject answers to, but also for and before the world, to exploit—in the wake of Derrida’s concept of responsibility (1992a, 2002)—the full range of meanings of the Latin verb *respondere*, through the way s/he experiences it. That this experience is *first* bodily and *essentially* material may matter for those of us who want to learn how to read and live. In fact, a lesson we can learn from Nietzsche’s gay science is that *healthy* experience gives birth to some *enlightening* ideas. Nietzsche’s *fresh* ideas about Europe sinking into what he refers to as nihilism, are an example. It would also explain that his general opinions about woman and sex, “often shallow and sometimes embarrassing, . . . were the product of an experience which had been drastically limited and disappointing” (Williams, 2001, p. xi).

Deliberately *materialist*, an auto/biographical approach to philosophy I opt for here may be seen as a method of doing philosophy defined as learning to live, which makes it possible, however, to go beyond its general and idealistic presumptions, as long as the question of life is concerned. Putting special emphasis on the interplay between experiencing the world and conceptualizing it, this approach, I believe, also provides a helpful tool for critical reading,

which ultimately enables us to see the light, i.e. to live/read *well*, which amount to living/reading *critically*. My way of reading philosophy is that of a philologist who tries to see the sense of a *singular* oeuvre as a result of an experience that his/her author refers to more or less conspicuously. Perhaps, to a “traditional” philosopher, this *materialist* reading may be *immaterial*. But if the sense of philosophy still has to be about learning to live in a “post-truth” world, it has to stem from a philological curiosity and an appetite for meaning.

Ultimately, what philosophy means to us largely depends on what kind of questions we ask when reading in order to learn to live. In a documentary film about Derrida by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, an off-camera voice asks Derrida what he would like to learn from a documentary film about Heidegger, Hegel or Kant. After a longer moment of silence, Derrida—ill at ease, manifestly irritated but still determined—says that he would like to hear them speak of their sexual life. He also would like to know, as he adds, why they appear as asexual beings through their writings and why they wiped out their private life from their philosophy. From this perspective, to philosophize in order to learn to live entails asking straight and non-philosophical questions that require, however, mostly philosophical answers.

Discussing auto/biography in the context of “Envois” involves asking not only whether a philosopher is entitled to write his autobiography and whether we are entitled to discuss his thought in relation to his life, but also whether a philosopher has the right to love. How does loving affect thinking? Can we be in love and think at the same time, given the fact that love, pragmatically speaking, is something we necessarily *fall* in? Derrida not only questions “traditional” philosophy that makes it somehow impossible, from a rhetorical point of view, to inscribe the autobiographical in the philosophical, but he also untringly tries to invent an idiom that would bear his experience. In a personal note from 1976, quoted by his biographer, Derrida refers to the idea of a book that would transform what he calls his “approach to anecdote which is strangled, tense and repressed” (Peeters, 2010, p. 361). From now on, Derrida will refer to this project as “the impossible,” whenever his autobiographical ghost will appear in many of his texts, for example in *Specters of Marx* which opens with some kind of an avowal: “Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally*” (Derrida, 1994, p. xvi).

In this respect, “Envois” is of particular importance. On the one hand, Derrida writes the text when, so to speak, his autobiographical urge is at its peak: he is obsessed by an idea of a fully autobiographical book which is supposed to be different from what he has written so far. On the other hand, he writes “Envois” in order to give voice to his love, yet this love, as I will try to show, is supposed to remain secret and, as a result, has to be ciphered. In 1972 Derrida gives a lecture on Nietzsche, published later as *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. He starts this lecture by recalling a letter sent by Nietzsche in 1872, which is rather loosely connected to his argument (he translates the letter and puts his comments in):

From Basel in seventy two (The Birth of Tragedy) Nietzsche writes to Malvida von Meysenbug. . . . At last my little bundle (or the little envelope (*pli*): *mein Bündelchen für Sie*. Will it ever be revealed, what was thus named between them?) is ready for you, and at last you hear

from me, after it must have seemed that I had sunk into a dead silence (*grabesschweigen*). . . . You see, my *Birth of Tragedy* has made of me the most offensive [the most scabrous] philologist of the present day (*der anstoßigste Philologe des Tages*). (1979, pp. 34–35)

Derrida continues in a rather nebulous way: “the title for this lecture was to have been the question of style. However—it is woman who will be my subject. Still, one might wonder whether that doesn’t really amount to the same thing—or is it to the other?” (pp. 35–37). Feminist interpretations of Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche point out that “Derrida’s analysis challenges the structural apparatus that sustains the reproduction of patriarchy. Nonetheless, the style of *Spurs* clearly betrays its masculine signature, and thereby participates in this reproduction” (Feder & Zakin, 1997, p. 24). Putting aside the masculine character of Derrida’s signature, it has to be said that Nietzsche here is first of all a “transferential figure” (Derrida, 1992b, p. 364) through which Derrida seems to write/cipher his own “birth of tragedy.” Written between 1977 and 1979, “Envois” refers to his long and passionate love affair with Sylviane Agacinski. It begins in 1972 precisely and was tacitly accepted by Derrida’s wife and his intellectual entourage (Peeters, 2010, pp. 358–359). “A taste for the secret” (Derrida & Ferraris, 2002) Derrida would have recognized as his own stems, perhaps, from what has to be left unsaid, as if the secret had to be known and kept by everyone, which means that no one can actually reveal it.

The air of a strange open secrecy that hovers over Derrida’s love affair gives us a better insight into what Derrida understands as love and how he ciphers his love by what legal English refers to as “unsealed writing.” An unsealed writing tells us that no special means are required to make a contract legally binding. Technically speaking, “Envois” are love letters that Derrida supposedly writes to his lover on a whole stock of the same postcard. Commenting on Derrida’s text, Richard Rorty says that “nothing is more private than a love letter—there is nothing to which general ideas are less relevant and more inappropriate. Everything, in a love affair or in a love letter, shared private associations” (1989, p. 126). And yet, the most private becomes public, since what is written on a postcard can be read by anyone. “I resemble a messenger from antiquity, a bellboy, a runner, the courier of what we have given one another . . . and I run to bring them news which must remain secret, and I fall all the time” (Derrida, 1987, p. 8). Derrida’s love written in cipher illustrates his constant and obsessive question: how to save myself (how to save my love) using the only possible language (my proper language) that kills me whenever I open my mouth? Hence, the question is not about how to tell the secret, but just how to write the secret that becomes unspeakable once it takes the shape of words or sentences. Derrida writes as if he were the keeper of his own secret by untiringly trying to tell it. His singular idiom, but also what he often refers to as “unfaithful fidelity” or “the impossible,” comes from this secret that must be told to be kept and can never be revealed at the same time. This is why Derrida, as he writes, “fall[s] all the time” (1987, p. 8).

And yet, a fall is not a *sine qua non* condition of love from a pragmatic perspective. Derrida is fallen in love, but his fall is rather a way of reasoning through writing. If Derrida had been Flaubert, he might have said: “*la différence, c’est moi.*” In fact, the public secret his

love speaks through is a way of telling the *différance* he seems to embody and identify with. One may imagine Derrida speaking in these simplified terms: if you want to follow me and see my love, just love the *différance*, find me *disseminated* in my love letters. Love, as *différance*, “cannot be *exposed* . . . In every exposition it would be exposed to disappearing as disappearance. It would risk appearing: disappearing” (Derrida, 1982, pp. 5–6). Derrida in love is still the one who writes out his fundamental concept and multiplies his masks. Driven by a real love affair, love is also a result of philosophizing.

As Richard Rorty points out, “anybody who has read a little of philosophy will get little from ‘Envois’” (1989, pp. 133–134). And yet, if we look at “the incredible richness of texture of ‘Envois’—a richness achieved by few other contemporary writers, and no other contemporary philosophy professors” (p. 129)—paying more attention to how Derrida decides to tell his secret love, then “Envois” lets us understand better the autobiographical ghost that haunts his philosophy since his first writings. Telling his love, exposing to the public view what “cannot be *exposed*” (Derrida, 1982), Derrida certainly exposes himself. However, by his personal exposure and the way he combines “the privately erotic and the publicly philosophical” (Rorty, 1989, p. 127), he also exposes his own concepts.

Derrida’s love may be seen as a key to the reinterpretation of his most recognized and apparently more philosophical texts. Suffice it to remember his comment on *Phaedrus*. In this Platonic dialogue Socrates holds a discussion with the young Phaedrus who reads the text of a sophist speech about love, delivered by Lysias. An exchange on love entails Derrida’s argument about the nature of writing that Socrates defines as *pharmakon* (Derrida, 1981, pp. 61–171). Plato and Socrates make their unexpected return in “Envois.” The back of the postcard on which Derrida writes his love letters presents a reproduction of a medieval illustration by Matthew Paris. It depicts Socrates who is writing and Plato who is standing behind. Confessing that “[he] still do[es] not know how to see what there is to see” (Derrida, 1987, p. 16), Derrida endlessly ponders on Paris’s illustration and gives the most astonishing interpretations of it through the letters he sends. Identifying with Nietzsche, who describes himself in his letter to Malvida von Meysenbug as “the most offensive [the most scabrous] philologist of the present day” (Derrida, 1979, pp. 34–35), Derrida also seems to identify his love with Paris’s illustration. He strangely becomes Plato from his own fantasy:

for the moment, myself, I tell you I see *Plato* getting an erection in *Socrates*’ back and see the insane hubris of his prick, an interminable, disproportionate erection traversing Paris’s head like a single idea and then the copyist’s chair, before slowly sliding, still warm, under *Socrates*’ right leg, in harmony or symphony with the movement of his phallus sheaf, the points, plumes, pens, fingers, nails, and *grattoirs*, the very pencil boxes which address themselves in the same direction. The di-rection, the dierection of this couple, these old nuts, these rascals on horseback, this is us. (Derrida, 1987, p. 18)

Telling love by unsealed writing, Derrida's lips are definitely not to be sealed, while the secret is not to be hidden, but rather seems to be told in a cryptic language. By recalling the Hebrew meaning of the word "tongue" in the Tower of Babel story, Derrida refers this cryptic language to "one lip, one alone to say everything":

They wanted to elevate sublimely themselves, in order to impose their lip, the unique lip, on the universe. Babel, the father, giving his name of confusion, multiplied the lips and this is why we are separated and that right now I am dying, dying to kiss you with our lip the only one I want to hear. (1987, p. 9)

If Derrida's postal principle comes from the fact that "a letter can always not arrive at its destination" (1987, p. 33), his love principle, so to speak, simply comes from the act of writing. Derrida does not write to say *je t'aime*, even though he is in love. *Je t'aime* is replaced by *je t'écris*, which is meant to be understood as "I am writing to you" and "I am writing you" as well. To love is to write: "At every moment the order to write you is given, no matter what, but to write you, and I love, and this is how I recognize that I love" (1987, p. 10). To love is then not necessarily to love the other, but rather to dwell in/on the self and its own love. Saying "I love," saying it again and again in a narcissistic suspense, has the edge over saying "I love you."

And when I call you my love, my love, is it you I am calling or my love? You, my love, is it you I thereby name, is it to you I address myself? I don't know if the question is well put, it frightens me. But I am sure that the answer, if it gets to me one day, will have come to me from you. You alone, my love, you alone will have known it. . . .

when I call you my love, is it that I am calling you, yourself, or is it that I am telling my love? and when I tell you my love, is it that I am declaring my love to you or indeed that I am telling you, yourself, my love, and that you are my love. I want so much to tell you. (Derrida, 1987, p. 8)

When writing "Envois," Derrida seems to have assimilated Sandor Ferenczi's theory he became familiar with through Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's works. According to Ferenczi, quoted by Derrida in his preface to *The Wolf Man's Magic World*, written in 1976, "all object-love [is] an enlargement of the Self" (Derrida, 1986, p. xvi). Torok and Abraham's reinterpretation of the Wolf Man's diary largely determined Derrida's approach to psychoanalysis and his reading of Freud and Lacan in the subsequent chapters of *The Post Card*. But it may have also fed lines to him when he was performing his love on philosophical stage. Derrida seems to be particularly seduced by the linguistic entanglement of the Wolf Man's case as described by Freud. Abraham and Torok point out that Sergei Pankejeff's personal story was predetermined by four languages. Russian, German, English and French words interacted with each other and created a specific *verbarium* that one cannot symbolize or refer to an extralinguistic event. The *verbarium* is a "crypt" that only hides words to be ciphered in a widely open and a fully available text. Words are given, yet they remain out of reach. They are full of phantoms, phonetic, rhyming and semantic fossils, while infinitely switching from one language to another. However, this "jigsaw puzzle" (Abraham & Torok, 1986, p. 80) does not lead to the hidden meaning which is somehow drowned in the unconscious as if it were buried into the crypt. Abraham

and Torok speak of “a false Unconsciousness” understood as “the crypt in the Ego—a false ‘return of the repressed,’ the action in the Ego of hidden thoughts from the crypt” (1986, p. lxxi). What is at stake here is not to provide sense, i.e. to say what the puzzle really means, once it has been assembled. It is rather about discovering the intersymbolic principle which is responsible for the production of cryptonyms with no intention to conclude whether they refer to what is real or imagined.

When telling his love, Derrida speaks from within the crypt. He seems to create a specific love cryptogram in the wake of what he referred to as dissemination in his early writings. To become disseminated would be to “lose one’s head, no longer to know where one’s head is” (Derrida, 1981, p. 20). Thus, when Derrida says: *on va pouvoir enfin s’aimer* [we are finally going to love each other], it should be also understood as *on va pouvoir semer* [we are finally going to spread or disseminate]. Were we to play with homonymy that dissemination feeds on, we may say that a reader *sews* what Derrida *sows* through his text from within his crypt (Johnson, 1981, p. xix). However, such a reading is not about sewing Derrida up, stitching him together, but rather about sewing Derrida’s private crypt onto his philosophical concepts in order to better understand the link between his philosophy and autobiography. Derrida’s crypt is perhaps the most visible/hidden through the way he decides to sign his text by disseminating his name within his writing:

I accept [*j’accepte*], this will be my signature henceforth, . . . take this word at its most literal, it is my name, that *j’accepte*, and you will be able to count, to count on it as on the capital clarities, from you I accept everything. (1987, p. 26)

In *j’accepte* one is supposed to find Jacques and *sept* [seven] referring to the number of letters the name Derrida consists of (Bass, 1987, p. xiv). Derrida’s corpus is Derrida’s body [*corps*]. However, it would be hard to say that his writing is corporeal. Derrida does not write with or on his own body. He rather writes over his dead body. Singing his text, he *accepts* his death, yet the signature becomes the only possibility of an impossible life in his corpus—his second skin. For this reason Derrida’s love can only exist when enunciating itself; it is both performative and self-centred.

Accepting such a love seems to be rather challenging for the one who is supposed to be loved and somehow despairing for the one who loves. While the former can simply misunderstand the words of love or find no trace of it in the letters she receives, the latter experiences his love as “a tragedy . . . of destination” (Derrida, 1987, p. 23):

a tragedy, my love, of destination. Everything becomes a postcard once more, legible for the other, even if he understands nothing about it. And if he understands nothing, certain for the moment of the contrary, it might always arrive for you, for you too, to understand nothing, and therefore for me, and therefore not to arrive, I mean at its destination. (Derrida, 1987, p. 23)

Derrida also notes: “You always accuse me of being ‘delirious,’ and you know very well, alas, what that means in our code” (1987, p. 17). Of course, no one knows the code that she is supposed to know. It is possible, however, to indicate a specific code of love in Derrida’s text. An attempt to decode it would entail leaving Derrida in his crypt and paying attention to his “love delirium” which may be seen as coessential with the language created by the

“*original words*” (Abraham & Torok, 1986, p. 83) from the Wolf Man’s crypt. Paradoxically, the crypt makes it possible to see “the truth” of love, yet this love is experienced as real and imagined or fantasized at the same time. A biographical approach to “Envois” cannot be thus limited to what *really* happened to Derrida, since he decides to immediately hide his love into the crypt. Loving in the crypt becomes a peculiar way of life through writing which skilfully plays with the truth, be it quite a sophisticated form of living a lie. In this respect, Derrida’s lecture on Nietzsche from 1972, where writing is identified with “a woman (truth) [who] will not be pinned down” (1979, pp. 55–57), gives us an insight into how Derrida likes to hide in his oeuvre: “a ‘woman’ takes so little interest in truth, because in fact she barely even believes in it, the truth, as regards her, does not concern her in the least” (1979, p. 63). Only from this perspective may his style be qualified as feminine, yet this perspective tells us nothing about women without inverted commas. This “woman” refers to no other than Derrida who tries to make his love speak through philosophy.

In his famous *Literary Theory* Jonathan Culler, when explaining why a text can be defined as a literary text in our culture, provides us with a couplet from Robert Frost’s poem: “We dance round in a ring and suppose / But the Secret sits in the middle and knows” (1997, p. 22). Any attempt to reveal the secret of “Envois,” i.e. to take hold of the text, is certainly doomed to failure. In fact, as Rorty has it, “Envois” is a kind of prose “in which you can never tell, from line to line, whether you are supposed to pay attention to the ‘symbolic’ or the ‘material’ features of the words being used” (1989, p. 135). Does it then mean that “there is nothing propositional to be taken away from the experience of reading it” (Rorty, 1989, p. 135)? I would not say so. In fact, if we pay more attention to the *material* conditions of Derrida’s writing and take account of his countless strategies of performing the self on philosophical stage, it becomes possible to find a specific code behind Derrida’s *verbarium* and, as a result, to decode Derrida’s cryptic love. However, it is not about trying to force his crypt in order to know the secret. It is rather about observing “the cryptonymic procedure” (Abraham & Torok, 1986, p. 20) in order to understand what *J’accepte* means when telling love and signing his love cards: “make myself illegible for you. *J’accepte*” (Derrida, 1987, p. 34). Understanding Derrida and his love is a complex operation, as it challenges our ordinary ways of understanding things. What is at stake here is not to understand what is hidden behind. There is nothing to be disclosed in Derrida’s text since the secret is told. To understand Derrida is not to catch or seize him, to hold together all words his *corpus* consists of, as the Latin formula of understanding [*comprehension*] would suggest. To understand the secret is rather to carefully follow the topography of its traces: “I’m talking about conscious secrets, carried by what is known, as known, and not about the unconscious one, no one has yet said anything about the secret as known” (Derrida, 1993, p. 78).

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