

Fleeced

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I.

What does it mean to get fleeced? What does it mean, for instance, to get fleeced by *Glas*,¹ described by Derrida himself as a ‘fleecing text’? The fleece is both garb and pelt; it is at once a talismanic ‘scalp’, a part that has been brutally cut away, and a covering used to shield or shelter what is vulnerable or exposed (sometimes, working like a highly-prized charm). It is both something stolen, and a protective barrier against loss. To get ‘fleeced’ already carries a double and ambiguous set of possible meanings, therefore—as if we may get ‘fleeced’ in the very process of subjecting the fleece to, let’s say, hermeunetical inquiry. As if the warm embrace of (one) meaning always comes at the expense of another; and indeed not just at another’s expense, but potentially one’s own, since the very possibility of the ‘fleece’ is founded on sudden and violent (re-) appropriation. If ‘fleecing’ has no stable, single meaning, then, what is it to be ‘fleeced’ in or by *Glas*, this spellbinding concoction that is *Glas*? What, if anything, does it expose us to? And what, if anything, does it defend us from?

Perhaps in a similar vein—that of the seeming colloquialism—one may ask not only how the reader might approach a text so extraordinary as *Glas*, but how one might *wear* it: that is, how one might stand or bear it; how one might put up with it, or live with it, swallow it or suck it up? These phrases are not just fortuitous ones, in the sense that the entire fabric of the Genet column of *Glas* seems to be woven around images of garb (as well as of spittle, sputum, the mouth, etc., to which we’ll return): depictions of types of costumery, jewelry and other clothing accessories, described by Genet and Derrida alike with a degree of stylization

that often seems to match their highly contrived and ornamented appearance. As if the style of such garb, of Genet's writing and of *Glas* itself are themselves intricately woven together. We are told, for instance, that *The Thief's Journal* and 'the costume of the prisoners' are in fact 'cut from the same material, the same flowery fabric' (p.129). The qualities of this material in turn fashions the particular sensibilities of the reader. Meanwhile, a little later on, it is again 'the outfit of the convicts' that spurs desire, impels writing, and fosters the very language of both the text and its reader (p.137). 'A column and a textile', a 'style', too, attain semblance of one another, through an intricately woven play of detachment and substitution that intimately ties the philosophical or critical concerns of the Genet column to its textual operations, construed each time as a 'made' or stylised fabric (p.137). The details of a pair of denim slacks, of a criminal's gait, of a false limb (the 'wooden peg ... fastened to a stump cut off below the knee by a system of straps and buckles' p.139), of a plastic bunch of grapes pinned inside the trouser fly as if it were the cock's head-dress, of a military uniform or a fine tapestry, of an arrangement of cut flowers: pose, posture, postiche, prosthesis—all combine to manifest a 'simulacrum', a 'parade', a 'parry' or 'masquerade' (of erection, among other things, but also castration: the 'peg' for example is likened to a 'stony colossus' (p.139)) that seems ornately and inseparably plaited, stitched into the work at hand. As if the 'style in question' were itself a 'fetish' of sorts (p.223). The relation between style, fetish, erection and castration will therefore be one of our problems.

If it regales itself, *Glas* regales itself in flowers. The text is indeed composed 'in liana and ivy' (p.18)—that which weaves, braids, entwines, binds, grafts, overlaps, and sews together with some decorative aplomb the parts of the text that would otherwise appear to stand starkly apart, banded erect. The flower, so *Glas* tells us, is as much what gathers—"the poetic object par excellence" or the very 'figure of figures' (p.14)—as it is that which is

gathered or cut. What we might gather on the strength of the flower-gathering that *Glas* is itself gathered by the flower that styles the text, whether in literary or rhetorical terms. The cut or gathered part nonetheless allots the whole of which it is a part. How, then, is one to comprehend or gather (cut) the flower, if it in fact determines the entire field within which—and of which—it becomes the principal figure? The part is larger than the whole of which it is a part, while still being a potentially detachable part of the whole whose intrinsic integrity it supposedly assures, and therefore it cannot with any simplicity support what supports it. (Later, as we will see, this will recall the deconstructive problem of the column and colossus, perhaps of erection itself.) And, performing this very problem perhaps, Genet ‘has made himself into a flower. While tolling the *glas* (knell), he has put into the ground, with very great pomp, but also as a flower, his proper name, the names and nouns of common law, language, truth, sense, literature, rhetoric, and, if possible, the remain(s)’ (p.12). If the style of *Glas* has to do with ‘the erectile stem—the style—of the flower’, nonetheless when the flower blossoms at the stem’s summit, ‘the petals part’ (p.21–22) and the flower head (the proper) divides or decapitates itself. The bloom thus becomes, as Derrida puts it, ‘(de)part(ed)’ [*partie*]. No longer just a part of a larger whole (that it never simply was), but the very part that (however impossibly) partitions or demarcates it as such, the flower holds or harbours in itself ‘the force of a transcendental excrescence’ (p.15). This suggests an odd outgrowth or projection, a distended body or architecture, an impossibly elastic supplementarity that both enlarges a figure, making it larger than the whole (of itself), larger than the rhetoric or poetics it comes to distinguish or define, but which also distorts, ruptures and interrupts the entire economy and very idea of the ‘whole’, of which it somehow remains an (excrecent) part. The flower—as the part that is and is not gathered—is ‘(de)part(ed)’, then, by force of this ‘transcendental excrescence’ that somewhat sets it apart from the ‘series of bodies or objects of which it forms a part’. Like the ‘appearance’ or ‘apparition’ of a ‘hole

in erection’, the spectral remains of the ‘(de)part(ed)’ part are therefore always already ‘at work in the structure of the flower’ (the stem, column, erection) as a ‘practical deconstruction of the transcendental effect’ (p.15):

In little continuous jerks, the sequences are enjoined, induced, glide in silence... They are always only sections of flowers, from paragraph to paragraph, so much so that anthological excerpts inflict only the violence necessary to attach importance {*faire cas*} to the remain(s). Take into account the overlap-effects {*effets de recoupe*}, and you will see that the tissue ceaselessly re-forms itself around the incision {*entaille*}. (p.25)

But what of the fleece, among these other regalia and insignia of the text? What of the especially talismanic golden fleece, fleece of the winged ram? As perhaps a byword for *genêt*, the gold-blossomed bush, so Derrida will say? The fleece ‘surrounds the neck’. In the French the ‘*toison d’or*’ also refers to the necklace of the ‘Order of the Golden Fleece’ that Genet imagines Harcamone wearing, so it *is* a necklace as well as a fleece that is ‘worn like a necklace’. Worn this way, the fleece festoons the person like the proper name in all its fragile grandeur (p.67). As such the fleece marks the spot or line of the cut, the place where the head is at once prioritized, one might say fetishized through both severance and suspension, and at the same time degraded or demeaned, at once raised up and cast down, rendered proper and improper at a stroke (the head, therefore, as a double and no doubt duplicitous part of the ‘whole’ it at once participates in and allots). The fleece thus summons the problem or question—the spectre—of castration (though, as we shall see, transforming it, too). It therefore comes to be associated with ‘the apparition or the appearance of a hole in erection’, and furthermore with both erection itself, as it seemingly fulfils itself through the penetrative

act (which entails the opening of a hole), and a certain lapse or failure of erection—a gap or hole in erection—so that we end up with the extraordinary image of a fleece-lined volcano, a vertiginous, erupting black hole, a shadowy pit, a lair for thieves and murderers armed with the sharpest of blades, that is also a ‘spitting gulf’, ‘an inexhaustible eructation of letters in fusion’: ‘the text is a golden fleece’ (p.67). What we have, then, is a double-sexed image of the fleece: with the fleece, we find that which opens or gapes, and that which erupts, ejaculates; that which screens the exposable (detachable?) part, dissembling the promise of revelation, folding in and over on itself as it thrusts and spills forth. The text as golden fleece is a precious ‘scalp’, a cuttable part no doubt, the trophy-effect of a violent incision in language (something like a cut phallus or flower); but it is also a woven or braided mesh, a textual veil, an ornate fabulation, a near-spectral trace that spaces what it membraneously nets together, an extended dissimulation covering both the whole of the hole, and the hole of the whole—in other words, the entirety of the void that it at once dissimulates and dissembles. In part, then, by casting holes over holes. So that in multiple ways the whole-hole lacks itself. The fleece-like text fleeces, then, in a double sense—if it steals away, what it takes from us is perhaps the thievable or detachable object itself, leaving hanging, suspended, in its place the fetish that it fabulates, as we’ll see. As such, the seminal act to be associated with this woven ‘scalp’ is not simply that of theft, but theft of theft, theft of a certain possibility of theft. Where theft is to be committed, in other words, we find a certain abyss, as if another thief has come before the thief himself; but leaving only the trace of a certain abyss that no longer conforms to what is thievable or castratable in any simple sense. It is as if, through this textual fleecing, castration is put into double-sexed deconstruction, suspended above or below itself (like the fetish?), subjected to repetitive scenes of concocted re-enactment and re-embellishment, for good or ill.

Such a fleece is therefore not simply wrapped around a ‘spitting gulf’ conceived of decisively as either an ejaculating erection or the raw wound of castration; instead, it is refigured as a near-transparent sheath of spittle, fragile perhaps in the sense of being somewhat ethereal, but mucoid and gluey nonetheless. Mobile, elastic, strangely ‘intact’ (p.67) (its increasing viscosity perhaps a gesture of hospitality towards the small tube of Vaseline that Genet so famously introduces into his text). This spittle smears, spreads like a thin, watery milk; worked in the mouth as a form of technique, it mats, pastes together hairs (pubic hairs, for instance). The white spit over the lips enframes as much as it sheathes the opening, coats rather than covers the genital parts to which it sticks, decorating as much as hiding them. A delicate silken veil rolled in the head’s orifice folds over and in on itself, an oddly fascinating secretion that perhaps secretes nothing but itself—or that perhaps secretes secretion itself. What is discharged here, then, is not pure seminal fluid nor, for that matter, menstrual blood, but an enveloping drool that may mix and intermingle with others to form a strange, hybrid solution, a woven garment of liquids, juices, the flow and ebb of tides, a fine regalia befitting the watery pomp of a ‘fleet of screens with purple sails... a fleet guarding itself at the prow and the poop, gold spurs for the parade’ (p.67). Elsewhere in the text, we find highly ornamented descriptions that culminate in Derrida’s evocation of ‘the agglomerate web-veil-spittle’. Here, amid a complex interaction between the ‘membranous partition’ of the soft palate, the jagged pillars of the tongue’s edges, and the saliva that produces ‘gluing contiguity’, the ‘text is spit out’ (pp.140-42). It is even ‘spat out into my mouth’ perhaps: ‘an almost unconscious movement of deglutination made me swallow’ (p.147)—providing another answer to the question of how one might ‘wear’ the text, how one might *swallow* it or suck it up. With this watery image of a purple-sailed, golden-spurred fleet parading itself before us, however, it is as if the fleece as modesty panel, as layered covering (‘fleet of screens’), now comes to disport itself almost brazenly. Promising to sail or slide across vast

expanses of hidden depths, it nonetheless seems to cover or conceal nothing at all. But, for all that, it is a parade that never seems to get going, never quite getting itself out of port: ‘The parade always stays behind’. This ‘behind’ or *Derrière* calls to mind the tomb of the (late) father (tomb of the proper name marked by the ‘capital letter’, the ‘D’ of Derrida), but such that the logic of castration woven into the family romance can never quite be separated, severed, isolated or extracted from this watery solution, this spat-out secretion that mixes blood and sperm with itself. If the text is a ‘fleecing text’ in the sense that it reminds and thus robs us anew of the dead father (the figure behind the veil), nevertheless the ‘phallic’ cut that may be ‘fervently celebrated in private, behind the curtain’ is still a sort of cultic adornment, the occasion and pretext for another fleece-like weaving—another fleecing—another floral display of flowers and phalluses that are as much ornately braided as they are violently cut. What follows is a festival of preening, a hybrid arrangement of stems and stalks, hairs and feathers mixing together all plant, animal and human life in a wild orgy of miscegenation. Borders make way for braided flowers, the fleece-like text ‘*tricks out* its writing’ such that the ‘gulf’ or abyss over which it seems to glide is at once divested of all borderlines of the ‘self-same’—those which might grant identity or delineate being, for instance—and endures instead a weaving-dissimulation in which ‘the erection is produced only in *abyme*’, in the abyss (or the abeyance, the suspension) of the abyss. As Derrida writes:

The tangled tracing of its filial filaments assures *at once* (impossible castration decision) sewing and overlap cutting again...: of the mass of flowers as a phallic upsurging *and* a vaginal concavity (small *glas* grown, summarized in between, at the back of the glottis), intact virginity *and* bleeding castration, *taille* (clipping and size) of a rose, of “the red rose of monstrous size and beauty” that will soon open up into a “shadowy pit.” (p.68)

As it joins and separates at once, this ‘*and*’—‘a phallic upsurging *and* a vaginal concavity’, ‘intact virginity *and* bleeding castration’—represents and yet transforms the ‘impossible castration decision’ that in its very impossibility allows weaving, braiding, concocting, textual fleecing—‘the tangled tracing of filial filaments’—to happen. Elsewhere, Derrida speaks of the ‘economy of the fetish’ (antagonistically inseparable mix of separation and attachment) that overpowers the ‘deciding discourse of castration’: at bottom, ‘the fetish is not opposable’; like the ‘*and*’, one ‘cannot cut through to a decision’ concerning its always double function, ‘any more than between the sexes’, he writes (p.227; p.229). (Meant to overcome castration anxiety, the fetish nonetheless suspends or substitutes every decision about castration in an ongoing way.) Such ‘grafting’, like that of the flower, is however precisely a matter of the text’s ‘style’, one that cannot be secundarized in relation to its supposed ‘substance’ or ‘matter’, since the latter is everywhere spat, discharged, woven, worn, formed, stylized, seeming to pass between and across. The overpowering force or ‘style’ of the fetish in relation to the ‘deciding discourse of castration’—like this double-sexed discourse of the ‘*and*’—connects, moreover, to Derrida’s suggestion that the bi-columnar is in a certain sense uncastratable. Instead, the ‘*and*’ fleeces, intricately and impossibly knotting what is separate and joined at one and the same time, undecidably giving and taking, exposing and covering. With this, the membraneous, agglutinating, clumping ‘*and*’ steals away from under our very noses the ‘castration decision’—a decision that would indeed maintain the distinction between property and theft, presence and absence, ‘monstrous size and beauty’/‘shadowy pit’, and so forth—a decision that it nevertheless cannot help but suspend, letting it hang, undecided, in a certain way. (A ‘clump’ is not exactly an erection but neither is it simply a non-erection.) This is perhaps the whole tale (hole-tale) of the ‘*taille*’—of ‘clipping and size’—that the ‘fleecing text’ weaves. From this ‘maddening, atypical place’

we get ‘more or less (*than the*) truth, more or less (*than the*) veil’ (p.69), not simply causing the whole erection to *fall* (recall the winged ram, at once brought down and raised up), but putting such erection into deconstruction—fleecing it, if you will (where of course ‘fleecing’ retains its multiple sense).

Genet may well write for money—yes, and why not? (p.217-19)—but, still, he fleeces us by means of a double and duplicitous economy in which—through theft of theft— what is taken from us (or given in return, who is to say?) is more and less than money, property, profit and loss.

For the erection to ‘fall’, to fall purely and simply or to be thought vulgarly in terms of mere ‘falling’, one would still have to maintain—to hold up—the entire edifice or column of that phallogocentrism of which castration would form an (uncastratable) part; whereas to deconstruct the phallus in its erection would be to expose to a powerfully deciphering and transformative reading just this tale—*taille*—of (uncastratable) castration. Immeasurably taking its measure.

II.

How, then, is one to take the size of the column, or bi-columnar text? How can it possibly measure against the erection, the stone stump, all-supplementing prosthesis, colossal perhaps beyond (its own) measure—‘the sublime, immeasurable, sizeless superelevation’ (p.260) that is as much (and undecidably so) a portent of death as it is a sign of pure potency? Appearing as the supplementing part of ‘Parergon’, buried deep in *The Truth in Painting*,² we find Derrida’s reading of Kant’s ‘Analytic of the Sublime’, under the name or title of ‘The Colossus’. The colossus, erect, upright, sublimely overhangs, looms above us, almost too

high, ‘almost too large’. Outsized, it seems at first beyond size, albeit according to a certain disproportionality which nonetheless implies the ‘vast’, the ‘gigantic’, the ‘massive’, the ‘enormous’. Size (*taille*), Derrida tells us here, referred more originally to ‘the line of a cut’, to the incision which not only comes to ‘broach a surface’ (to circumcise, let’s say), but also to ‘delimit a contour’, to distinguish but also to pattern, perhaps (p.120). In order to retain the latter sense of the French word *taille*—cutting, incision—in its uncertain relation to its other meaning—scale—Derrida chooses to deploy the term ‘cise’, an obsolete spelling of the English word ‘size’. ‘Cise’ therefore appears repeatedly throughout the text in order to preserve and indeed cultivate this ambiguity or complexity. ‘Size’, then, opens a track or pathway that goes from the question of magnitude or scale, to a certain opening or breaching, to the delineating mark of the *parergon*—as impossible mark, given the very problematic that the *parergon* itself implies (what intervenes to establish or limit the limit, and how might we delimit whatever this may be?). Thus leading to the complex relation, if it could be called that, between the ‘size’ of the outsized and the impossible logic of the cut (problem of the phallus).

Henceforth, a certain double antagonises (itself), a double-effect occurs, deconstructively, between the over- or outsized and the tracing or drawing or marking of a line: ‘between the Greek *kolossus* and the *columna* or *columen* of the Romans, a sort of semantic and formal unity exerts an irresistible attraction’, Derrida writes (p.120). A sublime attraction, perhaps—we should wonder a good while longer how to describe it, though doubtless in a form which turns such ‘unity’ (indeed such a desire for unity) nearly inside out. For the column is not, in the end, the colossus; or, rather, the column is not purely and simply colossal. The column that supports an edifice as its prop, as a *parergon*—‘supplement to the operation, neither work nor outside the work’ (p.121)—constitutes itself as a supporting

structure, and is therefore necessarily of moderate and measurable size. As Derrida remarks, ‘a measure of its erection can be taken’ (p.122). Although, of course, deconstructibly so, since by constituting itself as an indispensable part of the object it delineates, the *parergon* serves, not simply as the outer limit or boundary of ‘form’, but more fundamentally as its enabling condition and hence most ‘interior’ property. Which begs the question, if the parergon is an intrinsic facet of the ‘work’ as much as its extrinsic border or edge, what then serves as the parergon of parergon, the limit of the limit, that which limits the limit itself? Thus, according to an impossible measure (that of the ‘erection’), the parergonal-deconstructible limit of the column vies strangely with the colossal sublimity or sublime colossus that attracts it, or raises it up, elevates it, only to ‘out-size’ it.

How does one take the measure, or get the size, of this situation? As if to maintain a distinction between the two (however unstable this may be), Kant in the analytic of the sublime highlights ‘quantity’, in contrast to the analytic of the beautiful where, as Derrida notes, he had begun with ‘quality’. Kant distinguishes the mathematical sublime, where the imagination is overwhelmed by spatial or temporal magnitude, from the dynamical sublime, in which a sense of overbearing power (for instance, an irresistible force of nature) may cause sheer terror, impeding cognition, immobilizing the will. Kant commences with the mathematical sublime, then, taking ‘quantity’ as his cue. In these terms, he describes the sublime—irreducible to the simple measure of ‘form’—as that which is *absolutely large*. Nevertheless, the absolutely large, as Derrida points out, ‘is not a dimension, in the quantitative sense’ (p.135). The ‘absolutely large’ acquires a magnitude that is beyond measure, that is wholly disproportionate, asymmetrical, incalculable, incomparable, and thus unequal, unscaled, to anything save itself. And yet, all the same, the ‘absolutely large’ allows itself to be ‘represented under the category of quantity’ (p.136) which it unavoidably evokes

as much as decisively eschews. Moreover, while ostensibly it may not be compared with anything, the absolutely large as a 'figure' of the sublime is, Derrida tells us, nonetheless *preferred* by Kant to the absolutely small. Indeed, since 'the more and hence largeness are inscribed in the movement and in the very concept of preference' (p.136), it is not just that the (non-rational) elevation of the large over the small on Kant's part raises the question of a particular preference, but instead that the *very question of preference itself* is at issue here. 'If no mathematics can as such justify a preference', writes Derrida, 'it must be that an aesthetic judgement is implied in it, and a subjective measure coming to found reflective judgments' (p.136). For Derrida, then, such 'preference' overwrites and undermines the borders of the mathematical sublime it is supposed to uphold, and operates to reintroduce comparability or comparison where it should, in fact, have no place (i.e., no preferentiality where mathematics is concerned). Here, then, the (mathematical) sublime is not merely subjected to its own, grand law of indetermination, but through the implicitly comparative process of preferentiality is somewhat brought down to size.

The colossus, the colossal, is, then, not just the column, the prop or support (although the *parergon* is no more wholly supportive of the *ergon* than the colossal is radically asymmetrical, absolutely free-standing, utterly self-sufficient, without-prop or *sans-prop*). The colossus is, however, neither simply the 'prodigious' nor the 'monstrous'. As Derrida observes, an object is 'prodigious' when, by means of its sheer enormity, it obliterates 'the end which constitutes its concept' (p.125). Whereas the sublime is resisted or diluted both by 'things of nature' whose concept 'already contains a determinate end' (for example, the horse, 'whose natural destination is well known to us'), and by the art object already endowed with aesthetic intention or purpose, the 'prodigious' aspires to that degree of superelevation (beyond degree, height, measure or coordination) with which one associates

the sublime in its strongest manifestation (pp.122-25). The ‘prodigious’ may be detected in ‘raw nature’ which, undomesticated by any sense of proportion, symmetry, or order, nevertheless overflows itself, deforms itself, taking on a monstrous or denatured quality (so extreme, in fact, that it is incapable of inspiring emotion or fear; incapable, that is, of human ‘attraction’ in any sense). Whereas the ‘prodigious’ or the ‘monstrous’, in their truest sense, work to annihilate utterly the ‘end’, determination, or purpose which might otherwise constitute their grounds, the colossal merely ‘qualifies’ the presentation of its concept, such that it is, in Kant’s terms, ‘almost too large’ for the idea that it conveys. As Derrida puts it:

Colossal (*kolossalisch*) thus qualifies the presentation, the putting on stage or into presence, the catching-sight, rather, of some thing, but of something which is not a thing, since it is a concept. And the presentation of this concept inasmuch as it is not presentable. Nor simply unrepresentable: *almost unrepresentable*. And by reason of its size: it is “almost too large.” (p.125)

Here, the ‘unrepresentable’ opens up (within) the space of presentation that it also exceeds, remarking it ‘otherwise’, according to a certain logic of the trace, perhaps. The colossal retains an affinity with the sublime to the extent that its appearance does not take the form of a ‘thing’ that is fully formed for the imagination or experience, but which instead puts conceptuality and thus reason itself to work. Yet the ‘*almost too*’ of the colossus, rather than being just a pure excess, also amounts to a provocation of reason in the sense that it remains extremely difficult to arrest its ‘category’. If it were just *too* large, the colossal would be absolutely unrepresentable, and would thereby fall upon its own grounds. ‘The pure and simple “too” would bring the colossal down’ (p.125), just as much as the complete absence of this ‘too’ would effectively destroy the colossus by dint of a full adequation of the thing and the

concept: colossus (cutting it back down to size, thereby reducing it to what it should not be). The 'almost too' thus plays against or upon the limit in a more complex way than the 'simple overflow' (p.125) that would seem to characterise the sublime. This is its 'singular originality', Derrida tells us. Hence, the 'almost too' at once invites reason's approach (in the form of the work of conceptuality); yet it also restricts, even confounds, its satisfactory completion (such that, for instance, the presentation of a concept is made difficult 'when the intuition of the object is "almost too great" for our "power of apprehension"', as Kant puts it (p.126)). Indeed, this to-ing and fro-ing of the 'almost too' threatens to unravel its trait in any kind of delimited form: 'Where are we to delimit the trait of the *almost too*?' asks Derrida (p.126).

Somewhere between the 'size' of the oversized or the always mis-sized, and the impossible logic of the cut (the limit, border, or frame), somewhere between the column and the colossus, we find ourselves in the midst of the 'sublime', albeit a 'sublime' that, like column and colossus, is not quite the same as itself, never quite the same. (And what is the nature or status of this 'between', this 'and', if neither simply an extension or protrusion, verging on a bridging-effect, nor simply a meeting at the edges, one limit touching another?)

'The colossal will perhaps be something, or rather the presentation of something which can be taken without being able to be taken... and which from then on crushes you, throws you down while elevating you at the same time, since you can take it in view without taking it in your hand... and since you can see it without seeing it completely' (p.139).

The Kantian sublime constitutes a movement away from empiricist or naturalistic theories of sublimity (for unrepresentable 'raw nature' is ultimately a projection, the extreme or outermost limit of a sublimity which takes only its 'presentations' from nature). Thus, as Derrida writes, the Kantian sublime 'can be encountered as such only in the mind and on the side of the

subject. The sublime cannot inhabit any sensible form. There are natural objects that are beautiful, but there cannot be a natural object that is sublime. The true sublime, the sublime proper and properly speaking... relates only to the idea of reason. It therefore refuses all adequate presentation' (p.131). Yet still, what is 'unpresentable' presents itself, the sublime is no more simply 'the infinite idea itself' than it is contained in a 'finite natural or artificial object' (p.131). Instead, the fundamental 'inadequation' or 'incommensurability' that characterises the sublime inheres in the fact that the 'infinite' is inadequately presented in the 'finite' as precisely the inadequation of the sublime itself. To complicate matters further, if sublimity is, for Derrida, 'only in the mind and on the side of the subject' it is nonetheless 'not just encountered in the mind'. For, in view of the preference which elevates the absolutely large over the absolutely small, the Kantian discourse of the sublime refers itself to the body, doing so at the point where the mathematical evaluation of size gives itself over to aesthetic evaluation of the sublime's enormity. Here, the 'primary (subjective, sensory, immediate, living) measure proceeds from the body. And it takes the body as its primary object... *It is the body which erects itself as a measure*'. This body is the 'body of man', says Derrida: 'It is *starting from* it that the erection of the largest is preferred' (p.140). Hence the presentation *in man-like form* of the Colossus in the painting attributed, now contentiously, to Goya, for instance—although with sufficient enormity and deformity to present a concept almost too great for its presentation. In Derrida's 'The Colossus', in fact, we find reproductions of two 'Goya' paintings of the Colossus, including the now-disputed one. This situation recalls Derrida's remark in the Hegel column of *Glas*: 'A scandalizing question traverses the text ... how can one have two sons {*filis*}? How can one be the father of two phalli, erected one against each other ?' (p.175). (Here, of course, he is also speaking of *Glas* itself.) In one of these images reproduced in *The Truth in Painting*, then, the Colossus sits amid a barren landscape under a slender crescent moon, part-man, part-animal, his head hairy

yet his torso smooth and muscular, his back turned but his face looking towards us, though gazing upwards, beyond the space of both the composition and the spectator. In the other, perhaps the more famous—yet now disputed—of the two, the Colossus strides out across the shadowy wastes of a craggy landscape, leaving in his wake a desperate scene of chaos in which men and animals scatter in hurried confusion from their all-too exposed encampment. It is a sublime scene of darkness, violence and wild disorder. In both images, the Colossus seems intent on broaching the very bounds or borders of the picture that nonetheless confines him. Although Derrida does not offer an analysis of either of these paintings, their salient features recall his insistence that the colossal is always to be found between the ‘monstrous’ and ‘man’, between culture and nature, the infinite and finite, between enormity and the limit, the outsized and the ‘frame’.

No sublime, then, without the emergence, the rising up, of man’s body. Its monstration, one might say. This body is nonetheless a ‘median place, an average place of the body which would provide an aesthetic maximum without losing itself in the mathematical infinite’ (p.141). This body at once raised up and brought (or weighted) down a little, then, its apparent fixity (at mid-point) an effect, as much as a resistance, of the complex forces at work in its ‘erection’. The colossus as that which, as in *Glas* and in *glas* (gl—) remains falling, slipping or sliding away, as it remains—somewhat like the decollated head or the droopy ding dong of an elderly man (p.244).

This colossus is—these irreconcilable colossuses are—strangely like the circumcised Jew in Derrida’s ‘Circumfession’³, perhaps: ‘the circumcised Jew: more naked, perhaps, and therefore more modest, under the excess of clothes, cleaner, dirtier, where the foreskin no longer covers, protects itself the better for being more exposed... whence my theme, foreskin and truth, the question of knowing by whom by what the violence of circumcision was

imposed...’ (pp.59-60; pp. 134-35). The colossus appears both strikingly naked and excessively covered, protecting itself all the better, maybe, for being more exposed (‘fleeced’, maybe): ‘neither culture nor nature, both culture and nature... between the presentable and the unrepresentable, the passage from the one to the other as much as the irreducibility of the one to the other. Cise, edging, cut edges, that which passes and happens, without passing, from one to the other’ (p.143). In ‘Parergon’, while reading Kant, Derrida considers the clothes of statues, ‘which both decorate and veil their nudity’. Tellingly, here, statues’ clothing are termed ‘hors-d’oeuvres stuck onto the edging of the work nonetheless, and to the edging of the represented body to the extent that—such is the argument—they supposedly do not belong to the whole of the representation’ (p.57). Thus, perhaps, through the regaling of stone stumps, the problem or question of circumcision might be re-stitched or re-grafted, like the flower itself, onto that of the parergon. ‘Fleecingly’, one might even say.

III.

I want to conclude with some brief remarks linking this expository reading of the Genet column of *Glas* to the Hegel column that forms its counterpart. In Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* the family plays a central part in the syllogistic reasoning that connects marriage, education, property, capital and civil society. The unification of the family through marriage and child-rearing finds its external embodiment in the synthesis of the civil sphere, education and capital. Indeed, the production of free, educated and property-holding individuals through child-rearing within bourgeois society itself brokers the transition from family to civil life, and thus leads to the constitution of the state. As *Glas* shows, the family therefore acquires pivotal importance in the whole system of Hegel’s philosophy of right, notably in its relationship to his thinking of politics, ethics and society. Yet it is not only that the family

repeats intact the entire dialectical system, but also that it renders that system problematic. For Hegel, the fundamental meaning of family is filiation. It is that which defines Spirit, although at the exclusion or expense of material, natural and animal realms. In the Christian faith the family-ties between father and son connect infinite to finite Spirit, God to man. The human family itself embodies the story of a divine filiation which, indeed, incarnates itself in the figure of Christ. For Hegel, Christianity inaugurates true filiation at the point it overcomes and replaces the Old Testament rights and duties prized by Judaism with an ethical paradigm of love and freedom. In this (Greco-Christian) story of filial reproduction, not only is the Jew excluded as irredeemable within the movement of dialectic synthesis that filiation itself seems to name. The mother, too, is largely reduced to a material conduit that remains extrinsic to the dialectical process to be found in the story of filiation. Only the father's image finds divinity in the filiation of infinite and finite Spirit (God and man)—Christ's (and man's) mother is merely 'actual'. The fact that the mother cannot be fully included within the divinely filiated family in which she nevertheless plays an inescapable part disrupts the movement of synthesis which hopes to reappropriate without remainder the circle in which are brought together marriage, family, education, property, religion, society and state. Thus, the ever-higher synthesis aimed at through the work of dialectical reason rests upon the violent exclusion/reduction of the otherness of the other that it cannot assimilate.

But, of course, that which is excluded from the system in fact assures the system's very conditions of possibility. As the Hegel column continues, Derrida turns to the story of Antigone which Hegel himself discusses in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In contrast to the masculine task of re-securing the polis after a period of internecine struggle (civil war but also family feud), in *Antigone* the feminine is associated with a work of mourning that fulfils its role within the family and community through ensuring burial rites for the dead brother. Thus, albeit at the 'other' end of life, the woman's function is once again merely to facilitate

or actualise the masculine transition from finite to infinite Spirit. Yet the store Hegel sets by the brother-sister relationship problematises as much as secures dialectical reason. The spiritual and ethical purity of the sister-brother relation seems guaranteed both by the lack of conjugal desire and by the absence of epic conflict between parent and child, so that in going beyond internecine struggle this very same relation provides grounds for the ‘free’ dissolution of family into a wholly felicitous civil life. Thus, the brother-sister bond at once provides an exemplary image of filiation in its full plenitude or synthetic possibility, uninterrupted either by longing or resentment; and yet it also places Antigone outside the possibility of dialectical incorporation according to the dominant logic of filiation (that of the ‘masculine’ in the conventional fatherly or state form, which Antigone powerfully resists in defying Creon as the embodiment of a state-substitute for the father). In other words, Antigone represents at once the condition of possibility and impossibility for the synthesising universality of Spirit, and thus of the Hegelian system itself. As internal ‘enemy’ possessed of an ‘ethical’ orientation which the system can neither reduce, disqualify nor contain, Antigone’s appearance in the Hegel column of *Glas* prompts certain connections with the Genet side of the page. Most of all, perhaps, what Antigone’s story tells us is that the system cannot stably contain or ‘sublate’ its own figures—just as in the Genet column the flower as poetic figure *par excellence* figures or allots the entire field of literature or rhetoric of which it also forms a part, according to a supplementing logic of ‘transcendental excrescence’ which produces the flower as ungatherable gatherer at the limits of philosophical conceptuality or dialectical reason, rhetorical possibility or textual inscription. Antigone’s story, in other words, is also that of the deconstructibility of erection and sexual difference, and therefore in a certain way of the limits of a ‘deciding discourse of castration’ once more; it is the story of what remains—what is spat out into our own mouths—as a perhaps colossal edifice seems to begin to fall. (The ‘deciding discourse of castration’ may even serve as an improper name for that

which assures the dialectical working of negativity in the Hegelian system.) It is a tale (*taille*) that also fleeces us.

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). Page references will be given in the body of my essay.

² Jacques Derrida, 'The Colossal', in *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp.119-47. Page references will be given in the body of my essay.

³ Jacques Derrida, 'Circumfession', in *Jacques Derrida* by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Page references will be given in the body of my essay.