

## What Once to Read to Write: Locating the Other in *Veils*.

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Who writes the other. Well, Emmanuel Levinas for one. Or rather, Jacques Derrida. Or rather, Emmanuel Levinas, "...precisely where the words seem to get carried away and become disidentified in a discourse that opens each signification to its other (relation *without* relation, passivity *without* passivity, "passivity...more passive than every passivity," etc)"<sup>i</sup>, writes Derrida. To open to the other in discourse is to disidentify the same with itself. It is not written, *the other is the other*, or *the same is not the other*, or *the other is not the same*, but *the same is not the same (the same without the same)*. Who writes the other. No one. Who: Something that is not, or won't be, or isn't yet, what it is. (I have a sudden memory of Beckett, the final lines of *Molloy*, it's *Adieu*, "It is raining. It is not raining."<sup>ii</sup>).

*Veil*<sup>iii</sup> is not a book by Helene Cixous. *Veils* is not a book by Jacques Derrida. *Veils* is a book by Helene Cixous and Jacques Derrida. *Veils* is a book of two: both authors not the other, two voices, two genres, two sexes too. *Veils* begins with a trope; Helene Cixous begins her *Veils* as a trope, "Myopia was her fault, her lead, her imperceptible native veil"<sup>iv</sup>. Leaving aside for the moment that both myopia and the veil function as a trope, both synonymously and antonymously at varying moments in *Veils*, this first phrase in isolation forges what will become a "prehistoric" alliance: a metaphor. What happens to Cixous' veil and its substantiative counterpart, myopia, as it traverses and mutates (through) the text?

In the beginning there was myopia, near ignorance, or a kind of ignorance that is based on indeterminacy. At first she has some sight, and navigates her way through the city based on little breaks in its "refusal" to her: there is a point of discrepancy between what she sees of the world and what the world is. If this makes her a foreigner to the world, unable to see what others see, it also locates her in a state of constant ambiguous unresolve, "To be and not to be

were never exclusive”. The world, her vision, her self, is entrenched in otherness, in complete otherness, in “limitless pale nothingness...death”<sup>v</sup>.

But her myopia does not stay the same. In fact, it does the exact opposite. It becomes other, it goes away, it dies. Our myopic, she (Helene?) receives an eye surgery and her myopia becomes a thing of the past, “Suddenly, myopia, ‘the other’, the unwelcome, is unveiled”<sup>vi</sup> and she must say “Farewell to this veil she cursed so much.” So much happens in her new world of seeing, but one thing is that she is no longer myopic. She is not only seeing now, but is no longer not seeing. The piece is titled *Savoir* and this condition, not of seeing, but of no longer not seeing, and likewise, of seeing herself see, becomes both her node and her mode of knowing. What happens to the veil now that it is unveiled—now that her myopia is not what it was, her “blood”, but is now the opposite of seeing, and is therefore opposed to her self? She mourns, her old foreignness becomes foreign to herself; she can finally see, and that also means she can see her myopia, “its force, its strange force, was revealed to her *retrospectively* at the very moment it was taken away from her”<sup>vii</sup>. The movement of the veil in *Savoir* traces an inversion in which the veil begins as the trope of her otherness, and slowly, as she regains her vision, the veil no longer ‘sees’ her as an other, she ‘sees’ the veil as an other insofar as it is the not-seeing of her seeing. At the moment of the unveiling of her myopia, her vision, it suddenly becomes intangible again, too far away, too early, too late.

Derrida, in his parallel text, “A Silkworm of One’s Own” writes another veil, the tallith. A sexual opposition made of cloth: the tallith, the veil—it goes unsaid, without being written explicitly in the text—passing, or hidden, under a fabric of silence, that the tallith is male and the veil is female. And like masculinity and femininity, they share commonalities, points of intersection, here, being, consuming or ejaculating “a figure, a symbol, a trope”<sup>viii</sup>. An analysis of sexual difference based on this convergence will lead Derrida (Cixous) to write “the equivocal multiplicity or the enveloped duplicity of sexes.” In order to understand this

building that knots rhetoric with the duplicity, or multiplicity of sexual difference, one must undertake a reading of a reading of cloth. Let us now read the tallith through the veil.

The tallith begins with the opposite movement from that of the veil. The transformation consists of donning the tallith, not of removing it. How does it compare to this strange doubling of strategies that turns back on itself, in which in order for a veil to embrace a full significance it has to cease to exist—or rather has to exist, as Cixous says, it must be “seen”, “*retrospectively*”? Derrida opposes the veil, which is double (at least), to the tallith, which “depends on the One of the unique”<sup>ix</sup>. Whereas a veil aims to move beyond the veil, the tallith aims to come “Before and in front of the veil.” Its attachment to its singularity and its location in front of the veil, reaching further and further forward in front of the veil, opposes itself radically to a myopia that is lost in its otherness, trying insistently to transcend the veil and move past it, get behind it. Cixous and Derrida are standing on opposite sides of a veil, trying to undo it with their techniques of opposition. Cixous’ veil has failed, her veil folding, moving to the other side of the veil only to continue to be hidden from another side; the limit she crosses turning back to face her upon her crossing.

Let’s examine a strange occurrence in Derrida’s text. A sizable portion of Derrida’s reading of the tallith consists of the laws laid out in the tallith-text for the weaving and sewing of the shawl: “We must distinguish the warp from the woof”. A textual memory surges up, page 24, “You’re dreaming of taking on a braid or a weave, a warp or a woof, but without being sure of the textile to come, if there is one, if any remains and without knowing if what remains to come will still deserve the name of text, especially of the text in the figure of a textile. But you insist on writing to it, doing without undoing, from afar, yes, from afar, like before life, like after life, on writing to it from a lower corner of the map....”. In this instance, Derrida is making reference to a trope that has not yet appeared in his text in its full embodiment. The first mention of this trope comes too early, making reference to a braid, a

metaphor, that is not (yet), as well as to his own tallith, both his “real” tallith, the referent of his tallith in his text, and this literal, textual tallith that weaves the warp and the woof of the warp-woof text: this tallith that comes “before and in front of the veil”: This proleptic image serves as a kind of deconstruction of Derrida’s own tropics.

This figure and movement of a figure do not exist in isolation. It is embroidered into a long swerving thread of a reading of the time of metaphor: the time of both the veil and the tallith. It is here where the veil and the tallith move towards one another, in this strange present that is not present of the fabric-figures that constitute the difference between Derrida and Cixous, and of sexual difference. In French, “warp” and “woof” are translated by “chaine” and “trame”. These words speak more than themselves, as many words do, as they are woven into worlds of signification. Something they have in common purports adverse chronologies. “Chaine” translates with ease into English. It is the same chain that is made of metal or genealogy etc. and also resides in the same location as the English chain in “chain of events”—it thus connotes a relationship of cause and effect and of cause preceding effect, a chronology of linearity moving forward. “Trame” is more foreign. It also makes a story, (a “weave”), but it moves backwards, its chronology only reveals itself from ahead: we can translate it by “intrigue”, or “plot”, but this leaves behind a resonance in the French of which the character is to be pre-ordained. “Trame” is also the story of human destiny. And we must as Derrida says, “distinguish” between the two, as the condition for the fabrication of the tallith; the unity of the tallith coincides with a nonconvergence of chronology—a chronology that is always looking forward or looking back, intersecting in the middle, but never subsuming the one, the other.

But wait, hold on, back up—the metaphor of this cross weaving of threads that makes up the tallith, contrasts starkly with the tallith’s figural oneness whose identity Derrida was so quick to proclaim in opposition to the veil. Is this or is this not the same tallith? Derrida

writes, the shawl is One, like Yahweh, or the Self, one order from the one mouth of Yahweh he writes, “It [the tallith] is unique... depends on the One of the unique” (64), “the singular event” (64) or, wait, it comes “before all else” (64) (even that?) or wait, it is “a tunic” (65), a “text” (65), “skin” (67) the “law” (64), “mine” (66) or my “brother”’s (65) or my “neighbor”’s (65) it is “animal” (68), “dead” (69), “living” (69) a “nickname” (69): “What I am nicknaming here the tallith” and before, “All my nicknames, I have so many”<sup>x</sup>. It seems suddenly as though tallith = tallith or one = one is no longer a self-reflexive statement, that one ≠ one. This kind of trope is totally aberrant, signifying signifieds that do not coincide with each other; (what) can this mean?

Stop; Before the tallith overwhelms itself and breeches the limits of its own reference and becomes something like everything. “When one cannot read the original language, one rapidly loses oneself in translations”<sup>xi</sup>. Turn to help amongst Derrida’s genealogy, ask(s) deMan: (what) can this mean? Unfortunately, DeMan died too early to read *Veils*, so all we can do is go away from *Veils*, and then come back and see if anything has been retained in this translation, this crossing. Who reads the trope. Well, Paul DeMan for one. Or rather, Marcel Proust. Or rather, Paul deMan reads, or rather, “suspect”’s a “nonconvergence between the stated meaning and its understanding”<sup>xii</sup>. DeMan reads an essential disjunction in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* hinging on the construction of narrator-as-author and author-as-narrator that graces Proust’s novel (as well as many other instances of Proust’s meaning formation in this text). This relationship is punctuated by the formulation, “later on”, or “later on, I understood.” For DeMan this convergence between narrator and author depends on a system of reference in which both are intended to refer to the same person while in fact, the one obliterates the other; their literal meanings cancel each other out, “In the convergence of the narrator Marcel with the author Proust.... the unbridgeable distance between the narrator, allegorical and therefore obliterating figure of author, and Proust, is that the former can

believe that this 'later on' could ever be located in his own past"<sup>xiii</sup>. In a sense, Proust out-writes himself, referring to a 'later on' intending to refer to the common past of himself and himself as allegorical narrator but in fact referring to a past that actually breaks their coincidence insofar as it is the narrator's later on and not his own, even though it *must* be in order for the 'later on' to even be uttered: "later on" when I am writing as myself, my narrator understands something. The narrator has to no longer be what he is in order so that this alliance can be created; his moment of presence signals also the moment of an impossibility of his existence.

As it turns out, DeMan's reading of Proust bears some uncanny resemblances to the one I have just given of Cixous' myopia in which in order to have meaning, it has to no longer be what it once was. Unexpectedly, since Derrida says it is just the opposite, the tallith is the same as Cixous' veil, her myopia: its oneness is constituted only afterward ("retrospectively" as Cixous says), only *after* a parade of incantations that constitute its iteration. This relationship which crosses through all three of these readings seems to have a very peculiar chronology in which what is present is only what it is after it is no longer present: "what we call time is precisely truth's inability to coincide with itself". Is this the time of rhetoric? the time of truth? the time of meaning? the time of language?

It is the time of the other. Or rather, the time of the self. Or, wait, the time of the other. Who writes the self. Well, DeMan for one. Or rather, Nietzsche. Or rather, DeMan, "Making the language that denies the self into a center rescues the self linguistically at the same time that it asserts its insignificance, its emptiness as a mere figure of speech. It can only persist as self if it is displaced into the text that denies it. The self which was at first the center of the language as its empirical referent now becomes the language of the center as fiction, as metaphor of the self. What was originally a simply referential text now becomes the text of a text, the figure of a figure"<sup>xiv</sup>. This is a reading of a reading of the tropical

location of the self in philosophical discourse. Nietzsche wants to, in part, oppose truth with metaphor, and thus to pit self against self. The self is false, the self is a metaphor; therefore philosophy is aberrant because it, in spite of itself, situates the self at the birth of truth. How can, Nietzsche would like to know, truth coincide with truth if the vehicle within which it travels is a lie—this self that is a metaphor? Metaphor is both the foundation of truth and its annihilator, simultaneously, (what) can this mean?

Cixous' myopic's truth is also a lie: she needs lenses in order to see, know, to be with others on the side of truth, but, "The lenses seemed like a fraud to her. People said to her: you have beautiful eyes, and she would reply: I am shortsighted. People did not believe her: they didn't listen. They didn't know. She spoke 'the truth.' She be-ried her face, her eyes. As if her real... As if her false... As if she were lying. Wandering, flickering of the lie. Where is the truth. Myopia was her truth"<sup>xv</sup>. A truth, or a lie, has something of the other in it, something of the self. It seems the myopic cannot lie or tell the truth all on her own. She doesn't wear glasses because this shields herself from her myopic world—she doesn't want to lie to herself about the world. And for the world, it has an adverse effect; she doesn't wear glasses as though she were lying about her myopia, masquerading as someone who does not have myopia, the world doesn't want her to tell the truth about herself. And what they think of as her truth (her non-myopia) coincides remarkably with her lie (her glasses). "As if she were lying" or maybe as Nietzsche might say, lying about lying; or telling the truth, as though there must be something of a lie in a truth and something of a truth in a lie; like the myopic's lie that is either a lie (glasses) and thus the truth (true vision), or a truth (no glasses) and thus a lie (looking like a non-myopic), depending upon who is looking at whom. For Cixous' as for Nietzsche, truth and lies are attached to a self that is not really, or not only, a self—a self that doesn't coincide with itself, like a symbol that doesn't always mean the same thing.

What does Derrida see when he looks at Cixous? A symbol can mean many things. Myopia is often Cixous' mourning in *Savoir*, (or even her "truth"), mourning of something unknown—the visible, and then later, after the operation, mourning of something lost, that dark, non-visible world that mourned the visible. However, never once does the myopia, the veil *signify* mourning; it is always exactly what she mourns, the object of her mourning, her own death, or her dead mother; it's her untouchable *signified*. But Derrida looks back at her mourning, and sees through Cixous and Cixous' veil is transfigured: "Fault or election, a veil is worn as a sign of mourning"<sup>xvi</sup> (Cixous doesn't "wear" her veil because she never "puts it on"). Derrida and Cixous both write about the veil, but refer to different veils. Cixous' veil, her truth, becomes Cixous' lie, once Derrida gets his hand on it, the veil is now a "sign", it means something other than itself, it's lying. It has also lost what it once was, it mourns: "This operation" (Derrida here refers to the myopic's eye operation, Cixous' opus, its translation into his opus, and his own opus, the operation of his "operation") "thus engenders the opus, that is, the poem that was born of it and here beats its wings".<sup>xvii</sup> The "poem" "beats its wings" "here"—it emerges from itself, gains a new body, a metaphor: wings. And "this operation had to be paid for by a loss". In fact, Derrida's text is always mourning Cixous', which arrives at the same time as his reading or his re-metaphorizing of her text (*retrospectively*): "Like me, but quite differently, she does her mourning for the veil.... She says: *That's when she shuddered as an unexpected mourning stabbed through her: but I'm losing my myopia!*" , write Derrida and Cixous.

So there is something of mourning, something of death, in these metaphors. What does Derrida mean by "it must remain possible-as-possible" when he writes on The Force of Mourning in his essay on Louis Marin? Mourning aims at that in the self that doesn't coincide with the self or with the same, the other. I have seen in Derrida, a philosophical figure that does not coincide with itself. I have seen in deMan and in Proust, a literary figure

that does not coincide with itself. I have seen in deMan and in Proust, time that does not coincide with itself. I have seen in deMan, in Nietzsche, in Cixous, truth and lie that do not coincide with themselves. I have seen in deMan, in Nietzsche, in Cixous, a self that does not coincide with itself. Mourning aims at precisely that which does not coincide with itself. Mourning seeks to be that which it cannot be, what is inalienably *not* itself; to assimilate the object of mourning it is to annihilate it: to make it possible is to make it impossible, thus it must remain “possible-as-possible.” “The law of mourning, the law of the law, always in mourning, that it would have to fail in order to succeed. In order to succeed, it would well have to *fail*, to fail *well*.”<sup>xviii</sup>. In a sense we can see that the arrangement of texts in *Veils*, Derrida and Cixous’ texts both silently writing of the other, without writing the writing of the other, *fails* in this very same sense insofar as it maintains a necessary relationship with the other (the woman? the man?), can’t ever be without the other (it’s the same book), but never subsumes the other. It is always letting the other speak wholly for itself—never pretending to speak in place of the other, but just listening, in proximity.

I would say that this time which is not its own time, moment that is not its own moment, is also the time of its own writing, or as Derrida and Cixous refer to it on more than one occasion, the “date”<sup>xix</sup>. It is also the time of the weaving of metaphors that link Derrida’s text to Cixous’ and Cixous’ to Derrida’s: these rendezvous traced in a word that crosses both texts, “the crossing”. This crossing occurs with the date: “this is how you come into the world without ever having imagined before that hour that you could ever become an inhabitant of daylight. No one had ever before set their feet on this planet. This event has a date”<sup>xx</sup>. What a strange date this is, verbs exceeding nouns, exceeding verbs. She begins her phrase about her operation with a verb in the present tense, “come” but this come is not something else, this condition of “ever having imagined before” which is a reduced adverbial phrase that functions like a past perfect in that it expresses a kind of double past; you didn’t

imagine, you hadn't even imagined when you imagined: the past of the past, which strangely places the "hour" a little bit more in the past than it should be considering that its moment is one of possibility, of knowledge-to-come, a sort of futuricity: the conditional. This weaving of chronology (of warp and woof?) is this "event" that "has a date" (a *now* that emerges strangely *retrospective*).

Plus another moment like the warp and the woof, which (could) come at the hour of the warp and the woof without ever having been imagined, since it is written on the same page, write underneath the warp and the woof: the strait of Magellan. *As if* this crossing were like a prehistoric birthplace of metaphors that have not yet realized their full significance. Again, the present that becomes past, more than past, and especially so, by being too far away from the future, "But you insist on writing to it, doing without undoing, from afar, yes, from afar, like before life, like after life, on writing to it from a lower corner of the map, right at the bottom of the world, in sight of *Tierra del Fuego*, in the Magellan strait, in memory of the caravels" <sup>xxi</sup>. Interesting that next to this deferral of chronology that echoes the verb shifting Cixous uses to write about her operation, Derrida writes "writing" and also this oh so (not) Levinasian phrase, "doing without undoing" (I suppose Levinas would have written, doing without doing), which deprives the same of its otherness, forbids it to do what it does, that is, what it does not do. And in undoing his own text, by speaking too soon, making reference without being able to make reference, the text's economy strangely produces a very potent arrangement of signification, a *force* (which is the word Derrida uses along side "mourning" in his essay on Marin) that is—there should be another word—*beautiful*, like a well-woven tapestry.

Because just like the crossing of the warp and the woof, the strait of Magellan appears again, as he is quoting Cixous "later on", like a memory, at the rendezvous with Cixous, *as if* he isn't able to tell whether it is his memory or hers, "A strait, what a word. Mine and hers. I

was talking about my Tierra del Fuego and the Strait of Magellan, without knowing if I would come back alive from them”<sup>xxii</sup>. And then he crosses directly into Cixous, “The passage through not-seeing, always there has been a threshold, swim across the strait between the blind continent and the seeing continent, between two worlds, a step taken, come from outside, another step [un pas encore]...”<sup>xxiii</sup>. The French strait is “detroit” which is a geographical and oceanic feature, as well as something like it, a difficult moment of transition *crossed* by someone, or a critical moment in a person’s destiny. It’s also the location of birth, the superior orifice of the pelvis, situated at the sacrum, through which the fetus has to pass in order to be born (“what a word” indeed! how can I even begin to read a word that so thoroughly outreads itself already!?). The French “detroit” also shares a homophonic proximity that occurs in the English strait/straight duo, but it is split between two words, 1) “Etroit” is strait in the sense of straight and narrow, in both the moral and the physical sense. It also connotes intimacy, referring to something like a very “etroit” space between two people. 2) “Droit” is “right”, again, in both the physical and moral sense. It’s interesting too, that *Tresor*<sup>xxiv</sup> defined the “right” of directionality in relation to the body, or to the heart, “the privileged place of metaphor”, as Cixous says somewhere. It is also ‘right’ in the sense of truthful, like *straight up*, or as the French say so eloquently, “comme il faut”; such a succinct phrase that requires so much attention thanks to the ubiquity of its iterability, applying at once to nothing and to everything, *as it must (be)*.

This crossing of writers, of friends, is laced into the text not only there at the date, at their date, but elsewhere too, before, arriving too soon, or wait, too late, I mean, after, I mean, before,<sup>xxv</sup> as *if* he were already remembering something that has not yet happened (is there not something of Cixous’ chronology here too?), “writing to it from a lower corner of the map, right at the bottom of the world, in sight of *Tierra del Fuego*, in the Magellan strait, in memory of the caravels. In memory of him for whom everything turned out so badly, once

he'd gone through the strait. Poor Magellan, you can say that again. Because I can still see those caravels. On writing to him from afar *as if* someone were waiting for the new Messiah, that is, a 'happy event'". A date with Cixous, Derrida marks his calendar here, so that he can write about the strait later, as I have done before when I quoted page 51. The strait is both here and there and his and hers, and he pre-emptively echoes what she wrote before, I never knew an echo could come before a sound. What was Cixous' quote, I mean, Derrida's quote, I mean, Cixous' quote, again?: "the passage through not-seeing, always there has been a threshold, swim across the strait between the blind continent and the seeing continent, between two worlds, a step taken, come from outside, another step [un pas encore]..."<sup>xxvi</sup>. Who is the strait-swimmer, I thought it was Magellan, but no, it's the myopic. At once Derrida is playing on his own economy, his relationship to and reappropriation of Cixous' economy, while also leaving something intact in her: remember that Cixous' myopic, her myopic's myopia has an "operation" at a particular "hour" on a particular "date" that constitutes her "crossing".

There's something of the spirit of the adventurer in Cixous' text, something of Magellan's spirit. They both have in common the experience of a crossing that concerns a particular kind of chronology that always seems to annul itself at the moment of its own fulfillment because it seeks to go elsewhere, east, to travel to another world. Just as Magellan makes his home his foreign, unreachable land the moment he crosses the ocean, Cixous can never move past her veil, her myopia. The moment her myopia unveils itself, it becomes an object of mourning, an unreachable, foreign land. The criss-crossing of metaphors in the in-between crossing of Derrida and Cixous' text operates in this same space, each reiteration of the figure-crossing, the crossing-figure, tends to locate its meaning, its reference, elsewhere: later on in the text, or before, or in the others' writing; never does it seem to gather itself, to affirm that it is in every event one and the same crossing. Each goes east. In footnote 2 we

have noted that Derrida names this locating-elsewhere of a moment of referential meaning as the “date”: “(what does not return, what is not repeated, promised experience of memory as promise, experience of ruin or ashes.)”<sup>xxvii</sup>. What of the date of writing emerges from the figure of crossing? In other words, to what extent can our reading of Derrida and Cixous’ relation to their other prompt *Veils* to be seen as an allegory of its own writing?

Cross the crossing, try to get at it, what does this crossing mean? It’s so hard to understand, this crossing is at once itself and something else—both the land from whence it came and the land where it is going. All of a sudden this word “crossing” seems both near and far, familiar and strange, heimlich und unheimlich. Written here and written elsewhere, it is iterable, transformable figure, bit of wax, how can it stay the same and change? The crossing as both that which takes her through her myopia towards the world and the operation that displaces her myopia. There is something similar about these two experiences. They constantly *reiterates* itself. To return (cross) to the text in which Derrida names the date as the time of his own writing, or as a concern of his own writing, his own writing writing his writing, I quote, “the power that *there is*, as language or as writing, is that a singular mark should also be repeatable, iterable, as mark. It then begins to differ from itself sufficiently to become exemplary and thus involve a certain generality. The economy of exemplary iterability is itself formalizing... this condensation of history, of language, of the encyclopedia, remains here indissociable from an *absolutely* singular event, an *absolutely* singular signature, and therefore also of a date of language, of an autobiographical inscription... Precisely because the trait, date, or signature—in short, the irreplaceable and untranslatable singularity of the unique—is iterable as such, it both does and does not form part of the marked set”<sup>xxviii</sup>. The crossing, its iteration, plays out its own iteration. Derrida and Cixous together accomplish the impossible: inscribe and reinscribe a crossing that is both theirs and Magellan’s, *Veils*’ and history’s that insistently re-enacts this singular unique

moment over and over again. Not only that, its own announcement at each date plays out the chain in which it is inscribed, like DNA, insofar as it references the moment which brought it into being: this strange chronology in which the date never arrives on time. The “later on” that is a past packed into a future that is nowhere. This crossing is a trope of the trope, the language of a language. It writes its own writing. Is a writing that writes itself somehow more apt to write about what it is not? —as though writing were not (only) writing—as though it were not enough to name this unnamable thing and rename it, “the other”. One must try to get their fingers on it—not from its side, because that’s trying to touch something untouchable, which is futile, but from our side. Not *what is* this other, but where does this other reside, how are we looking at it from where we are?

Let me reiterate. Derrida writes in the same essay, a few pages later, “No doubt all language refers to something other than itself or to language as something other.”<sup>xxxix</sup> These are the terms upon which a text, a literary text in particular, resists itself, or rather resists being only itself: the terms upon which a transcendental reading is not only possible but necessary. It serves as a kind of condition of literature or of literary meaning. Without yet crossing, I’ll mention, that deMan writes in an essay that shares at least one word with the context from which I pulled this last quote, “resistance”, “It is therefore not *a priori* certain that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language.”<sup>xxx</sup> Like the veil and the tallith these two moments in two texts signed by two colleagues, two friends, contradict one other. In one it is certain the language refers to something other than itself, and in the other it is certain that language refers to itself. Wait, I said, *like the veil and the tallith*. And like the veil and the tallith, as different as these two citations may be, they converge, around the word “resistance”. In the first instance, resistance is that which works against a transcendental reading, in other words, a language that refers only to itself (and thus “annuls” itself). In the other, resistance takes the shape of a self-interrogation, or self-

reflexivity, a language that refers to itself. As though at the meeting point of linguistic representation that refers to another and linguistic representation that refers to itself there were resistance, like a crossing, keeping the two both distinct and intact.

It is interesting too that Derrida in his *Strange* essay, seems to locate this negotiation that plays like a resistance, in literature. Interesting in particular because of a peculiar word that appears and reappears in *Veils* like an incantation, the word *Voila*, which is a pun. It appears both in Cixous' text and in Derrida's. We have this word in English and it means the same thing as in French, strangely enough—there's no (need for a) translation. It almost means nothing, or it means whatever came just before it. Or sometimes even less than that—I can barely describe it. The French utter it the same breath as a sigh, meaning both, “there you have it” and “nothing to be said.” A word that is only a word, that is to say, not even a word. But like almost every word in a Derridean or Cixousian text, it acts more than once, has a double meaning. *Voila* is a pun, and in that, it means pun. It also means *Voile-la*, or “Veil there”, “There is the veil.” “*Voila* the whole question, every word counts”<sup>xxxix</sup>, as if to say, *la*, *there*, there's my poem, there's my veil that makes reference to something that it is not, but remains inalienably singular, itself. The play on words plays too on the iterability of language; a word, but so much more than a word, but also a word.

*Voila*, then, in a text that makes reference to itself insofar as it makes reference to the other, is resistance—this play between the other and the same that divides the veil and the tallith and keeps a language together. And there then, too, in a self-referencing text, is the other, is death. The mourning that I referenced earlier that maintains the possible-as-possible, the other-as-other: whatever is not linguistic representation lies at the heart of linguistic representation. But wait—this funny relationship with death, Orpheus chasing Eurydice... this is not the domain of philosophy, it's literature. Does a philosophical text which resists itself, questions its own meaning suddenly become literature? Certainly not. However,

perhaps here lies one of many points of intersection between philosophy and literature. This intersection is a very wide chasm, or rather, not so wide, razor thin, but very very deep and I will not attempt to fully delimit it here since, as Derrida says, “If every literary text plays and negotiates the suspension of referential naivety, of *thetic* referentiality ... each text does so differently”—sorry, I’m catching up, Derrida says here that a literary text *resists*, it refers to itself, or rather to its other, to what it refers to, maybe, how it does so. In other words, if each literary text develops a relationship to its own resistance, its way of *crossing*, it does it in a way that is absolutely singular. (And I’ll speak too soon and say that there is something similar about the indeterminate and the infinite). However, I think Cixous and Derrida agree with me that there are certain authors who resist more ardently, Cixous calls them writers who write the “passage”<sup>xxxii</sup>, Cixous names “Aeschylus to Clarice Lispector or to Derrida, passing by Montaigne and Stendahl”. Or maybe Derrida would put on this same list certain authors who write texts “whose logic is always ready to reverse itself or subvert itself” or texts that “produce deconstructive effects”<sup>xxxiii</sup>, writers like “Nietzsche, Joyce, Ponge, Bataille, Artaud... Woolf, Stein, Cixous” and I would certainly add Beckett

and Celan. Celan’s poetry is an opus that strongly questions its relationship to its own referentiality and its own language, and it also reeks pungently of death. It’s written here in this alliance: the Other, the “wholly other” and its “original gift” to, or within, the same. Paul Celan, or rather, Lacoue-Labarthes, or rather, Paul Celan writes, “The poem wants to reach the Other, it needs this Other, it needs a vis-à-vis. It searches it out and addresses it.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> This Other is also iterated like “pure wanting-to-say nothing”<sup>xxxv</sup>, as the other of life, birth, I mean, death: “death is the pro-spect of the gift of birth. It is thus a paradoxical experience of birth (into the world)—perhaps even of the birth *of* the world. In the firmest possible manner, Celan calls this birth ‘perceiving,’ or thinking, and assigns its task to poetry.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Cixous’ strait was a birthplace, is a birthplace. Cixous, a woman-mother who refers to herself writing

in her “poet-philosopher voice” somewhere. In a sense, we could say that Lacoue-Labarthe has assigned Celan to assign a certain task to poetry and as such has indirectly assigned this task to Cixous as well. And if his task is a birth whose pro-spect is death, I can only assume to align death with an Other who is an incarnation of a thinking of the same... and I wouldn't be the first.

And it's around the death-pole that this work, and *the* work, of Cixous and Derrida, part philosophy, part literature circulates:

The first time I saw Jacques Derrida (it must have been in 1962) he was walking on the crest of a mountain at a rapid and sure pace, from left to right, I was in Arcachon, I was reading (it must have been *Force and Signification*), from where I was I saw him clearly advancing black on the light sky, feet on the edge, the crest, was blade-thin, clearly traced, he was walking on the peak, from afar I saw him, his progression on the limit between the mountain and the sky melted the one in the other, he must have been following a path no wider than the mark of a pencil tip. He did not run, rapid, he *made* his way, *all* the way of the crests.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

With Helene watching all the while, this near-death experience, which has Derrida riding the line between one side of a mountain and the other. It's funny, the way she tells it, she is the one writing (riding) the line, his line, from afar, looking at Derrida who is so close to himself; or rather they are riding (writing) each others' lines. Perhaps it is only possible to speak of this space where poetry and philosophy intersect as a metaphor because maybe it is a metaphor, or is metaphor. Metaphor, or I'll broaden the scope so as to not fall off the

mountain, the kind of writing that Celan has assigned to the poet, has a relationship to death that appears at the intersection, or rather the non-intersection—since this intersection is precisely the place, the non-place, where each does not come together with itself—of poetry and philosophy. Helene's first experience with Jacques was also Jacques first experience with Helene, and so, she is not only writing her poetry, or her philosophy, but his poetry, his philosophy. In this way, Jacques Derrida does not walk the crest. Helene Cixous does not walk the crest. Jacques Derrida and Helene Cixous walk the crest together—almost forming the ridge that separates philosophy from poetry. I walk into a bookstore and I look for books by Helene Cixous and Jacques Derrida, and as close as they may be, their works are shelved on opposite sides of the bookstore—the institutions of literature and philosophy has them divided, on two sides of a mountain. A gender/ed difference.

Likewise, each on their side, the other side looks different. (I leap) Death looks different: “Him: he fears his own death for others. Me: I fear the death of others”<sup>xxxviii</sup> Is this to say that Derrida writes the other through the side of the same while Cixous writes the same through the side of the other? I don't know. I can't write my own death or the death of the other, or rather, that's what I've been trying to do all along.

I'll put it this way: Derrida died before Cixous, but writes, after, “*Voilà* what happens.... here it is, the other's.... Everything had begun the night before. I had just read *Savoir*. And before closing my eyes to give in to sleep, I let myself be invaded, as they say, gently, in gentleness, by a childhood memory, a true childhood memory, the opposite of a dream, and here I embroider no longer.” I'll write Derrida's *Silkworm*, the childhood memory he recounts at the tail end of *Veils*. Sew here in Derrida's parallel text; I'll say it again:

*Veil*<sup>xxxix</sup> is not a book by Helene Cixous. *Veils* is not a book by Jacques Derrida. *Veils* is a book by Helene Cixous and Jacques Derrida. *Veils* is a book of two: both authors

not the other, two voices, two genres, two sexes too. *Veils* ends with a trope; Jacques Derrida begins his *Silkworms* with a “link”: “Before I was thirteen, before ever having worn a tallith and having even dreamed of my own, I cultivated (what’s the link?) Silkworms”<sup>xi</sup>. Leaving aside for the moment that both cultivation and silkworms function as “links”, both synonymously and antonymously at varying moments in *Veils*, this first phrase in isolation forges what will become a “prehistoric” alliance: a metaphor. What happens to Derrida’s silkworm and its substantiative counterpart, cultivation, as it traverses and mutates (through) the text?

In the beginning there was the silkworm, a mere promise, or a kind of promise that is based on indeterminacy. At first the silkworm secretes something, and navigates its way through its growth based on little interruptions in its body: there are points of discrepancy between what Derrida as a child sees of the silkworm and what the silkworm is. If this makes him the silkworm’s foreigner, unable to know what the silkworm grows, it also locates him in a state of constant ambiguous unresolve, “the secret of this secret over there”<sup>xli</sup>. The silkworm, his silkworm, his self, is entrenched in otherness, in complete otherness, located “at the infinite distance of the animal, of this little innocent member, so foreign yet so close in its incalculable distance”.

But the silkworm does not stay the same. In fact, it does the exact opposite. It becomes other, it goes away, it turns into a moth. The silkworm goes into a cocoon, undergoes an operation, comes out of the cocoon, and suddenly the silkworm becomes a thing of the past, “an unknown blood, a red almost black, came from within to soften and penetrate the skin, then open the way for the moth’s wings, at this moment of awakening as much as of birth... unforeseeable reappropriation.”<sup>xlii</sup> So much could be said about the silkworm’s new life as a moth, but one thing is that he is no longer a silkworm. It is not only a moth now, but is no longer not a silkworm. The piece is titled *A Silkworm of One’s Own* and this condition,

not of the moth or its birth, but of the death of the silkworm, its no longer not being a silkworm, and likewise, of Derrida's no longer being able to speak of the silkworm, becomes both the node and the mode of his silence. What happens to the silkworm now that it is a moth—now that the silkworm is not what it was, but is now the opposite of a silkworm, and is therefore opposed to itself? Derrida mourns, the worm's old foreignness becomes foreign to himself; the worm is no longer, and that also means he no can longer write about it, "I will never tell you that tale. I have promised... As though evil would only happen again with death, or only later, too late, so much later"<sup>xliii</sup>. The movement of the silkworm in *A Silkworm of One's Own* traces an inversion in which the worm begins as the trope of Derrida's otherness, and slowly, as worm becomes moth, Derrida no longer writes the silkworm as an other, he writes the not-worm-moth as an other insofar as he stops writing. At the moment of the unveiling of his silkworm, his text suddenly becomes intangible again, too far away, too early, too late.

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<sup>ii</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Adieu; To Emmanuel Levinas*. trans: Brault, Pascale-Anne & Naas, Michael. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press: 1999.

<sup>ii</sup> Beckett, Samuel. *Three Novels: Molloy ; Malone dies ; The unnamable*. New York : Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1997.

<sup>iii</sup> *Veils*. Cixous, Helene and Derrida, Jacques. trans: Bennington, Geoffrey. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2001

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid.* p. 3 (Cixous)

<sup>v</sup> *ibid.* p 6., p. 7

<sup>vi</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>vii</sup> *ibid.* p. 16

<sup>viii</sup> *Veils*. Derrida. p. 78

<sup>ix</sup> *ibid.* p. 64

<sup>x</sup> *ibid.* p. 63

<sup>xi</sup> *ibid.* p. 43

<sup>xii</sup> deMan, Paul. "Reading; Proust". *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1979. p. 58

<sup>xiii</sup> *ibid.* p. 78

<sup>xiv</sup> deMan, Paul. "Rhetoric of Tropes; Nietzsche". *Allegories of Reading*. p. 112.

<sup>xv</sup> Cixous, Helene. *Veils*. p. 9

<sup>xvi</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Veils*. 49.

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- <sup>xvii</sup> *ibid.* p. 50
- <sup>xviii</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "By Force of Mourning". *The Work of Mourning*. trans: Brault, Pascale-Anne and Nass, Michael. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2001. p. 144
- <sup>xix</sup> Derrida writes about his own task in *The Strange Institution Called Literature*, "to write so as to put into play or to keep the singularity of the date (what does not return, what is not repeated, promised experience of memory as promise, experience of ruin or ashes)." (424)
- <sup>xx</sup> Cixous, Helene. *Veils*. p. 8
- <sup>xxi</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Veils*. p. 24.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *ibid.* 51
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Derrida quoting Cixous. *Veils*. 51.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Le Tresor de la Langue Francaise* is an astoundingly comprehensive on-line french dictionary: [atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm](http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm)
- <sup>xxv</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Veils*. p. 24 again, I'm jumping (*je saute*) back and forth.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Derrida quoting Cixous. *Veils*. p. 51 again.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "This Strange Institution Called Literature". *Acts of Literature*. trans: Bennington, Geoffrey and Bowlby, Anne. New York: Routledge. 1992. p. 42
- <sup>xxviii</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>xxix</sup> *ibid.* p. 48.
- <sup>xxx</sup> deMan, Paul. "The Resistance to theory". Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. p. 10.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Derrida *Veils*. p. 34
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Cixous, Helene. *Stigmata*. trans: MacGillivray, Catherine A.F. Oxford: Routledge. 2005 p. 91
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Derrida. *Strange Institution Called Literature*.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe quotes Celan in: Lacoue-Labarthes. *Poetry as Experience*. trans: Tarnowski, Andrea. California: Stanford University Press. 1999. p. 63.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> *ibid.* p. 20
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> *ibid.* p. 105
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Cixous, Helen. *Rootprints; Memory and Life Writing*. trans: Prenowitz, Eric. London: Routledge. 1997 p. 79
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Derrida. *Veils*. 87
- <sup>xxxix</sup> *Veils*. Cixous, Helene and Derrida, Jacques. trans: Bennington, Geoffrey. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2001
- <sup>xl</sup> *ibid.* p. 3 (Cixous)
- <sup>xli</sup> *ibid.* 89
- <sup>xlii</sup> *ibid.* p.91
- <sup>xliii</sup> *ibid.* p. 16