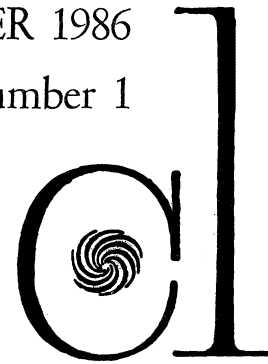


WINTER 1986
Volume 38, Number 1



JANE MARIE TODD

Autobiography and the Case of the Signature: Reading Derrida's *Glas*

JACQUES DERRIDA'S *Glas* seems to defy the familiar categories of genre. Each page is divided into two columns: on the left, a meticulous discussion of Hegel's philosophical works, from his early writings to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Aesthetics*; on the right, a fragmented, lyrical celebration of Jean Genet's literary writings. Straddling the distance between philosophy and literature, *Glas* combines widely diverse writing styles, modes, levels of discourse and even typefaces. Each of the two columns splits again to allow for marginalia, supplementary comments, lengthy quotations, and dictionary definitions. Paragraphs break off in mid-sentence to make way for undigested material, excerpts from Hegel's correspondence or translations of Poe's poetry, only to resume several pages later. Despite or because of its "defiance" of categorization, this curious and challenging text offers a direct contribution to literary theory: in both form and subject matter, it details a new way of viewing genre definitions.

In his discussion of Genet's autobiographical writings, Derrida suggests that the status of the signature is a "préliminaire indispensable à l'explication de la formalité (par exemple, 'littéraire') avec tous les juges musclés qui l'interrogent depuis des instances apparemment extrinsèques (question du sujet—biographique, historique, économique, politique, etc.—classé). Quant à la textualité générale, le seing représente peut-être le cas, le lieu de recoupement (topique et tropique) de l'intrinsèque et de l'extrinsèque" (pp. 9-10, right column).¹

¹ *Glas*, (Paris, 1974).

To realize the role that the signature plays in the discourse of literary criticism, and in autobiography criticism in particular, one need only look at Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, one of a half-dozen books that Lejeune has written on autobiography. In his generic definition, he argues that the author of an autobiography must be *identical* to both the narrator and the main character of the work in order for it to conform to the genre. He adds that "il n'y a ni transition ni latitude. Une identité est, ou n'est pas. Il n'y a pas de degré possible et tout doute entraîne une conclusion négative" (p. 15)². Lejeune grounds autobiography in the honesty and sincerity of the author's intentions to truthfully convey his own life and personality. But if his notion of "identity" is necessarily founded on the immediacy of a subject present to itself, this is quickly supplemented by an exterior sign that would guarantee this intention. He thus makes an appeal to the institutional value of the proper name: the name that appears on the cover of the book must be identical to that of the narrator and the main character *in* the book. That proper name, Lejeune claims, is the "seule marque dans le texte d'un indubitable hors-texte, renvoyant à une personne réelle, qui demande ainsi qu'on lui attribue, en dernier ressort, la responsabilité de l'énonciation de tout le text écrit" (Lejeune, p. 23). The empirical existence of the author who bears the same name as the narrator and main character thus becomes the sole means of authenticating the "pact."

Lejeune makes it clear that by "personne réelle," he means one "dont l'existence est attestée par l'état civil et vérifiable" (p. 23). It is thus to a legal contract assumed by the author and guaranteed not only by the signature but by the state that Lejeune must eventually have recourse. Everything comes to depend on the proper name, the signature, and eventually on the legal status of the subject as author.

Although Lejeune has greatly underestimated the problematic status of the signature, especially in relation to a literary discourse, he has identified the essential issue involved in autobiography. For whatever the strategy of establishing a genre definition, whether by locating it in the reader, in shared conventions, in formal characteristics, or in the historical transformations of a general structure, the issues inevitably involve the supposed identity between the author and his main character, and the opposition between referential (or, more recently, performative) and figural modes. These suppositions, in turn, are eventually grounded on certain assumptions about the relation between signature and text.

Elizabeth Bruss' *Autobiographical Acts*,³ to take a recent example,

² *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, (Paris, 1974).

³ *Autobiographical Acts*, (Baltimore, 1976).

appears more subtle than Lejeune's work; it is, in fact, simply more oblique. She notes at one point that "the title page or mode of publication alone may be enough to suggest its illocutionary force" (p. 10), a phrasing less strong than Lejeune's insistence that the signature on the title page always determines the genre. But in the next paragraph she adds that "in fact, we must have something on the order of rules which accounts for our ability to recognize that there is something wrong, paradoxical in a title like *Everybody's Autobiography*." These rules, in turn, invoke the author's "individual responsibility" for the authorship of the text, his shared identity with the "individual to whom reference is made via the subject matter of the text," the "existence of this individual, independent of the text itself . . . susceptible to appropriate verification procedures," and so on (p. 11). All of these criteria, as Lejeune very rightly points out, rest on the signature-function, the articulation between text and culture or institution.

Considering autobiography as fictional, as Northrop Frye and others have done, does not solve the legal and ethical problems of the author's responsibility, but only displaces them. The signature is effaced in favor of the text, except where it is a question of the legal functions of the canon (the assumed integrity of an author's corpus, the critical literature attached to that corpus, and the aesthetic and historical information that provides the background for "formal" interpretations), when the signature is simply reinvoked. The situation is not essentially different if, with Barbara Herrnstein Smith, one locates the distinction between autobiography and fiction in the reader. Here, it is simply the reader's responsibility to validate the signature, to recognize the author's responsibility by means of a countersignature, or to remove the text from its historical context by amputating the author's signature, and hence read the text as "fictive."⁴ As long as autobiography criticism fails to address the problematic of the signature, the fundamental issue, the "indispensable preliminary" to understanding what autobiography is about, will not have been addressed.⁵

Derrida's strategy is to show how Genet's autobiographical writings comment on and eventually undermine the very assumptions about the role of the signature which inform all definitions of autobiography. Derrida takes on the additional task of commenting on the way his own signature, the name that signs *Glas*, operates, just as he claims Genet has done. The result is not only a theoretical critique of the question of the signature, but a reevaluation or displacement of the genre of auto-

⁴ *On the Margins of Discourse*, (Chicago and London, 1978), p. 48 and passim.

⁵ See also Paul de Man's discussion of these questions in "Autobiography as De-facement" *MLN*, 94 (1979), pp. 919-30, an article that has influenced me on a number of points.

biography, and a revised genre definition that includes *Glas* as one of its examples.

The first step is to question the assumption that the signature is a mark in the text that points to an extratextual source of the text. For if it lies within, the signature “ne signe plus, elle opère comme un effet à l’intérieur de l’objet, joue comme une pièce dans ce qu’elle prétend s’appropriier ou reconduire à l’origine. La filiation se perd. Le seing se défalque” (p. 10, right column). In this case, it is not a signature at all, but simply a name, a word, itself a bit of text. It cannot guarantee an ultimate signified, cannot function as the expression of an author’s intentions or as the source of the text. If, on the other hand, the signature is simply outside the text, “elle émancipe aussi bien le produit qui se passe d’elle, du nom du père ou de la mère dont il n’a pas besoin pour fonctionner. La filiation se dénonce encore, elle est toujours trahie par ce qui la remarque” (p. 10, right column). If the signature is simply outside the text, then the text does not depend on it and is already complete without it.

Drawing on a persistent metaphor that he analyzed in “La Pharmacie de Platon,” Derrida describes the relation of author to text as one of filiation. Throughout *Glas* he uses and distorts Plato’s metaphor: whereas for Plato the parent in question is always the father, Derrida suggests here that the author is alternatively the father and the mother of the text. Furthermore, since the signature takes the place of the absent author, it becomes its surrogate parent, watching over it in the real parent’s place. The duties of paternity fall to the signature itself.

These distortions of Plato’s model allow Derrida to assimilate his discussion of the family, and of Genet’s family in particular, to the question of the signature. As it happens, “Genet,” the author’s *nom de plume*, is also the name of the mother: illegitimate and abandoned by his parents at birth, all he knows of his genealogy is the name “Gabrielle Genet” that appears on his birth certificate. In the mother who abandons her bastard child, leaving only her name, Derrida finds a figure for the author/text/signature relationship.

Having established the two possible functions of the signature, Derrida adds that whether the signature lies within or outside the text, “la perte secrétée du reste” is recuperated by the signature. The text is somehow reappropriated by the name that signs it. In fact, “tout le texte . . . se rassemblerait dans tel ‘cerceuil vertical’ . . . comme l’érection d’un seing” (p. 10, right column). The “cerceuil vertical,” an allusion to Genet’s *Miracle de la Rose*, is a prison: the signature would imprison the text, enclose it in a tomb. There is, then, a certain conflict between the text and the signature: the text seems to be able to function on its own; it seems to kill off the father or mother that produces

it so as to engage in the free play of signification. Nevertheless, the signature tries to imprison the text, to make it a tomb or a dwelling for the signature. Derrida compares this conflict to a reciprocal work of mourning: "La signature reste demeure et tombe. Le texte travaille à en faire son deuil. Et réciproquement" (p. 11, right column). Signature and text work against each other, each trying to bury the other.

In the next paragraph, Derrida offers a definition of literary discourse. Although at first it seems to have little to do with the question of the signature, the discussion that follows makes the connection clear: "Le grand enjeu du discours—je dis bien discours—littéraire: la transformation patiente, rusée, quasi animale ou végétale, monumentale, dérisoire aussi mais se tournant plutôt en dérision, de son nom propre, *rebus*, en choses, en nom de choses" (p. 11, right column). The passage presents itself as a general formulation of the nature of literature, or rather, of literary *discourse*. If literature is conceived as a set of norms, practices, and conventions, literary discourse converts those norms into figures in the text in order to demonstrate how language operates. For this reason, literary discourse is essentially subversive: it undermines language, in particular, metalanguage, by constantly turning against itself.

The phrase "quasi animale ou végétale" also refers to the two meanings of Genet's proper name: a *genet* is a kind of horse native to Spain, whereas a *genêt* is a type of flower called "broom." Much of the right column of *Glas* is concerned with how Genet incorporates his name into his texts by representing it as flowers or horses. The passage thus suggests that one of the conventions that literary discourse puts into play is precisely the signature: the transformation in question is also of the *author's* proper name into a thing. In fact, this passage immediately follows the first use of Genet's name in *Glas* and announces the discussion of the act of naming (of others and himself) in Genet's texts. This nomination is precisely the kind that Derrida describes in relation to literary discourse: it consists of transforming proper names into names of things or using common nouns to refer to individuals.

It is no accident that most of Derrida's examples are drawn from Genet's autobiographical writings, since the fundamental issue in defining the genre involves the relation of the "I" in the text to the name that signs it. The founding law of autobiography is folded into the work.

The phrase "quasi animale ou végétale," in addition to alluding to Genet's proper name, also echoes the first of two passages from Hegel that Derrida quotes in the first pages of the left column of *Glas*. In fact, he writes that these "figures en train de disparaître" (p. 7, left column) are the only parts of Hegel's corpus that he will "donner à lire," and although he does not discuss the passage explicitly until the very end of

the book, it takes up the issues that will surface in the discussion of Genet's signature.

The passage in question occurs in Hegel's discussion of religion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Natural religion is the first phase of the development toward absolute religion, and the religion of plants and animals is the second moment in the syllogism of natural religion. Derrida focuses on the religion of *flowers*, which is not even a moment, only part of the religion of plants and animals. The religion of flowers is innocent, whereas the religion of animals is guilty (*coupable*). In fact, the religion of flowers "procède à sa propre mise en culpabilité, à sa propre animalisation" (p. 8, left column). This is because the flower, not yet a self, a subject, a destructive being-for-itself, nonetheless is the representation (*Vorstellung*) of such a self: "L'innocence de la *religion des fleurs*, qui est seulement représentation de soi-même sans le soi-même (*die nur selbstlose Vorstellung des Selbsts*) passe dans le sérieux de la vie agonistique, dans la culpabilité de la *religion des animaux*; la quiétude de l'impuissance de l'individualité contemplative passe dans l'être-pour-soi destructeur" (Hegel, quoted in *Glas*, p. 8, left column).

The passage from the religion of flowers to the religion of animals corresponds to the passage from *genêt* to *genet*, plant to animal. That is in fact the order that Derrida follows in discussing Genet's signatures in the first pages of *Glas*. The Hegelian passage that he leaves out at this point, and only takes up at the very end of *Glas*, is the moment that immediately precedes the religion of plants and animals (the first moment of the syllogism); it in fact corresponds to the transformation of Genet into *genêt*, of the signature as origin or source of the text to the name as figure within the text. For the first moment of natural religion is the religion of the sun, and the characteristic feature of this religion is that it does not involve representation or figuration: "Cette première figure de la religion naturelle figure l'absence de figure, un soleil purement visible" (p. 264, left column). The movement from the religion of the sun to the religion of plants and animals is the passage from the realm of pure phenomenality to the realm of figuration. The development of religion in the *Phenomenology* proceeds as a development of the figure—as representation, work of art, language, and so forth. Moreover, the stage that follows the last phase of religion (i.e. absolute religion) is absolute knowing and it, too, is characterized by the absence of figure. "La figure se dérode à l'origine et à la fin de la religion; dont le devenir décrit littéralement une consommation de la figure, entre deux soleils" (p. 264, left column). This stage of absolute knowing, then, which is also the last section of Hegel's text, brings an end to figuration or representation. If the development of religion is assimilated to the

operation of reading (of reading the *Phenomenology*, for example), we find that Hegel's ideal text is made up of figures or symbols that are consumed as they are apprehended; it is the model of a text that always returns to its source, to its author or to the signature that guarantees the author's intentions. The figures in the texts would finally be consumed by the light of the sun, leaving no residue to be read.

Tracing the passage from the religion of the sun to the religion of flowers, Derrida offers an alternative to this apocalyptic mode of reading: "Alors au lieu de tout brûler, on commence à aimer les fleurs. La religion des fleurs suit la religion du soleil" (p. 268, left column). This, then, is the model of reading that Genet's texts institute: they transform the signature as source, sun, non-figure, into the proper name as flower, that is, the proper name as common noun.

Genet's signature becomes a flower in two senses. First, the word *genêt* refers to a type of flower, and the proliferation of flowers in his texts can be taken as so many signatures. Secondly, the transformation of proper name into common noun is itself a rhetorical figure, that is, a *flower* of rhetoric, namely an antonomasia, a type of synecdoche that consists in taking a proper name for a common noun, or the reverse (p. 204, right column). As a result, *genêt* is not only a figure for Genet's signature but a figure for figuration in general. The flower *genêt* describes at once Genet's signature and the operation that allows the signature to be transformed into a thing. Furthermore, since the flower is "l'objet poétique par excellence" (Sartre, quoted in *Glas*, p. 21, right column), it can also stand as a figure for poetry or poetic language.

Derrida writes: "En apparence, cédant à la Passion de l'Écriture, Genet s'est fait une fleur. Et il a mis en terre, en très grande pompe, mais aussi comme une fleur, en sonnante le glas, son nom propre, les noms de droit commun, le langage, la vérité, le sens, la littérature, la rhétorique et, si possible, le reste" (p. 20, right column). Derrida claims, first, that Genet's use of antonomasia is a subversive activity: by figuring his signature as a thing in the text, Genet undermines the function of the signature which guarantees truth and meaning. And, since the flower of rhetoric, the antonomasia, is itself a flower (a *genêt*), it turns the expression "flowers of rhetoric" into a pun and so parodies rhetoric and poetry. No doubt Derrida is also alluding to other aspects of Genet's texts, for example, his use of mythological *topoi* and of sophisticated literary devices to render the life of the criminal-homosexual. That is why, in Derrida's formulation of what is at stake in literary discourse, the phrase "la transformation . . . quasi animale ou végétale . . . de son nom propre" can refer just as well to Genet's proper name as to the proper name of literature. The use of antonomasia is only one example

of Genet's practice of commenting on and undermining literature by parodying it.

Yet Derrida qualifies his appraisal of Genet's use of the signature, suggesting that the subversive aspect is only an appearance. If we take Derrida's discussion of Hegel as a commentary on Genet's practice of *antonomasia*, we discover the reason for this qualification.

The plant remains "innocent" for Hegel because it is brought out of itself by an external force rather than by an internal, subjective act: "La plante est arrachée à elle-même, vers l'extérieur, par la lumière," that is, by the sun. The plant's flower, however, "libère un progrès dans le mouvement de réappropriation et de subjectivation" (p. 274, left column.) The flower is not only acted upon, altered, made exterior *by* light, it also produces its own light as color. Although the flower's color is only a figure (a *Vorstellung*) of self-representation and not true subjectivity, it is the first step toward subjectivity in the form of self-representation or self-figuration. This self-figuration, as we have seen, involves guilt and reappropriation, in particular, the reappropriation of the sun. This raises the question: if Genet's use of *antonomasia* is a self-figuration of this kind, is it also a reappropriation? Does the transformation of the signature as sun into a flower involve the reappropriation of the sun *into* the text? Are Genet's flowers also little suns?

This is in fact one of the major issues that Derrida addresses in his discussion. Genet's self-figuration is only one case of his use of *antonomasia*. In general, his literary texts glorify thievery, cowardice, betrayal, prostitution, poverty, homosexuality, all negative values of what he calls "votre monde." Derrida explains that Genet often defines this "opération 'magnifiante'" as an act of naming (p. 11, right column). This leads him to examine the function of naming in Genet's writing. As it happens, this naming is also an *antonomasia*, since he often converts common nouns into proper names, calling his characters, for example, "Mimosa, Querelle, Divine, Yeux-Verts, Culafroy, Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs, Divers, etc" (p. 13, right column):

Quand Genet donne à ses personnages des noms propres, des espèces de singularités qui sont des noms communs majuscules, que fait-il? . . . Arrache-t-il violemment une identité sociale, un droit de propriété absolue? Est-ce là l'opération politique la plus effective, la pratique révolutionnaire la plus signifiante? ou bien, mais voici la rengaine des contraires qui se recourent sans cesse, les baptise-t-il avec la pompe et le sacré—la gloire est son mot—qu'il confère toujours à la nomination? (p. 14, 5, right column)

It is not a question of deciding between these two possibilities. Genet's use of *antonomasia*, like his glorification and aesthetization of the underworld in general, is both an expropriation and a reappropriation, a decapitation and a "recapitation," a dissemination and a recapitalization

(p. 19, right column). “Quand Genet donne des noms, il baptise et dénonce à la fois” (p. 12, right column). The use of antonomasia simply foregrounds what is true of naming in general: no name is absolutely proper to the person it designates; it operates within a system, classifies the individual, grants him a place within language and within the state. Further, the proper name can always be used to refer to someone else, can be repeated, expropriated and reappropriated. In this sense, antonomasia uncovers the lie of the proper name which, like private property, is presumed to belong properly to someone. Antonomasia is, then, a kind of theft, but one that reveals the thievery involved in the original act of naming.

On the other hand, antonomasia is quite literally an appropriation, the making proper of a common noun. By adorning the word with a capital letter, one attempts to take it out of circulation, out of the system of language, and make it one's own. From this point of view, antonomasia is a kind of theft, but like the orphan Genet who steals, not because he scorns private property but because he wishes to possess something that is truly his,⁶ the use of the rhetorical figure simply reaffirms the institutional status of the proper name. The use of antonomasia, then, like the “opération ‘magnifiante’” in general, is a double gesture that both calls into question the institution (of literature or of the proper name) and reaffirms it.

Having concluded the discussion of Genet's use of antonomasia in naming *others*, Derrida adds that “la division se complique à peine quand le dénominateur . . . s'institue ou s'érige lui-même dans sa propre signature. Habitat colossal: le chef-d'oeuvre” (p. 17, right column). In other words, Genet's transformation of his signature into a thing, a plant or animal, functions in the same (double) way as his naming of others. In the process, antonomasia emerges as the trope of literary authorship.

The major example of this trope is drawn from *Le Journal du Voleur*. Genet writes:

Je suis né à Paris le 19 décembre 1910. Pupille de l'Assistance Publique, il me fut impossible de connaître autre chose de mon état civil. Quand j'eus vingt et un ans, j'obtins un acte de naissance. Ma mère s'appelait Gabrielle Genet. Mon père reste inconnu . . . Quand je rencontre dans la lande . . . des fleurs de genêt, j'éprouve à leur égard une sympathie profonde . . . Je suis seul au monde, et je ne suis pas sûr de n'être pas le roi—peut-être la fée de ses fleurs . . . Elles savent que je suis leur représentant vivant . . . Elles sont mon emblème naturel . . .

Par [cette fleur] dont je porte le nom le monde végétal m'est familier. Je peux sans pitié considérer toutes les fleurs, elles sont de la famille.⁷

⁶ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet*, Vol. I of Genet's *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris, 1952-68), pp. 16-17.

⁷ *Le Journal du Voleur* (Paris, 1949), pp. 46, 47.

The passage begins with an account of Genet's civil and legal status and thus establishes his place in a genealogy and in an institution (the state). Yet Genet refuses that genealogy: taking on his mother's name and adorning it with a circumflex accent, he denies his heritage and establishes his own natural genealogy. The *antonomasia* serves to extract the proper name from its civil status and places it in the natural world; as a result, Genet becomes, if not the mother of flowers, at least their king or fairy. He scatters his name over a field of flowers and makes those flowers his family.

Derrida characterizes the operation whereby Genet takes on his mother's name in the following terms: "Je . . . me surnomme fleur (le baptême est une seconde naissance), je nais une fois de plus, je m'accouche comme une fleur. La race étant condamnée, l'accent circonflexe se sacre en ouvrant la bouche et tirant la langue . . . s'élève et se place lui-même en tête couronnée" (p. 203, right column). Thus, Genet becomes a mother, the mother of his own life, in taking on the name of his mother. "L'accent circonflexe" is Derrida's nickname for the "narrator" (as opposed to the author) of *Le Journal du Voleur*; the passage, then, also points to Genet's activity as a writer, his act of making himself into a rhetorical or poetical "flower" in his texts. Derrida thus displaces the commonplace notion of autobiography as the telling of a life (of one's birth and genealogy) to a different plane: Genet engages the specifically legal aspect of identity, only to refuse it in favor of a poetic or rhetorical one.

In one of the passages leading up to the "hymne au nom propre" (p. 193, right column) cited above, Genet, having described the baseness and poverty of his life of crime, explains: "Mon talent se développait de donner un sens sublime à une apparence si pauvre. (Je ne parle pas encore de talent littéraire)." This talent consists in creating a religion of abjection, a new, mythical world out of the criminal underworld he is thrown into. This talent for transforming his life anticipates his literary talent, since Genet's texts involve precisely a transformation of this sort. In the next paragraph, Genet compares his activities to that of a mother of a monstrous child. He writes:

Je me voulus semblable à cette femme qui, à l'abri des gens, chez elle conserva sa fille, une sorte de monstre hideux, difforme, grognant et marchant à quatre pattes, stupide et blanc. En accouchant, son désespoir fut tel sans doute qu'il devint l'essence même de sa vie. Elle décida d'aimer ce monstre, d'aimer la laideur sortie de son ventre où elle s'était élaborée, et de l'ériger dévotieusement . . . Avec des soins dévots, des mains douces malgré le cal des besognes quotidiennes, avec l'archarnement volontaire des désespérés elle s'opposa au monde, au monde elle opposa le monstre qui prit les proportions du monde et sa puissance.

In a footnote, Genet adds that

par les journaux j'appris qu'après quarante ans de dévouement cette mère arrosa d'essence—ou de pétrole—sa fille endormie, puis toute la maison et mit le feu. Le monstre (la fille) succomba. Des flammes on retira la vieille (75 ans) et elle fut sauvée, c'est-à-dire qu'elle comparut en Cour d'assises.⁸

Derrida once more takes this scene as a description of Genet's relation to his text. In taking on his mother's name, the name that he uses to sign his texts, Genet becomes the mother of his text, and by dispersing his name throughout it (through *antonomasia*), keeps it to himself, devotes himself to it, and finally, kills it off, keeps it away from "the world," from the reader :

Rêvant visiblement de devenir, à resonner, son propre (glas), d'assister à *son propre* enterrement après avoir accouché de lui-même ou opéré sa propre décollation, il aurait veillé à bloquer tout ce qu'il écrit dans la forme d'une tombe. D'une tombe qui se résume à son nom, dont la masse pierreuse ne déborde même plus les lettres, jaunes comme l'or ou comme la trahison, comme le *genêt* (p. 52, right column)

In this view, Genet's practice of *antonomasia* would stem from the desire for the proper, the wish to erect his signature into a tomb or dwelling or to shape his entire corpus into the tomb of his proper name. As his own mother, he would give birth to himself as a flower (a name or figure in a text) only to keep the text for himself :

Genet . . . aurait, le sachant ou non . . . silencieusement, laborieusement, minutieusement, obsessionnellement, compulsivement, avec les gestes d'un voleur dans la nuit, disposé ses signatures à la place de tous les objets manquants. Le matin, vous attendant à reconnaître les choses familières, vous retrouvez son nom partout, en grosses lettres, en petites lettres, en entier ou en morceaux, déformé ou recomposé. Il n'est plus là mais vous habitez son mausolée ou ses chiottes. (p. 51, right column)

Rather than a representation of a "life," the familiar thing one expects to find in an autobiography, Genet's writings have no other content than "literariness" itself, that is, the investigation of their own literary conventions, including the regulatory convention of the signature. Just as Genet scatters his name over a field of flowers by transforming it into a *genêt*, he disseminates his signature throughout the text, through the operation of *antonomasia*. He does nothing but sign with the flower of his proper name; his corpus is a sepulcher for the signature.

The question remains, however: does Genet *succeed* in signing his text? Can any text, even one littered with signatures, be ultimately governed, regulated by a signature? Summarizing his argument that the flowers in Genet's texts are anagrams or figures for the proper name, Derrida writes :

⁸ *Journal*, p. 29, 30.

Genet anagrammatise son propre, sème plus que tout autre et glane son nom sur quoi qu'il tombe. Glaner égale lire . . . Mais si cette (double) opération . . . était possible, absolument praticable ou centrale, si s'effectuait l'irrépressible désir qui l'agit (de mort ou de vie, cela revient ici au même), il n'y aurait ni texte ni reste. Encore moins celui-ci. Le résumé serait absolu, s'emporterait, s'enlèverait lui-même d'un coup d'aile. (pp. 55, 56, right column)

Genet's efforts to gather his dispersed signature back to himself, to reclaim his text, cannot but fail. The text falls; it escapes the prison of the signature; Derrida reads it and writes another text. Derrida gleans and glosses Genet's text, reads it; in so doing, he steals it away from its author.

A text, like a name (common or proper), can always be appropriated. One can always use another's text to describe oneself, or name oneself in feigning to name another. If Genet does not succeed entirely in signing his text, it is partly because Derrida also signs it, in an autobiography that appropriates the other into the self. This points to a second trope of autobiography, the chiasmus, a figure of the reader and not the author, or rather, the figure that blurs the distinction between writer and reader.

Following the preliminary discussion of the signature, Derrida returns to Genet's autobiographical essay, "Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers et foutu aux chiottes" which serves as a model of sorts for *Glas*. Describing the double-columned form of the short essay, he writes: "X, chiasme presque parfait, plus que parfait, de deux textes mis en regard l'un de l'autre: une galerie et une graphie qui l'une de l'autre se gardent et se perdent de vue. Mais les tableaux sont écrits et ce(lui) qui (s')écrit se voit regardé par le peintre" (p. 53, right column). The chiasmus in question is, in the first place, the effect produced by placing two texts on the same page so that they exchange gazes, gloss each other.

As Derrida realizes, however, the form of Genet's text stages the experiences that Genet relates in each column. On the left, the narrator tells how, seated in a train compartment, he happened to look up and catch the gaze of the stranger sitting across from him. He had the overwhelming sensation of looking, not into the eyes of another, but into his own eyes. He relates the "expérience désagréable" in these terms:

Ce que j'éprouvais je ne pus le traduire que sous cette forme: je m'écoulais de mon corps, et par les yeux, dans celui du voyageur *en même temps que le voyageur s'écoulait dans le mien* . . . Qu'est-ce donc qui s'était écoulé de mon corps—je m'éc . . . —et qu'est-ce qui de ce voyageur s'écoulait de son corps?⁹

Thus, the autobiographical essay relates an exchange of identities, the

⁹ "Ce qui est resté . . .", in Vol. IV of Genet's *Oeuvres Complètes*, pp. 22, 3.

reversal of position between self and other. Derrida associates Genet's "je m'ec" with, among other things, "je m'écrivais," suggesting that the activity of writing (oneself) involves such an exchange of identity. In the circulation between the two columns, the very foundation of autobiography, the identity of the self, begins to crumble. The first person narrator, in telling his story, finds his identity blurred in the telling.

In the right column, the narrator is looking at a portrait by Rembrandt that not only returns his gaze, but also exchanges its gaze with the painting that hangs on the opposite wall of the gallery. This situation, in turn, provides a specular image of the reader before Genet's facing columns. "Vous croyez regarder et c'est le texte du tableau (Rembrandt) qui vous surveille et vous indique, vous dénonce" (p. 53, right column). The reader too is drawn into the exchange of identities.

This exchange is quite common in *Glas*: the gloss that describes Genet's writing turns back upon itself and comments on Derrida's textual practice. There are, for example, numerous instances of anonomasia in *Glas*, the transformation of Derrida's signature into a common noun: most appear in the *judas* of the Genet column, those pockets that occasionally interrupt the main text. They involve a chiasmic movement between Genet and Derrida who, for instance, takes up the specific details of Genet's life and shapes them into his theory about the signature, then stages this theory in the play of his proper name.

One of the first of these moments appears as a *judas* that runs alongside Derrida's discussion of naming in Genet. He first quotes a passage from *Le Journal du Voleur* in which the narrator, discussing the name of another, turns to consider his own name: "Armand était en voyage. Encore que j'entendisse parfois qu'on l'appelât de noms différents, nous garderons celui-ci. Moi-même n'en suis-je pas, avec celui de Jean Gallien que je porte aujourd'hui, à mon quinze ou seizième nom?" (quoted in *Glas*, p. 12, right column). In his gloss, Derrida suggests that he will remotivate the apparent arbitrariness of the proper name "Gallien" and of the initials "J.G." He adds that in Genet's *Pompes Funèbres*, the initials are not "J.G." but "J.D." Thus, in a move that parallels Genet's shift from Armand's name to his own, Derrida introduces *his* initials into the discussion and, in so doing, remotivates an apparently arbitrary signifier that figures prominently in Genet's novel.

In the following paragraph, still ostensibly discussing Genet, Derrida raises a number of issues about the signature, the text, and their relation to death and genealogy. As he proceeds, he insinuates his name and his text into the analysis. "Quant au sigle, dans *Pompes funèbres*, c'est J.D., Jean D. . . . Le D majuscule à qui il échoit de représenter le nom de famille ne revient pas forcément au père. Il intéresse en tous cas la

mère et c'est elle qui bénéficie de son titre. 'La mère était anoblie par cet écusson portant le D majuscule brodé d'argent' " (p. 12, right column). *Pompes funèbres* is a study in mourning: the book is dedicated to one of Genet's lovers, Jean Decarnin, and the entire novel is organized around his funeral and the period of mourning that follows. The coat of arms with the capital D appears on the hearse that bears the corpse to the place of burial. It thus names and envelopes a corpse, but also brings prestige to the mother who presides at the burial. But the initials of the dead man are also Derrida's initials, and he exploits this ambiguity in order to further develop his theory of signatures in figuring his own name.

Derrida continues: "Quant à celui qui organise les *Pompes funèbres*—c'est-à-dire littéraires—de J.D., dira-t-on que c'est l'auteur, le narrateur, le narrataire, le lecteur, mais de quoi? Il est à la fois le double du mort . . . qui reste vivant après lui, son fils, mais aussi son père et sa mère" (p. 12, right column). On the one hand, this passage is simply a further discussion of *Pompes funèbres*: Genet does characterize himself as both Jean D.'s son and his mother and father. In fact, the novel enacts the sort of chiasmic movement, the exchange of identities that we noted earlier. Aided no doubt by the shared first name of the lovers, but due primarily to the operation of mourning itself, Jean Genet becomes Jean Decarnin: "Aujourd'hui je me fais horreur de contenir, l'ayant dévoré, le plus cher, le seul amant qui m'aimât. Je suis son tombeau"; "Mais Jean vivra par moi, je lui prêterai mon corps. Par moi, il agira, pensera."¹⁰ In the next lines, Genet even compares this lending of his body to a dead man to an actor's performance of a role on stage: "J'assume un rôle très grave . . . Avec la même émotion le comédien aborde le personnage qu'il rendra visible." This links mourning as incorporation and reactivation to the performance, the quoting, of a work of art.

But the doubt that Derrida attaches to the source of the text's meaning or "organization" tends to bring the question around to this use of quotation in Derrida's autobiographics. That is, he characterizes his *own* activity in *Glas* as the reactivating, the taking on the role of a dead man. Genet's notion of mourning as the performance of the dead man's role is extended to the activity of reading. As in *Pompes funèbres*, where Genet exploits the similarity of names, Derrida allows the ambiguity of the initials "J.D." to effect a blurring of identities. In fact, since a "glas" is obviously associated with a funeral rite, the phrase "les *Pompes funèbres* . . . de J.D." can be taken as a reference to Derrida's work as well as to Genet's. Derrida, as well as Genet, is "le double du mort": in rewriting Genet's texts, he imitates them, doubles them, claims them as

¹⁰ *Pompes funèbres*, in Vol. III of Genet's *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 14 and p. 57.

an ancestor; at the same time, he also (re)produces them, stitching together a tissue of quotations or an anthology of Genet's writings. He is, then, Genet's son as well as his father and mother.

In the last section of the *judas*, Derrida speaks of Genet's fear that someone will steal his death from him and that to guard against such an expropriation "il a d'avance occupé tous les lieux où ça meurt. Bien joué? Qui fait mieux, qui dit mieux, le mort" (p. 12, right column). This issue is also related to the signature and the text: Genet tries to occupy his tomb (tome) by scattering his signature throughout the text. But Derrida is enacting as well as reporting the expropriation of Genet's death: by taking the initials and the quotations from *Pompes funèbres* and applying them to himself and to his theory of the signature, Derrida is stealing away Genet's death and text in order to stage his own. And it is through the act of reading that this expropriation occurs.

Since the name "Derrida" does not have any semantic value in French, Derrida's use of antonomasia involves a number of mutations of his name: the two most common are "Derrière" and "Déjà." As for Genet, the figure of antonomasia stands not only for Derrida's signature, but also for the operation of figuration, of antonomasia itself. And, as for Genet, the signature stands in a certain relation to death and to ancestry. Thus, he writes in a *judas*:

Derrière: chaque fois que le mot vient en premier, s'il s'écrit donc après un point, avec une majuscule, quelque chose en moi se mettait à y reconnaître le nom de mon père, en lettres dorées sur sa tombe, avant même qu'il y fût.

A fortiori quand je lis *Derrière le rideau* (p. 80, right column)

At the beginning, the term "Derrière" seems to involve a simple, largely unmotivated referentiality: its similarity to "Derrida" leads him to recognize not his own name, but that of his father. But the word quickly takes on its semantic value as well. It points to something *behind*—specifically, to the corpse that lies behind the tombstone. The word "derrière" is not itself behind; it is the name engraved on the outside of the tombstone. It stands in the place of the father, and it points to the father presumed to lie behind it. Oddly, his reading of "Derrière" as the father's name on a tombstone occurs even before the father's death; the tombstone points to something behind itself, but the grave is empty. This undermines the simple referentiality of the proper name. Not only does the word refer to nothing behind it, it appears to bring about the illusion of reference. It is as if the word itself, or the meaning of the word, invoked the image of a tomb and of the father within.

Derrida describes the functioning of the signature or of the proper name on the cover of a book in precisely the same terms. The name of the book's "father" appears on the cover of the book, but its very ap-

pearance *outside* the text announces the death of the father and makes of the book a tomb for its author. Hence, the personal confession in the mode of an autobiographical anecdote is used to exemplify the theory of signatures that he is developing.

In the next paragraph, the link between “Derrière” as the proper name of Derrida’s father, and “Derrière” as figure for the signature in general, is made explicit: “Derrière n’est-ce pas toujours déjà derrière un rideau, un voile, un tissage. Un texte toisonnant . . .” (p. 80, right column).

Whereas in the first instance the word “derrière” was visible on the outside of the tombstone and only indicated something else presumed to lie behind it, it now appears that the signature “Derrière” is itself behind a text, and a text “toisonnant.” The term, a combination of *toison*, “fleece” or “pubic hair” and *foisonnant*, “abundant,” alludes to the notion of text as textile and, in this context, to Freud’s belief that women invented weaving out of the desire to weave their pubic hair into a penis or, at least, to cover their lack with the braided pubic hair (p. 79, right column). Thus, if the text is a *toison*, what it conceals is precisely a lack: if the signature lies behind the text, the signature is simply an empty space, like the mother’s missing phallus.

The text and the signature have exchanged places: in the first formulation, the signature was on the outside, the text was a tomb, and the grave was empty. In the second example, the text is the covering or veil, the signature is within, but void, disappearing behind the weave of the text. Thus, in these few lines, Derrida stages the two functions of the signature that he posits at the beginning of *Glas*, the reciprocal work of mourning between text and signature in relation to his own (and his father’s) name.

Immediately following the allusion to the “texte toisonnant,” Derrida quotes Genet: “Un autre de mes amants orne de rubans sa toison intime. Un autre a tressé pour la tête de noeud de son ami, miniscule, une couronne de pâquerettes. Avec ferveur un culte phallique se célèbre en chambre, derrière le rideau des braguettes boutonnées” (p. 80, right column). Like the term “toisonnant,” which both alludes to castration and, in its similarity to “foisonnant,” compensates for castration by multiplying the penis in peril, this passage describes a type of fetishism that, rather than substituting an object for an absent phallus (as in Freud’s theory), adorns an existing member. If the signature is seen as a phallus that can be cut off from the body of the text, then this fetishism involves a multiplication of the signature, a staging of the signature in the text.

Like a number of other scenes in *Glas*, the above passage moves by association from the “derrière le rideau” that points to a corpse, the

father's dead body, to a "derrière le rideau" that refers to the phallus behind the buttoned fly. This association of the corpse with the erect phallus (the shared trait of rigidity and the verbal bridge *bander* supply the link) is developed in relation to Derrida when he turns to speak of the signature as his own death :

déjà. La mort a *déjà* eu lieu, avant tout. Comment déchiffrer cette étrange antériorité d'un *déjà* qui vous met toujours un cadavre sur les bras? . . . Il veut que vous ne puissiez jamais vous défaire du corps très raide que sa littérature, sa pompe funèbre, aura bandé pour vous. Comment séduire, comment se faire aimer sans vous dire *je suis mort*? . . . Qui fait mieux? Qui dit mieux? . . . Le *déjà* que je suis sonne son propre glas, signe lui-même son arrêt de mort, vous regarde d'avance, vous voit avancer sans rien comprendre à ce que vous aurez aimé, suivant, en colonne, la marche funèbre d'une érection dont tout le monde entendra désormais disposer. (p. 92, left column)

The expression "Qui fait mieux? Qui dit mieux?" echoes Derrida's comments about Genet's efforts to guard against the theft of his death. Derrida is expressing the same desire. By pronouncing himself dead on arrival, he manages to seduce the reader with a monument erected to his death; he delivers his text, his cadaver, to the reader who cannot be rid of it. The text remains proper to him; the reader can do nothing but bear the text or pay tribute to it in a eulogy or funeral march.

We are already approaching the figure of the mother who bears a child only to keep it to herself, then finally, to kill it, to take it back into herself. Derrida develops this train of thought in another use of *antonomasia* :

Je suis *déjà* (mort) signifie que je suis *derrière*. Absolument derrière, le Derrière qui n'aura jamais été vu de face, le *Déjà* que rien n'aura précédé, qui s'est donc conçu et enfanté de lui-même, mais comme cadavre ou corps glorieux (p. 97, right column)

Earlier associated with the name of the father, "Derrière" now clearly represents the mother, the signature as mother who gives birth to a child already dead, a child who will never belong to anyone besides herself, who will never venture out of the home. We begin to see why the signature of preference is that of the mother: in taking on his mother's name, Derrida can give birth to himself, kill himself, bury himself, and thus remain absolutely proper to himself.

Nevertheless, Derrida recognizes the impossibility of this desire. Alluding once more to the details of Genet's genealogy, he writes :

On sait que la paternité s'attribue toujours au terme d'un procès, dans la forme d'un jugement. Donc d'une généralité. Mais la mère? Surtout celle qui se passe de père? Ne peut-on espérer une généalogie pure, purement singulière . . . ? Le propre n'est-il pas finalement de la mère? (p. 170, right column)

That, in any case, is the hope or desire. But in the next paragraph, alluding to Genet's encounter with a thief or beggarwoman whom he imagines to be his mother, Derrida concedes: "Pas plus que le glas qu'elle met en branle. La mère est une voleuse et une mendiante. Elle s'approprie tout mais parce qu'elle n'a rien en propre" (p. 170, right column).

The mother is a thief: the signature as mother steals its status from the state and from language. To appropriate and reappropriate the signature is to admit that nothing is proper, not even one's own death. Thus, explaining that through his use of *antonomasia* he has given birth to himself as a corpse, Derrida adds: "Le *Derrière* et le *Déjà* me protègent, me rendent illisible . . . Toutes les fleurs de rhétorique dans lesquelles je disperse ma signature, dans lesquelles je m'apostrophe et m'aprotrope, lisez-les aussi comme des formes de refoulement. Il s'agit de repousser la pire menace" (p. 97, right column).

What is repressed in the recourse to *antonomasia*, in the effort to sign and resign the text, is the possibility of being read. Derrida has said that Genet's text is only readable because, at some point, he has failed to keep it subsumed under his signature. Derrida admits the same thing in reference to his own text: "Vous ne pouvez vous intéresser à ce que je fais ici que dans la mesure où vous auriez raison de croire que —*quelque part*—je ne sais pas ce que je fais . . . ni ce qui s'agit ici" (p. 76, right column). Despite all the protective efforts to keep the text to himself, despite the multiple signatures that attempt to reappropriate it, there remains a text to be read, and the reader's interest in it lies precisely in those moments in *Glas* that reveal a *je m'ec*: a "je m'écarte," or a "je m'écrase" (p. 76, right column). The *antonomasia*, which attempts to reappropriate the text, will once more be expropriated through the *chiasmus* between the author of *Glas* and the reader.

Elizabeth Bruss writes that "if anything happens to alter or obscure" the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction or "empirical" and "rhetorical" first person narration, "the nature and scope of autobiography will be changed," a change that could involve the "obsolescence of autobiography or at least its radical reformulation" (p. 8). Derrida's reading of Genet as well as his own textual practice in *Glas* suggest that this obscuring of boundaries is involved in autobiographical discourse itself. What Bruss views as a historical eventuality is in fact a structural feature of figural language. Autobiography may be nothing more than the sounding of its own knell. Through the figures of *antonomasia* and *chiasmus*, the outside is brought inside, the signature placed in the text, the reader's identity blurred with the author's, and genre definitions transgressed in the process. It is not by accident that autobiography is often considered "marginal" to literature, since it is the genre that in-

corporates literature's margin, the signature that links it to its outside, into itself. The resulting text can no longer simply "belong" to the genre it takes as its object. Taking the issues of self, identity, and self-representation as their subject matter, autobiographers produce a counter-discourse (but not a metadiscourse) that questions and also reaffirms the legal claims of genre definitions. And the critical and legal discourses that assign a text to an author and to a genre do so at the expense of reading the text, which transforms the very terms of the definition into flowers and things.

Miami University (Ohio).