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HOMOSEXUALITÉ MON AMOUR: DERRIDA AND THE HAUNTING OF SODOM¹

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In Lee Edelman's work, *Homographesis*, a seminal reiteration of queer theory in the language of Derridian deconstruction, Edelman quotes Stanley Cavell's essay "Postscript" while reading the "Envois" section of Derrida's Post Card. Cavell writes:

I am from time to time haunted—I rather take it for granted that this is quite generally true of male heterosexual philosophers—by the origin of philosophy (in ancient Greece) in an environment of homosexual intimacy.²

Edelman then continues:

What haunts Derrida is not just (whatever "just" in this case might mean) the homophobic, homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual relations that endlessly circulate within and as "the philosophical tradition"; at issue for him is the irreducibility of both sodomy and writing to a binary logic predicated on the determinacy of presence or absence.³

From here Edelman's argument continues as it began, a reading of "the sodomitic spectacle" as the primal scene of writing. In it, we find a reading of the "Envois" as the staging of a peephole from which a voyeuristic Derrida would witness this scene of writing/sodomy. We might expect the Cavell quotation

to function for Edelman simply as an example among others of this voyeurism, an apostrophe, set aside almost parenthetically if it weren't for the appearance of a new term: *haunting*. Cavell is haunted; Derrida is haunted by the specter of homosexuality. Edelman quotes Cavell as if to ventriloquate Derrida through him, as if Derrida might have intimated a similar sensation of haunting. The naughty or unruly reader could arrive at an easy formulation such as: *Derrida wrote about a certain haunting in Greek philosophy, Cavell was haunted by the homosexuality of Greek philosophers, hence Derrida must have been secretly haunted by homosexuality.*⁴ So as if to contain this possibility Edelman writes, "what haunts Derrida is *not just* [...] homosexual relations [emphasis mine]." Edelman seems to want to protect a term as important as haunting to the Derridian corpus from the potentially threatening and limiting connotations of the Cavell quotation. But the fact remains, this restrictive "not just" still leaves open the possibility of reading Derrida's writing as haunted by the homosexuality of Greek philosophy. Edelman's qualification of Derrida's haunting here includes homosexuality in a haunted list of oppositions (that includes speech/writing, and ultimately presence/absence the most haunted pair of all) and thus inflects the Derridian concept of haunting such that we can no longer encounter homosexuality in Derrida's writing without noticing a haunting quality, nor can we read Derridian haunting without suspecting something of a sodomitic structure in the speculation⁵ of ghosts.

Such is the logic of contagion in the critical employment of metaphor that Derrida describes in *Plato's Pharmacy* and elsewhere. We are not let off the hook, however. Edelman's metaphor of homosexuality as haunting still demands to be read. Moreover, the task of reading homosexuality within an exegesis of the Derridian corpus remains to be done. The problem is double and hence this paper will open two main lines of questioning. On the one hand I want to elucidate the relationship Edelman posits, ever so briefly but powerfully, between homosexuality and haunting, and on the other I aim to read the place of homosexuality in Derrida's writing. A few warnings to my reader: while these two lines of questioning are certainly not

mutually exclusive they will occasionally seem further away from each other than they are. One has to approach the comparison from the back door, as it were. I have tried to approach this paper in such a way. And since these questions risk to engender a spin of further questions I have kept my reading as localized as possible, looking at a specific moment in the "Envois" and an equally specific moment in *Plato's Pharmacy*. At the same time, this paper should not be received as an academic exercise but rather the beginning of a reflection on the question of homosexuality in the writing of Jacques Derrida. Hence the task will be left to my reader to read Derrida's texts through, without agenda, to be his good reader.⁶

In the "Envois" there would be many places to begin with the question of homosexuality: references to the homosexuality of Orpheus (the one who, by definition, turns his back), the "delirious" readings (*délires*) of the post card's medieval illustration as a scene of sodomy, a speculation on Wilde's possible sighting of the post card, references to Genet, and the writer and his addressee's ciphered discovery of homosexuality, to name only a few. I will begin by citing a mention of homosexuality that occurs in a fragment of a post card toward the middle of the "Envois." It seems quite incidental until we begin to read around it. The fragment is marked as undated but Derrida suggests it can be situated "...probably between 9 January and Easter 1978...." This fragment of a post card echoes a crucial discussion of homosexuality in *Plato's Pharmacy*, and if we are to read the "Envois" as a sort of *roman à clef*,⁷ we need to read it against or along with its references outside itself. Indeed, the "Envois" could be read as a demonstration, if demonstration could ever be, of the Derridian formulation that the frame can always be framed by what it frames.

So first allow me to situate Derrida's temporal framing of this letter: written sometime before Easter—although perhaps not—the post card reads:

I would have preferred that you not go with me to the clinic, but there was no other choice. When you left again, the night before, I was furious with you ("je t'en

voulais à mort"). You let me make the decision all by myself. And if I died in this clinic, alone, without anyone having been warned? When I awoke (the nurse was holding my hand, everything was white), I was however, I don't understand why, reconciled with you.⁸

[J'aurais préféré que tu ne m'accompagnes pas à la clinique, mais il le fallait bien. Quand tu es repartie, la veille, je t'en voulais à mort. Tu m'as laissé prendre la décision tout seul. Et si je mourais dans cette clinique, seul, sans que personne ait été prévenu? Quand je me suis réveillé (l'infirmière me tenait la main, tout était blanc), j'étais pourtant, je ne comprends pas pourquoi, réconcilié.]⁹

It could be narrated in the form of a story that would be quite campy, a Derridian version of *Rosemary's Baby*,¹⁰ except in this version Derrida would find himself in a cold metal-clad abortion clinic crying over stillborn twins¹¹ the hideous double-bodied Siamese twins of life and death, wasted seed.

With all births, still- or not, the first doubt that will invariably arise is as to the paternity of the child and hence the first question (before even the question of the child's gender) will be: who is the father? The question punctuates and tears into the "Envois": *to whom do these post cards belong?*¹² Would the paternity of this stillborn letter-child be doubtful, dubious, double even? Near the beginning of the "Envois" Derrida writes:

The two impostors' program is to have a child by me, them too. And let it be made in the dorsum.¹³

[Le programme des deux imposteurs, c'est d'avoir, eux aussi, un enfant de moi. Et que ce soit fait dans le dos.]¹⁴

We can situate the probably-before-Easter letter around nine months after this almost-glorious almost-Gabrieline annunciation.¹⁵ Number nine evokes for a reader the time of human gestation and birth as automatically as the number 52 might evoke a deck of cards.¹⁶ Both numbers are numbers of chance and game: good and evil. The annunciation sends us

forward to the demonic clinic (abortion clinic or obstetric clinic, can we decide?) where the letter-child of Derrida is to be born. And just as it occurs to Roman Polanski's Rosemary in *Rosemary's Baby*, we begin to suspect there might be no escaping this diabolic birthplace. On a first read the letter does not exactly lead one to think of an abortion clinic, but if we remember that the next three letters contain discussions of children the most extensive in the "Envois" it becomes hard to read it in any other way than as the abortion narrative of abandonment, solitude and *liebestod*.

It is in the next letter, also dated as probably-before-Easter, that the topic of homosexuality appears, significantly in the context of a discussion about children and truth, framed as a problem:

To follow up our little dialogue from last night (genre, aporetic): just as for us, the problem of the child posed itself for them only in a second, at the very second when they accepted their homosexuality, not at all before this second of truth.¹⁷

[Suite à notre petit dialogue d'hier soir (genre, aporétique): comme à nous, le problème de l'enfant ne s'est posé pour eux qu'à la seconde, à la seconde même où ils ont accepté leur homosexualité, pas du tout avant cette seconde de vérité.]¹⁸

This fragment of a letter opens up numerous questions and as many possible readings. Here I will limit myself to reading the polyvalence of the word *second* in order to point out its relationship to homosexuality (or Sodomy¹⁹) in Derrida. Much of the reflection behind the writing of this paper has been an attempt to understand the meaning of this word *second* and all its possible meanings in Derrida's writing: a second glance—the voyeur's double-take when faced with the spectacle of sodomy, a second life—the *joie de re-vivre* that is both the title of our conference and a way of thinking haunting, the second as a mark of time that marks a break in the flow that is time, the second of doubt, the second primal scene, *nachträglichkeit*, etc...

Before we can embark on any of these readings, though, it will be helpful to read the letter's echo in chapter 8 of *Plato's Pharmacy*, entitled "The Heritage of the Pharmakon: Family Scene," a chapter to which Derrida sends his addressee rather specifically at various points in the "Envois."²⁰ Here we find homosexuality within a discussion of children (both stillborn and healthy, aborted and delivered) along with discussions of truth, doubt, paternity and legitimacy. The (abortion) clinic nurse who holds Derrida's hand in the "Envois" seems a mute echo of the midwife that is Socrates in the "Family Scene." One might even say that these probably-before-Easter letters stage a *mise-en-scène* of the thinking set forth in the "Family Scene."

The mention of homosexuality I want to bring to attention here comes toward the end of the chapter. Just before this Derrida discusses liquids, the penetrability of liquids. Liquid, according to Derrida, is the element *par excellence* of the pharmakon: sperm, water, ink, paint, perfumed dye. "In liquid, opposites are more easily mixed."²¹ He cites from Plato's *Laws* the "law" protecting water, pure liquidity—and hence the most penetrable of liquids, and reads the law as enacting the opposition of writing ("everything in sperm that overflows wastefully") to living speech (which "makes its capital bear fruit"). To put it in its own words, the law protects water because it is "exceptionally necessary for the growth of all garden produce," because water is bound to (re)generation, (re)productivity. Water mixed with the *pharmakon* is still liquid, still water, yet no longer useful, no longer "capable of engendering anything." Here, writing and speech become two different values of the trace for Derrida: good liquid/bad liquid. The law remains bound to speech however. Derrida writes, "there is still a marked unity between *logos* and *nomos*. What is the law in question?"²² In response he cites again from Plato's *Laws* the "law" forbidding homosexuality as the Athenian argues it. This seems a sudden and vertiginous move at first: Derrida moves from the law forbidding misuse of water to the law forbidding homosexuality (read: the misuse of sperm) from the "use" of one liquid to another. This move hinges on two (or more) analogies: first, of the frightening penetrability of water to

the frightening (inter)penetrability of men, and then of the law's concern with water's role in productivity and engenderment to the law's concern with the possibility that men can engender, or choose not to. The stale rhetoric of this law reads predictably: woman is figured as a field waiting to be harvested, and "congress with our own sex" constitutes a "deliberate murder of the race."²³ But in the context of Derrida's argument we notice the fishy evocation of *logos* in this *nomos*: "It is dictated, to begin with, by nature's own voice" (*italics mine*). Set in strategic comparison with the law prohibiting incest, it is the law that should never have to be enforced:

That was exactly my own meaning when I said I knew of a device for establishing this law of restricting procreative intercourse to its natural function by abstention from congress with our own sex, with its deliberate murder of the race and its wasting of the seed of life on a stony and rocky soil, where it will never take root and bear its natural fruit, and equal abstention from any female field whence you would desire no harvest. Once suppose this law perpetual and effective let it be, as it ought to be, no less effective in the remaining cases than it actually is against incest with parents and the result will be untold good. It is dictated, to begin with, by nature's own voice [...]. Yet should some young and lusty bystander of exuberant virility (*pollou spermatos mestos*) overhear us as we propose it, he might probably denounce our enactments as impracticable folly and make the air ring with his clamor.²⁴

[...c'est exactement ce que j'entendais en parlant du procédé que j'ai pour imposer cette loi qui demande qu'on obéisse à la nature dans l'accouplement destiné à la procréation; qu'on ne touche pas au sexe mâle; qu'on ne tue pas délibérément la race humaine; qu'on ne jette pas la semence parmi les rocs et les cailloux où elle ne prendra jamais racine de façon à reproduire sa propre nature; qu'on s'abstienne enfin dans le champ féminin, te

tout labour qui se refuse volontairement à la fécondation. Si cette loi prend à la fois permanence et force, autant de force qu'en a maintenant celle qui prohibe tout commerce entre pères et enfants, et si, dans les autres commerces, elle obtient, comme elle doit, la même victoire, elle sera mille et mille fois bienfaisante. Sa conformité à la nature est, en effet, son premier mérite [...]. Mais peut-être se dressera devant nous quelque homme fort et jeune, plein d'une semence foisonnante (pollou spermatos mestos), qui, ayant ouï promulguer cette loi, couvrira d'injures les auteurs que nous sommes d'imbéciles et impossibles décrets, et remplira tout de sa clameur...]²⁵

In the very next line, Derrida puts Plato in the place of this lusty young man who would denounce the proposition of this law. He writes:

One could cite here both the writing and the pederasty of a young man named Plato. And his ambiguous relation to the paternal supplement: in order to make up for the father's death, he transgressed the law. He repeated the father's death. These two gestures contradict each other or cancel each other out. Whether it be a question of sperm or of writing, the transgression of the law is a priori subject to a law of transgression. Transgression is not thinkable within the terms of classical logic but only within the graphics of the supplement or of the *pharmakon*.²⁶

[On pourrait faire comparaître ici l'écriture et la pédérastie d'un jeune homme nommé Platon. Et son rapport ambigu au supplément paternel: pour en réparer la mort, il a transgressé la loi. Il a répété la mort du père. Ces deux gestes s'annulent ou se contredisent. Qu'il s'agisse de sperme ou d'écriture, la transgression de la loi est d'avance soumise à une loi de la transgression. Celle-ci n'est pas pensable dans une logique classique mais

seulement dans la graphique du supplément ou du pharmakon.]²⁷

Derrida suggests that the law exists as a citation of its own breaking. If Plato's Athenian is an older version of Plato, a character of Plato's invention, Derrida is right to stop at this moment in the *Laws* when Plato would seem to cite a law against practices that we can identify as his own. The younger Plato transgresses the law *avant la lettre*, anticipating the writing of a law, before the older Plato will invoke even write the very law he has proleptically transgressed?²⁸ The law will be a citation of an anterior self here. Derrida's citation of a younger, spermatic and pederastic Plato can also be read as a citation of Socrates inasmuch as Socrates speaks (and always vocally) in protest, doubt that clamor of protest. This citation also suggests that Plato's writing and ultimately philosophy, function like the voice of Socrates, in the protestory mode of a "clamor." Moreover, for Derrida Plato's homosexuality represents the literal transgression of the law. Homosexuality becomes another name for transgression. It will be worth reading closely a few lines in this paragraph to try to unpack Derrida's bringing together of homosexuality and transgression.

"...in order to make up for the father's death, he transgressed the law."

If homosexuality is the same as this transgression of the law then, by the above formulation, it is his homosexuality or pederasty that somehow makes up for his father's death. And how does pederasty make up for the father's death? It creates a paternal supplement. It recreates another kind of paternity, based on a metaphorically paternal relationship, and both makes up for the father's death and, in trying to replace him, repeats the father's death, which itself occurs as an attempt to replace the father in his function. Homosexuality ignores the "voice of nature" and hence ignores *logos* where *logos* and *nomos* (living speech and the law) overlap. Homosexuality is the exemplary transgression for Derrida because it is the transgression against

which the law has no choice but to take recourse to the "voice of nature" argument. It points to a worn threadbare spot in the fabric of the law where law claims (or needs to claim) to function as voice and not writing (for it to be law). And if the law functions as speech, the transgression of the law will also function as speech, in this instance a "clamor" speech overflowing with excess, bestialized, overdetermined in its origin yet stripped of destination. So the law which cannot but call to the "voice of nature" (or the paternal guarantee of *logos*) would be the law of all laws, at least within this logic of the supplement. That homosexuality is exemplary we might read as a metaleptic consequence of the relationship of pederasty to pedagogy. The pedagogical relationship functions as a supplement just like the pederastic relationship; the pedagogue teaches using examples; exemplarity operates in the logic of the supplement; an example replaces the thing of which it is an example. Perhaps this is how the homosexual can become for Freud, on the one hand, exemplary of the ideal citizen, and for Derrida on the other hand, exemplary of the citizen who transgresses²⁹ seemingly opposite designations and yet in each case the homosexual man is an exemplary citizen. Again, the question: how can pederasty make up for the father's death? It does so by being commensurate with writing and constituting hence a double gesture.

"...the transgression of the law is *a priori* subject to a law of transgression."

What is this law of transgression? That any transgression will occur as a double gesture that cancels itself out. That any transgression of the law will be subject to it. Transgression (homosexuality) creates a supplement to the father in order to re-enact the murder of the father. Pederastic Plato ignores the voice of nature. The law prohibiting homosexuality is the "law in question" where living speech and law coincide, hence the transgression of this law re-enacts the transgression enacted by writing, cutting off from the father, guarantor of *logos* without whom language would wander the earth errant like a ghost or

orphan. If writing is the ghostly supplement of speech, homosexuality is the phantom-like supplement of paternity. Still, what is the law of transgression? That it will reiterate the law it transgresses. Transgression operates in the mode of a double take. Homosexuality transgresses the law of paternity while recreating a paternal relationship. It is double. Would it therefore cancel itself out in its doubleness? How should we read this doubleness? We might recall that the doubleness of transgression relies on the metaphor of biological paternity to intellectual paternity, of literal sperm to figurative sperm. A metaphor creates a bridge between two terms, and although it might bridge unlike terms it will never cancel them out. It seems rather to liquefy them such that they bleed into each other, or infect one other, to keep with Derrida's metaphors of liquid (*pharmakon*) and contagion.

“ Transgression is not thinkable within the terms of classical logic[.]”

Transgression is not thinkable within the terms of classical logic because it is double, because although it cancels out, and canceling out is doubtless a legitimate logical operation, it leaves ghostly forms in its wake. Transgression is not thinkable for the same reason ghosts are not thinkable; it happens without being thought; it haunts because it happens despite itself. And if homosexuality is another name for transgression as I have been trying to argue, then is homosexuality also not thinkable? At least not thinkable within the terms of classical logic, which is to say not thinkable in philosophy? If we take seriously Derrida's positioning of Plato as the lusty young man written into Plato's own law against homosexuality, then perhaps he is trying to think philosophy as that “clamor” of protest. If homosexuality were not thinkable in philosophy, or at least not thinkable in terms of classical logic, then it would have to be that thing, or one of the things, outside of philosophy³⁰ which conditions its possibility: philosophy's sterile midwife. We must not forget that philosophy is thought in this instance as that clamor of protest. Neither should we forget the specific law of which this clamor is

in protest. Protest comes out of a hesitation, a split-second of doubt. To be clear, I want to try to think this clamor of protest in “The Family Scene” in connection to the second of doubt in the above-mentioned letter.³¹ A clamor of protest happens automatically, a quick reflex: no reflection, no choice.

Protest happens in a split second of doubt. In a split second, doubt will lead to some kind of decision while aporia can only lead to indecision, paralysis. Both happen in a second; a second, this time of reaction, protest, clamor, this almost-time of my death, is an important measure because it seems to be where I look for the origin of action or inaction, the split second of decision or indecision that is so crucial to Descartes in discussion of *étonnement* (a kind of aporia) in his treatise on the passions. But could there be an origin of inaction? No act would have no time, but we still have to give it an origin, the phantom origin perhaps of an aborted action. By this ghostly logic, one could even argue that the second is the temporality of the primal scene: the second and the second, *la seconde* and *la deuxième*, as in *la seconde fois*. Let me remind you that the “Envois” as Edelman writes, stages the primal scene of philosophy, perhaps necessarily a parodic version. Indeed, parodies double which might help us understand why the “Envois” are filled with references—parodic references, to be sure—to Freud’s theorizing of the primal scene in his case study known as the “Wolf Man,” where Freud sets forth the concept of *nachträglichkeit*.

Now we can return to where we left off in the “Envois.” We already begin to have a sense of the polyvalence of the word *second*. Derrida writes:

...the problem of the child posed itself for them only in a second, at the very second when they accepted their homosexuality, not at all before this second of truth.

[...le problème de l’enfant ne s’est posé pour eux qu’à la seconde, à la seconde même où ils ont accepté leur homosexualité, pas du tout avant cette seconde de vérité.]

So this fantasized moment in which Plato and Socrates accept their homosexuality is here figured as the moment of truth, the second of truth and the number two of truth a second truth that functions as supplement to a single truth. Derrida writes that accepting their homosexuality poses the problem of the child for Plato and Socrates (as if there were only one: one problem, one child). What could this problem be? Certainly not the child's impossibility as one might automatically assume given the facile association of homosexuality to sterility. The child is already there always. We might say the problem has to do with doubt, a second of doubt as to the paternity of the child. Remember that the child Derrida gives birth to in the letter preceding this one is the stillborn child of his writing, of dubious paternity: *who is the father? To whom do these letters belong?* The question echoes throughout the "Envois." It is homosexuality that poses this problem, this doubt. Homosexuality then has some kind of relationship, an inseparable one, with doubt. Philosophy is of dubious paternity and yet is somehow born of the doubt integral to the structure of paternity. Doubt would be both sterile and productive.³² Doubt can be opposed to aporia, a hyperbolic doubt that leads to inaction. Not a coincidence that the word *aporetic* appears in this letter as the subject of discussion between Derrida and his addressee. Moving from a discussion into the letter, aporia creates writing, is somehow the impossible "before" of writing. Here enters the question of responsibility. A responsible father claims paternity despite his doubts, although it kills him. The doubt is murderous and this murder happens interminably, repeatedly in the "Envois." The second of doubt does not involve a process of questioning as we might hope. Derrida insists on the fact that Socrates responds to his *daimon*'s voice (which forbids him from action) unquestioningly. So the origin of philosophy would be in this sort of obedient reflex. Doubt, what makes questioning possible, must be itself unquestionable.

That doubt is unquestionable is perhaps one of the reasons Derrida so frequently calls Socrates and Plato 'Fido and Fido' in the "Envois." Fido obeys. Fido is another name for the example or exemplarity, named Fido "so that the example will be

obedient."³³ Fido also recalls the scene of sodomy, explicit in French and English in a certain expression involving dogs, but also quite resonant as it points to Freud's Wolf Man and his theorizing of the primal scene. It points to his second primal scene—the imagined one, the spectacle of sheep dogs that is replaced by a fantasy of parental sex *a tergo*. And this, a spectacle of sodomy, was the cause of Freud's great moment of doubt: was the primal scene observed or fantasized? If fantasized the primal scene is more believable and less shocking but not real, if observed it is more real but shocking and unbelievable.

Now, returning finally to the topic of this conference: it seems the paradox of the primal scene resembles the structure of a ghost sighting: an automatic double take. First, doubt: *was that a ghost?* Then ambivalence, hesitation: *did I see it or imagine it?* A ghost would be the in-between of seeing and imagining, of fact and fiction that unthinkable thing that takes me from behind and makes me write. Homosexuality, like the midwife, is related to doubt and to this ghost that haunts the in-between of fact and fiction. As the midwife of philosophy, homosexuality would possess the skill of discerning legitimate from illegitimate children, or real from phantom paternity. As such the midwife's role is destabilizing to the cocky sureness of the father. It is in a way her fault he keeps seeing ghosts. She has a relationship to fiction insofar as her role might even be to maintain a lie, to conspire in cahoots with the unfaithful mother. She deceptively announces the child as legitimate, invoking her skill as midwife, and guarantees a fiction in the same way the father guarantees *logos*. Her word is enough to make us look again. Homosexuality, this skilled and dangerous midwife of philosophy, haunts because it makes us do a double take and it is precisely this double take that makes ghosts possible.



Notes

¹ In the spirit of the conference I feel I must leave the title its obvious reference unexplained, in hope that it may haunt my reader as it has haunted me.

² Stanley Cavell, "Postscript (1989): To Whom It May Concern" *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1989): 248-289 (Qtd. in Edelman 189).

³ Lee Edelman, *Homographesis* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 189.

⁴ This is a syllogism: "Syllogisms have a way of taking us from behind. The syllogism must appear innocent, as though in the process of being formulated for the first time, before one's eyes, and yet it must always be thought out beforehand so as to avoid absurd formulations such as: Bears have fur, bears are animals, all animals have fur. In other words, syllogisms appear to move forward although they are not rigorously possible without looking back, without being taken from the back or behind, as it were. The third term surprises, seems magical and bewitching, often upsetting. We should read syllogistic reasoning in the same way we read poetry" (From a conversation with Angela Hunter entitled "Philosophy *a tergo*: From Rousseau to Sade and Back").

⁵ Edelman entitles the chapter of *Homographesis* in which he reads the "Envois", "Seeing Things: Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex". The title alone suggests a relationship between homosexuality and spectrality. He suggests that the spectacle of homosexuality disrupts the stable subjectivity (read: positionality) of the "straight" voyeuristic onlooker. It might be possible to say that what Edelman discusses as a certain voyeuristic pull might be much the same as what I am trying to think of as the haunting insistence of homosexuality.

⁶ For now I am content to remain his bad reader: "Because I still like him, I can foresee the impatience of the bad reader: this is the way I name or accuse the fearful reader, the reader in a hurry to be determined, decided upon deciding [...] Now, it is bad, and I know no other definition of the bad, it is bad to predestine one's reading, it is always bad to foretell. It is bad, reader, no longer to like retracing one's steps" Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁷ I want to thank Cynthia Chase here for suggesting to me the possibility of reading the "Envois" as a *roman à clef*.

⁸ Derrida, *Post Card* 134.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980) 147.

¹⁰ "To the devil with the child, the only thing we ever will have discussed, the child, the child, the child. The impossible message between us. A child is what one should not be able to "send" oneself. It never will be, never should be a sign, a letter, even a symbol. Writings: stillborn children one sends oneself in order to stop hearing about them [...]" (Derrida, *Post Card* 25).

"Plato wants to emit. Seed, artificially, technically. That devil of a Socrates holds the syringe. To sow the entire earth, to send the same fertile card to everyone ... This is what I call a catastrophe" (Derrida, *Post Card* 28).

¹¹ "Did I tell you that we are the infant twins (heterozygous but homosexual) of those two Double-doubles [*Sosie-sosie*]?" (Derrida, *Post Card* 113).

¹² "To whom do these letters belong?" (Derrida, *Post Card* 179).

"Who is writing?" (Derrida, *Post Card* 5).

¹³ Derrida, *Post Card* 24.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Carte postale* 29.

¹⁵ Keep in mind the etymology of the word angel from the Greek *angelos* meaning *messenger*: "[W]e are not angels, my angel, I mean messengers of whatever, but more and more angelic." (Derrida, *Post Card* 43)

¹⁶ "Whatever their original length, the passages that have disappeared are indicated, at the very place of their incineration, by a blank of 52 signs [...] As for the 52 signs, the 52 mute spaces, in question is a cipher that I had wanted to be symbolic and secret in a word a clever cryptogram, that is, a very naive one, that had cost me long calculations. If I state now, and this is the truth, I swear, that I have totally forgotten the rule as well as the elements of such a calculation, as if I had thrown them into the fire, I know in advance all the types of reaction that this will not fail to induce all around (Derrida, *Post Card* 4-5).

¹⁷ Derrida, *Post Card* 135.

¹⁸ Derrida, *Carte postale* 147.

¹⁹ My reader will notice that I use the terms homosexuality, sodomy and pederasty somewhat interchangeably. This is partly to echo

what seems to be Derrida's [own] interchangeable use of these terms and partly to try to resist the "homographesis" (as Edelman calls it) whereby homosexuality has to be made legible for it to be either condemned or elevated in society. For Edelman, this is the paradox that arises from making homosexual bodies legible, the twin agendas of legibility: condemnation, elevation. Rigorously thought, these terms defy a certain kind of classification. The slippage might seem unnerving and perhaps it should, although we might read the use of these terms less as a slippage in Derrida's writing and more as deictical, evocative, even metaphorical. The word homosexuality evokes the nineteenth century, psychoanalysis (Freud), pederasty was a Greek cultural institution (S. and p.), is now a forbidden act (transgression) and Sodomy reminds one of the burned-out city (burned letter), biblical catastrophe (catastrophe), medieval heterodoxy (Matthew Paris). Edelman performs a similar use of terms denoting forms of same-sex desire in his book. We see this slippage upon rereading the above quoted sentence: "What haunts Derrida is not just (whatever "just" in this case might mean) the homophobic, homosocial, homoerotic, and homosexual relations that endlessly circulate within and as "the philosophical tradition"". Just as Edelman is able to include homophobic and homoerotic relations that would seem opposites here, in a tight list of synonymous terms, he manages to include a scene of "straight" (perhaps even reproductive) sex in his chapter entitled "Seeing Things: Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex [emphasis mine]" that contains a section devoted to the parental primal scene in Freud's *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*.

²⁰ "Now, the scene of inheritance, repeated in another way in *Plato's Pharmacy* (right after chapter 7 of the PP, "The Inheritance of the Pharmakon: the Family Scene") interests Plato and Socrates in the very position in which you see them posted on this card. " (Derrida, *Post Card* 52).

²¹ Jacques Derrida, "*Plato's Pharmacy*" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 152.

²² Derrida, *Pharmacy* 152.

²³ Derrida, *Pharmacy* 153.

²⁴ Qtd. in Derrida, *Pharmacy* 153.

²⁵ Qtd. in Jacques Derrida, "La Pharmacie de Platon" in *La Dissemination*. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972) 364-5.

²⁶ Derrida, *Pharmacy* 153.

²⁷ Derrida, *Pharmacie* 365.

²⁸ It is worth a brief comment here on the implicit homosexual framing of *Phaedrus* since Derrida does not comment on it. The dialogue is framed by a scene of reading (or the intention to read). According to Michel Lisse the act of reading becomes tantamount to pederasty, or better still, a supplement for a pederastic sexual liaison in the absence of the lover. Lisse writes "Cette scène de lecture comporte des allusions sexuelles très nettes: Phèdre tient sous son manteau, dans sa main gauche, un texte de Lysias, Socrate lui conseille de prendre une position commode pour lire. Dans son livre *Phrasikleia: Anthropologie de la lecture en Grèce ancienne*, Jesper Svenbro démontre combien le lien était profond entre lecture et pédérastie. Lire équivaut à être pénétré par son amant. L'amant, c'est l'éraсте, le maître, l'enseignant, mais également le scripteur alors que le lecteur est l'aimé, l'éromène, esclave ou élève [...] Svenbro cite une inscription grecque qui se termine par la formule: « celui qui fait l'inscription (*grápsas*) enculera (*pugíxei*) le lecteur (*ananémon*) » (p. 210) [...] Si l'on se rappelle que Phèdre fut l'éromène de Lysias, les éléments du puzzle sont à présent rassemblés pour permettre de découvrir l'importance capitale de cette scène de lecture qui convoque à la fois le discours sur l'amour et le discours sur l'écriture et donne ainsi toute sa cohérence au dialogue." Michel Lisse, *L'expérience de la lecture: la soumission*. (Paris: Galilée, 1998) 19-20.

²⁹ For this reason the patient [the "Wolf Man"] was without all those social interests which give a content to life. It was only when, during the analytic treatment, it became possible to liberate his shackled homosexuality that this state of affairs showed any improvement; and it was a most remarkable experience to see how (without any direct advice from the physician) each piece of the homosexual libido which was set free sought out some application in life and some attachment to the great common concerns of mankind. Freud, Sigmund, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis", trans. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier Books, 1963) 260.

³⁰ As A. Hunter would have it, if homosexuality would have to be that thing outside of philosophy that conditions its possibility then it is always already inside, by the same logic. Taken from a conversation with Angela Hunter entitled: « L'Amour c'est déconstruire l'amour ».

³¹ The connection occurs in another way between "The Family Scene" and the "Envois". Socrates is likened in both to a stingray because of the doubt he imparts to his listener:

—“When confronted with this simple, organless voice, one cannot escape its penetration by stopping up one’s ears, like Ulysses trying to block out the Sirens (216a). The Socratic *pharmakon* also acts like venom, like the bite of a poisonous snake (217-18). And Socrates’ bite is worse than a snake’s since its traces invade the soul. What Socrates’ words and the viper’s venom have in common, in any case, is their ability to penetrate and make off with the most concealed interiority of the body or soul. The demonic speech of this thaumaturge (en)trains the listener in dionysian frenzy and philosophic mania (218b). And when they don’t act like the venom of a snake, Socrates’ pharmaceutical charms provoke a kind of narcosis, benumbing and paralyzing into aporia, like the touch of a sting ray (*narke*).” Derrida, *Pharmacy* 118.

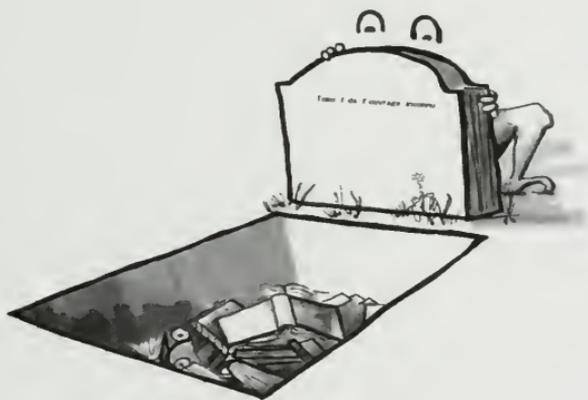
“What is going on under Socrates’ leg, do you recognize this object? It plunges under the waves made by the veils around the plump buttocks, you see the rounded double, improbable enough, it plunges straight down, rigid, like the nose of a stingray to electrocute the old man and analyze him under narcosis. You know that they were both very interested in this paralyzing animal. Would it make him write by paralyzing him? Derrida, *Post Card* 18.

³² “He wants to sow the entire world...S. the sterile midwife.” Derrida, *Post Card* 101.

³³ Ah yes, Fido, I am faithful to you as a dog. Why did “Ryle” choose this name, Fido? Because one says of a dog that he answers to his name, to the name of fido, for example? Because a dog is the figure of fidelity and that better than anyone else answers to his name, especially if it is Fido? Because he answers to his name without needing to answer? Fido answers without answering, because he is a dog, he recognizes his name but he never says anything about it. What do you say about it? If he is there, Fido, he cannot make the reference lie, without saying anything he answers to his name. Neither a stone nor a speaking being, in the sense of the philosophers of all times and the psycho-linguists of today, would answer without answering to the name of Fido. Neither a stone nor you my love would answer so adequately to the requisite demonstration (“‘Fido’ Fido” in Ryle’s *Theory of Meaning*). Why did Ryle choose a dog’s name. Fido? I have just spoken at length about this with Pierre, who whispers to me: “so that the example will be obedient.” Derrida, *Post Card* 243-4.

La joie de re-vivre:

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Literary and Cultural Production



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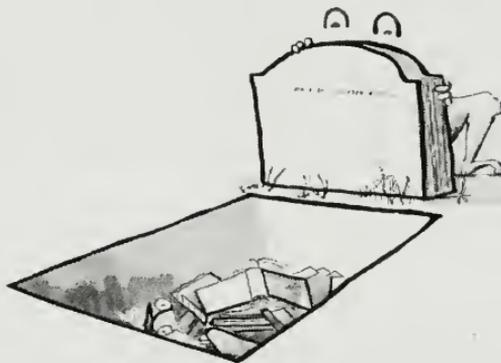
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*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouvait ici
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais,
Le Quart Livre

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