

Zoltán Dragon

Derrida's Specter, Abraham's Phantom

Psychoanalysis as the Uncanny Kernel of Deconstruction

The aim of this paper is to trace the haunting effect of two texts by Jacques Derrida and disclose the cause of that effect. First I discuss J. Hillis Miller's bafflement and subsequent misreading of Derrida's rather enigmatic text, "Fors," and then read it in tandem with a similarly haunting-haunted text, *Specters of Marx*. This forms the basis of my endeavor to disclose the silenced traces that lead to the work of Nicolas Abraham, an old friend of Derrida's, whose name is simply foreclosed from the French philosopher's oeuvre even though he wrote two prefaces to Abraham's works (one of them being "Fors" – which curiously turns into an enigma for Miller). My aim, in other words, is to let the foreclosed trace speak and to see what it does to Derrida's deconstructionist project culminating in his later project of "hauntology."

In the penultimate chapter of *Topographies* (1995), J. Hillis Miller sets himself the task to "map" Jacques Derrida's "topographies," which is an attempt to locate Derrida's discourse in the domains of literature, theory and philosophy. To map the French philosopher's discourse, Miller chooses as basic reference Derrida's "strange" text¹ of "Fors," the text that features the curious term "crypt" and that transgresses the discursive domains Miller aspires to detect. The "strange case" of "Fors" is thus the origin for a topographic rhetoric not only in Derrida, but also in Miller's project: this is the point from which all subsequent texts would be viewed. The reason for Miller to embark on this cartography is that "somewhere and nowhere in every Derridean topography is a secret place, a crypt whose coordinates cannot be plotted. This place exceeds any ordinary topographical placement."² This strange crypt is thus present in its absence: it is the invisible in the visible, the blind spot of Derrida's writing. Miller, however, having recognized that this crypt insists in Derrida's texts,

1. J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 295.

2. Miller, *Topographies*, pp. 296–297.

fails to map its recurrence and effect, focusing instead on the question of whether Derrida's language gets close to literature or it retains certain philosophical traits even in asking "What is literature?" – a question Derrida (in Miller's reading) seems to be obsessed with; a question that is displaced by the question of "What is a crypt?" in "Fors."³ My aim here is to consider the concept of the crypt as crypt, and not as a displacement of "literature," and to see what "crypt-effects" can be spotted in some of Derrida's texts: in other words, to "map" what Miller refused to map, namely the uncanny kernel of psychoanalytic thought hidden in Derrida's deconstructionist technique of reading that seems to haunt others in the same discursive domain as well. Moreover, I will turn to Derrida's *Specters of Marx* in order to locate the hidden train of thought that the text uncannily silences, and to see the implications of this silencing in the context of Derrida's deconstructive reading that seems to be haunted by its own specters.

1 Derrida's Crypts

To proceed, I first need to "locate" Derrida's "Fors," since Miller continuously "defers" this gesture, even though the appearance of that text is pivotal in any further investigation of the "crypt." During the late 1950s and early 1960s Derrida took part in a series of seminars organized by Nicolas Abraham, Hungarian-French philosopher-psychoanalyst, on the issue of "transphenomenology": a reading of Husserlian phenomenology in the light of Sándor Ferenczi's work and Freudian psychoanalysis.⁴ During the seminars Derrida and Abraham made friends, the result of which are the two forewords the former wrote for the posthumous publications of Abraham, one of them being "Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok" in Abraham and Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. The concepts of "anasemia," "transphenomenology," "crypt," "cryptonymy," "phantom," and "trans-generational haunting" were developing at that time, and the analysis of the Wolf Man *in absentia* also began then. *The Wolf Man's Magic Word* is the result of an analytic reading of Freud's failed treatment of Sergei Pankeiev, and the later at-

3. Miller, *Topographies*, p. 311.

4. Abraham and Torok organized a series of private seminars at their residence in Paris between 1959 and 1961 under the general title "Phenomenological Psychology," later modified to "Genetic Phenomenology" (Nicholas T. Rand, "Editor's Note to Part One," in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* [Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1994], p. 23).

tempts to complete the analysis by Ruth Mack Brunswick and Muriel Gardiner, and also of the Wolf Man's own works.

Abraham redefined Freud's concept of the primal scene as "primal words" (*les mots originaires*), as he believed that the traumatic scene that haunted the Wolf Man had been incorporated in his language. "Where Freud speaks of *Verwerfung* [foreclosure or repudiation], Abraham speaks of incorporation; where Freud says the Wolf-Man's libido was 'splintered,' Abraham speaks of the 'shattered symbol' (*le symbole éclaté*) and the formation of the 'crypt.'"⁵ That is, Abraham set his analysis onto a rhetorical field, in which the trauma is in fact not a psychic entity that is foreclosed, but rather it is incorporated, buried alive as it were, in the foreclosed or incorporated word itself. Therefore, Abraham could locate the fault lines, the shatterings or fissures, not in terms of psychic topography, but in a linguistic domain. This opens the way for a transliteral reading of the Wolf Man's language that includes his native Russian, the German he spoke to Freud, and also English. The "anasemic" reading Abraham performs is in fact a reading of hidden Russian homonyms that support the Wolf Man's German words through which Freud tried to decipher the primal scene. The "anaseme" in Abraham's analysis is the unspoken word adjacent to the one that is uttered, always being there but still absent, "over," "under," or "beside" – as the Greek prefix "ana-" suggests.

Completely in harmony with the Lacanian principle that desire is a metonymy, Abraham successfully pursues the "primal" line in the series of homonyms, displacements and metonymies at the end of which he locates the three pillars of the Wolf Man's language: "*vidietz*": witness; "*goulfik*": zipper; and "*tieret*": to rub. These words encrypt three positions that are pictured in the primal scene of the Wolf Man: the position of the sister, that of the father committing the incestuous act, and that of the witness, the little Sergei himself. It is thus this threefold identification incorporated in a series of words that haunted the Wolf Man's speech, and it was the primarily topographical analysis Freud and his followers performed that obscured the solution, deferring it further and further. Abraham's turn towards language and defining the crypt not in topographical but in linguistic terms let him decode the secret(ed) "*verbarium*" and thus to the termination of the analysis.

It is thus surprising that Derrida, and Miller too, for that matter, in a deconstructionist reading turn back onto the path Freud had taken. The stranger it gets when one reads "Fors," which is placed before Abraham's analysis as a foreword, as

5. Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 157.

introducing Abraham's technique, calling attention to the uniqueness of his psychoanalytic thought that clearly distinguishes him from the two most influential trends in psychoanalytic thought: Freud and Lacan. Why did Derrida retain the topographical analysis? Why did he simply neglect Abraham's genuine way of interrogation while acting as if he were doing a demonstration of it? And finally – a question that locates Derrida's crypt in this enigmatic foreword – why does he later work with the concepts clearly inspired by Abraham without referring to this old friend? In other words, while he utilizes (textual) analytic processes that at points come very close to the technique of cryptonymy, he seems to be reluctant to perform this on his own texts in order to locate his own crypt (although I have to mention that in "Fors" he in fact strives to find the crypt in Abraham and Torok's text, but he clearly fails).

Derrida's reading of Abraham and Torok's cryptonymy has a haunting effect onwards. I claim that it is precisely this effect that Miller noticed in Derrida's works, and he gets very close to the Derridean crypt in locating it. Nonetheless, Miller simply ignores Abraham and Torok's text, and performs a reading of the foreword to *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*. This is evident from the title of the chapter in his *Topographies*: "Derrida's Topographies." Thus he commits himself to the same "misreading" he did in "The Critic as Host," where he attempts to demonstrate the proceeding of a deconstructive reading, in which one example for the etymological tracing of potential meanings he mentions is the pair of opposites *Unheimlich* and *Heimlich*.⁶ Enlisting some of the meanings from the history of these words, Miller concludes that there is a certain meaning of *Heimlich* that mysteriously coincides with the primary meaning of *unheimlich*. The editor of the anthology of *Modern Literary Theory and Criticism*, David Lodge is quick to come with the help: he notes in a footnote, in a rather unusual way, that the author of the essay probably missed that the meaning of *Heimlich* as "secret" is fairly evident even from a German-English dictionary.⁷ What they both miss, however, is that Freud had long ago published an essay, "The Uncanny," that gives a much more minutely detailed analysis of this pair of opposites than that of Miller and Lodge's together. Strangely enough, the same way Derrida seems to forget about Abraham, Miller forgets about Freud.

Derrida's topographical incorporation has thus had an effect on Miller as well, which is evident in *Topographies*. While Freud, Brunswick and Gardiner tried to map the psychic topography of the Wolf Man, Abraham proposed another type of

6. J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in *Modern Literary Theory and Criticism: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (New York: Longman, 1988), p. 279.

7. Miller, "Critic," p. 279.

reading that shed light on the crypt in a linguistic scrutiny, which Derrida threw back onto the literal topography of the psyche, only to be taken up some twenty years later by Miller, who does not even seem to bother with all the predecessors, taking the concept of the crypt as a genuinely Derridean term. This way he incorporates the entire preceding discourse without giving a note of it, which refers me back to another Abrahamian concept: that of the *phantom*, which I intend to discuss in the next section. Before that, however, a more elaborate investigation of the basic differences between Derrida and Abraham is needed in order to be able to locate Derrida's crypts (i.e. his textual incorporations of concepts originally heterogeneous to his discourse) that will lead me on to the confrontation of his phantoms in the program of "hauntology" or "spectropoetics."

As it has been mentioned, "Fors" is a foreword to *The Wolf Man's Magic Word* that arrives to the reader of the book as both an introduction and an interpretation of Abraham and Torok's text. As the translator, Nicholas T. Rand argues, "the juxtaposition of Derrida's essay with Abraham and Torok's text represents an encounter between two distinct critical trends."⁸ These two trends, however, do not exclude each other: cryptonymy – unlike the implication of Derrida's text – "is neither for nor against deconstruction."⁹ Before one would get to the actual text of the analysis, there are already two introductions: one written by Derrida, adapting the tools of cryptonymy to a deconstructive end, and another text written by the translator (and familial and intellectual inheritor of Abraham and Torok's life and work). These two texts undermine each other even before the reader would know on behalf of what they perform their activities. Whereas later Miller celebrates "Fors" to be one of the most enigmatic Derridean texts that demonstrate the power and possibilities of deconstructive reading, Rand – with the same Yale education behind him – seems to "correct" Derrida on numerous points. One such point is the question of reading.

Deconstruction is, seen in the present context, a theory of reading.¹⁰ A theory of reading offers a model of the act or process the reader adopts in engaging with a text,

8. Nicholas T. Rand, "Translator's Introduction," in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. lxvi.

9. Rand, "Translator's Introduction," p. lxvi.

10. I follow here Rand's comparison of deconstruction and cryptonymy as "two separate theories of reading." See: Rand, "Translator's Introduction," p. lxvi. What Rand does not include in his discussion is that deconstruction (especially as practiced by Derrida) is a lot more than simply a way of reading – which may perhaps be said of cryptonymy, as well, I would suggest.

thus defining or delineating this activity (for some, even prescribing the procedure). While Derrida and Miller both seem to argue that cryptonymy is similarly such a theory (and in orientation quite close to the deconstructive project), Rand's definition of cryptonymy as a theory of *readability* focuses on an entirely different aim. In his formulation the theory of readability has nothing to do with the ways "meaning arises, functions or fails to function," which is the concern of many poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and phenomenological projects: it rather "shows how signification can be reinstated after its collapse."¹¹ In other words, cryptonymy as a theory of readability demonstrates "the feasibility of interpretation in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstructions."¹²

Whereas deconstructive reading proceeds as dictated by the infinite play of signification performed by language, or as dictated by the text's self-deconstruction, Abraham's aim is to study the very barrier or bar that allows the sliding of signifiers over the signifieds. Although he acknowledges the feasibility of the working of the chain of signification (as defined by Lacan and used by others as well), he aims to work on the obstacles this separation may induce in understanding. Behind this orientation is Abraham's theory of the symbol, which he adopts from the Greeks: for them the symbol was the broken half of an object that was used to indicate a pact or engagement between two persons when joined with its missing part. For Abraham, an analyst is given only symbols, not meanings: data that lack a missing part that "can be determined."¹³ The aim of analysis is to restore the symbol's unity, thus overcoming the separation, and making it possible for the patient to heal through speaking.

Contrary to this approach, Derrida does not seem to believe in the recovery of obstacles in language, in the operation of a given text. His aim is different inasmuch as his focus is to explore the play of signification in a way that annuls the mastering of the center, of the logos, to foreground the inherent tension or even contradiction a text may contain. In other words, while Derrida discloses the operation of the trace, Abraham "offers an inquiry into and an eloquent 'cure' for one particular pathology: the impossibility for the trace to speak."¹⁴ To put it somewhat differently, while the deconstructionist reading attempts to lay bare the ambiguity of textual foundations in the operation of a text, which inevitably foregrounds that the only possibility is the

11. Nicholas T. Rand, "Introduction: Renewals of Psychoanalysis," in Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, p. 17.

12. Rand, "Renewals of Psychoanalysis," p. 17.

13. Abraham and Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, p. 79.

14. Rand, "Translator's Introduction," p. lxix.

production of a series of different readings, the aim of a cryptonymic analysis is to make reading as such possible. These are the basic differences regarding the purely textual operations of the two distinct theories of deconstruction and cryptonymy: differences which seem to disappear in Derrida's "Fors," and which render Derrida's subsequent concern with secrets, crypts, and ghosts rather problematic.

I stress that the differences I have just pointed out concern both theories in terms of *textual* operations because what Derrida, and then later on Miller, advocate is something completely different. In what follows I will read Derrida's "Fors" in tandem with Miller's discussion and contrast it with Abraham and Torok's text to disclose a thematic shift in the two deconstructive readings (thus misreadings, of course) that has gone unnoticed until today. Inevitably, the question centers around the concept of the crypt which Derrida arbitrarily dissects from the first word of the original French title of the book, *Cryptonymie*: "crypte." The question "What is a crypt?" resonates through Derrida's essay, and everything he does is a move towards a definition – which finally is lost somewhere, or more precisely, absorbed into the metaphysical vocabulary stemming from Plato to Heidegger.

The title of the essay, "Fors," already designates Derrida's trajectory. In a lengthy footnote to the English translation Barbara Johnson explains the potential meanings of the word "for" and its plural, which underlines Derrida's attempt to produce a topographical analysis. *Fors* is the derivative of the Latin *foris* ("outside, outdoors"), and an archaic preposition for "except for, barring, save."¹⁵ Then *fors* as a plural of *for* "designates the inner heart, 'the tribunal of conscience,' subjective interiority."¹⁶ *Fors* thus may mean both exteriority and interiority at the very same time – it may be read as a distant echo of Lacan's rendition of Freud's concept of the *unheimlich*: "extimité." What is significant here is that already the title of the essay designates the role the concept of the crypt would play onwards: the crypt is in fact the topographical embodiment of this impossible place, this invisible *topos* in the visible cartography. In Miller's reading of Derrida, "Fors," the very word itself, is precisely the strange or uncanny (*extimate*, in Lacanese) crypt, "where something or someone both dead and alive is buried, where something has happened without having happened."¹⁷

15. Barbara Johnson's note in Jacques Derrida, "Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok," trans. Barbara Johnson, in Abraham and Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, p. xi.

16. Johnson, pp. xi–xii.

17. Miller, *Topographies*, p. 295.

The problem in this case lies with Miller: Derrida goes with Abraham on this point, namely that the crypt encloses something or someone (a secret, an unmourned beloved, etc.) *buried alive*. Were it buried dead, it would not haunt, that is there would not be any crypt effects. Miller thus makes Derrida's reading of the crypt as an impossible yet pivotal point in topography even more impossible (if that is possible at all), thus undercutting the definition itself. Thus, while for Derrida this impossible point makes possible the very existence of any topography, for Miller topography altogether becomes an impossibility: it becomes a domain that requires "a virtually interminable mapping procedure."¹⁸

As mentioned before, Miller hears in Derrida's recurring question of "What is a crypt?" another question: "What is literature?" According to Miller, Derrida's "interest in reading works of literature puts him in danger of being seen as a strange, Continental, crypto-New Critic"¹⁹ – an assertion that applies to himself as well in certain respect. However, evoking New Criticism is quite mistaken at this point, and it in fact reveals the basis of the multilayered misreading the two deconstructionists perform regarding cryptonymy. The aim of a New Critic is to study the text and nothing else outside it, which indeed would be very well in accord with the deconstructive claim that "there is nothing outside the text" [*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*].²⁰ However, what Derrida does is precisely leaving behind the text in the case of "Fors." Admittedly, he does not even try to talk about the text which his foreword precedes. For that matter, he does not even talk about "texts": right from the beginning he – with the help of a vocabulary drawn from building construction ("Caulked or padded along its inner partition, with cement or concrete on the other side. . .")²¹ – reflects on "crypt" as an object, a material existence of an object that is uncanny in its form. In this light what is even more uncanny is Miller's association of the crypt with literature.

The problem is highly significant: Derrida talks of topographies while Abraham and Torok *clearly state that they do not analyze the Wolf Man with the help of the topographical method used by Freud and his followers, but instead utilize the power of language*. The crypt, in Abraham and Torok's formulation is *purely linguistic*, and explicitly *non-topographical*. What might be called a somewhat New Critical orientation is then the technique of cryptonymy rather than what Derrida performs. Therefore, what Miller attributes to Derrida's discourse here, namely that

18. Miller, *Topographies*, p. 296.

19. Miller, *Topographies*, p. 293.

20. Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. G. Ch. Spivak. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 158.

21. Derrida, "Fors," p. xiv.

"What is a crypt?" is in fact a question of Derrida's endless obsession with "What is literature?" points at precisely what is *missing* from "Fors": it locates the crypt, Derrida's crypt. Since what Derrida performs is nothing else but the incorporation of the "secret" of cryptonymy: he silences the "linguistic turn" of the concept and works with its topographical allusions. Miller is thus, while completely missing the point with his obsession of detecting the question of literature in a text that clearly has nothing to do with the issue, quite accurate in detecting the paradoxical position of "Fors" as a foreword: it is about something that the text immediately following it is not concerned with.

Another crucial point is that for Derrida (and even more radically for Miller) the crypt is an unlocalizable point within the topography: an impossible place in the possible space, invisible in the visible, subverting and sustaining the map at the very same time. For Abraham and Torok it is somewhat different. The crypt effect for them is a symbol in the language of the patient, and as such, it lacks its "cosymbol" – i.e. the part with which signification can operate successfully. Once the symbol is detected and its cosymbol attached to it, reading or speaking becomes possible, as the obstruction that blocked the flow is surmounted. As it can be seen, the crypt in this case is not some mysteriously impossible non-entity: rather, it is a "safe," a linguistic trope (a homonym, an alloeme, or any other trope) that encrypts, that hides or conceals, the trace of the cosymbol. Contrary to what Derrida says about the crypt, for Abraham and Torok it can be detected, though not topographically: it is purely in language, but – and here is once again a crucial point Derrida and Miller absolutely miss – *not in all languages*, i.e. not in every textual or verbal manifestation. For Abraham and Torok a crypt is formed when the suffering, pertaining to the particular person, cannot be uttered, nor can it be discharged or dispensed with. As every suffering is genuine, every crypt should be treated accordingly. That is the reason Abraham and Torok criticize the institution of psychoanalytic thought that is confined to set rules: if the patients present distinct cases, how is it possible to treat them with only one set of formulae? According to them, the primary task of the analyst is to listen to the patient, listen to the very words, and locate the crypt, and it is only then when the procedure of analysis can be thought out – a view that rejects the standard procedure of psychoanalysis with its set analytic progress, stages and complexes.

In my view, in terms of textual analysis, cryptonymy offers a more liberating potential than the deconstructive model of reading Derrida and Miller offers in their examined texts. Whereas, as Miller argues, Derrida proved that the cosymbol is always already lost (a kind of Lacanian *objet a* – which in Abraham and Torok's text it

is clearly not), irrevocably missing, thus providing the point of ultimate textual (I should correct Miller here as he talks about topography continuously: topographical) vortex, the anasemic procedure of cryptonymy transgresses the two-dimensional view of the map and the logocentric concept of cartography. As the prefix “ana-” suggests, the crypt can be everywhere in the text, floating until its cosymbol opens it up. This allows a far greater play with words (not only etymology), and thus a more elaborate analysis as well.

There is one more crucial problem with Derrida and Miller’s approach concerning the issue of the crypt. It is none other than the impossibility of surmounting the obstruction the crypt sets in the face of reading: when they claim that every topography has a crypt,²² and they strive to assign a place for it, rather than disclosing, they simply add a layer of concealment to the crypt effect. For supposing a crypt where there is none, or assigning it a role it does not necessarily fulfill leads to an impasse, another obstruction before any reading. An unacknowledged Formalism may also be detected in Miller’s obsession with the recurring question “What is literature?”²³: if we accept the otherwise quite improbable shift in asking “what is literature?” instead of the original Derridean question of “what is a crypt?” it follows logically that literature, just as the crypt, holds a secret, which one should attempt to disclose through reading. It means, then, that what makes a text literary is the secret it holds safe: it has an essence, something that is “defamiliarized,” as it were, something uncannily encrypted within. What he does not bother asking is what this crypt effect does to the reader, since originally the crypt is erected to keep a traumatic knowledge out of the reach of the ego. If the walls of the crypt are torn down, the traumatic secret is set loose (it is at this point that Abraham proceeds with different psychoanalytic techniques, none of which is retained in either Derrida or Miller). Nonetheless, the effect of this traumatic secret, the so-called crypt effect, or what later Abraham terms as the phantom effect, reaches and touches the reader (as the recent investigations of trauma theory show).

Interestingly, some twenty years later, in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida takes up this very question, and tries to offer ways to deal with such situations. However, surprisingly, *his phantom does not seem to let him loose*: he proceeds in his discussion of ghosts, specters and phantoms without mentioning his late friend and his highly

22. Miller, *Topographies*, p. 308.

23. It is a question he has recently had a chance to tackle: *On Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002) was published in Routledge’s “Thinking in Action” series in 2002. Here, discussing Derrida and literature in Chapter Three, he designates literature as the “wholly other,” which can easily be traced back to his understanding of the crypt.

influential work on transgenerational haunting and the work of the phantom, two topics that are results of his indefatigable engagement with the issue of the crypt effect.

2 Derrida's Phantoms

When Derrida chooses not to refer to Abraham and his concept of the phantom and the transgenerational effects and dangers of haunting, he refers Abraham to occupy the very position of the phantom: he is always there but not there, i.e. present through his very absence. This is not a mere guess or some fancy of overinterpretation (in which case I would see phantoms whenever Derrida's name appears in some similar context, just because in the 1970s he wrote two forewords to Abraham's texts), it has been noted by several commentators, among them Nicholas Royle and Elizabeth Roudinesco. Royle in fact curiously begins his latest book on Derrida's work by drawing the reader's attention to the presence of Abraham's theoretical heritage even – and most importantly – where he is not mentioned.²⁴ Furthermore, even before Royle's previous study on Derrida, *After Derrida*, which also calls attention to Abraham's uncanny presence in several Derridean texts, Roudinesco, in her *Jacques Lacan & Co. A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985*, quite explicitly recalls the friendship of Derrida and Abraham and the latter's influence on the formation of the former's system of thought, and their common detest at Lacan's *aura*.²⁵

Therefore, what is really haunting in Derrida's program of *hauntology* is the uncanny silence concerning Abraham: the concept of the phantom developed throughout Abraham's occupation with the case history of the Wolf Man and his concurrent experience as a clinical psychoanalyst. In his practice he met several patients who produced symptoms the origins of which could not be detected in the psychic life of the patient.²⁶ Thus, their uncanny presence and form proved to be heterogenic to

24. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

25. Elizabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co. A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 598–601.

26. I wish to provide a summary of the theoretical formulation on the basis of Abraham's programmatic essay, "Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology," in Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, pp. 171–176. I mention here only what may be of special interest in the discussion of Derrida's program.

their context. While refining the technique of cryptonymy, Abraham realized that there is a possibility for undisclosed traumatic secrets to “travel” in the language of the parent to the child. This way, the uncanny symptom formation the particular patient produced may be the result of a previous generation’s repression that formed a crypt in the child’s unconscious. This crypt, however, must be guarded in order to go unnoticed and thus undisturbed. Abraham defined an active entity that produces fake traces in order to ward off any attempt at the disclosure of the crypt, using the term of *phantom*. The phantom works in silence, and returns as a witness to the secret buried alive in the crypt.

Derrida’s *hauntology* or *spectropoetics* is announced in connection with Marx’s specter (that which is said to haunt Europe), and concerns the issues of incorporation, mourning, ghosts and phantoms, and finally Hamlet. What is striking at first sight here is that looking at Abraham and Torok’s *The Shell and the Kernel*, one finds the very same topics – only without Marx. Taking the lead from Freud, Jones and to an extent Lacan, Abraham developed a distinct interpretation of Hamlet by focusing on Hamlet’s illness of mourning, which is a special problem of incorporation, made manifest by the appearance of the Ghost – i.e. the phantom. Abraham was so keen on this interpretation that, in 1975, he even wrote a sixth act in “The Phantom of Hamlet or The Sixth Act preceded by The Intermission of ‘Truth,’” in which he called forth the phantom to reveal his secret that – according to him – is left in the dark in Shakespeare’s text, thus blocking the process of working through not only for Hamlet, but for the reader as well.²⁷ In this light it is rather “uncanny” that Derrida bases his “new program” on the very same conceptual framework.

Thus, when Derrida introduces the specter or phantom as “the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible, or an invisibility of a visible X, that *non-senuous senuous* . . . the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of someone as someone other,”²⁸ he comes very close to repeat his own definition of the crypt in “Fors,” and finally to the definition of the phantom by Abraham. Then he introduces the *visor effect*: the strange situation when “we do not see who looks at us,”²⁹ and regards his forthcoming text as being watched by the unseen eyes of the specter “in Marx and elsewhere.” (It is, of course, quite a Lacanian turn, as the definition Derrida attributes to the phantom is strangely reminiscent of Lacan’s

27. Nicolas Abraham, “The Phantom of Hamlet or The Sixth Act preceded by The Intermission of ‘Truth,’” in *The Shell and the Kernel*, pp. 187–205.

28. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 7.

29. Derrida, *Specters*, p. 7.

definition of the *gaze* in the field of vision.)³⁰ I suggest that the strangely algebraic “X” designates the invisible and silenced position of this “elsewhere”: precisely the topographical crypt within his own text that he composed long before, in his foreword “Fors.” The phantom that haunts his text in this case is definitely Abraham.

3 Symptoms of the Phantom, or Derrida's Scepter

One may even attempt to regard Derrida's cautious tackling of the figure of the phantom as his endeavor to come to terms with it, while being aware of the impossibility of the undertaking. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida puts the phantom onto the stage (*mise-en-scène*) in order to “meet” it face to face, using Shakespeare as a referent. While his reference to *Hamlet* and the issue of spectatorship seems to be a genuine “analytic” trick to get rid of the phantom and its haunting effect, I wish to recall that one of the basic effects of the phantom is ventriloquism, i.e. unwitting enunciation generated by the phantom. In this light the turn to *Hamlet*, and especially to the figure of the Ghost, should be read as a ventriloquist act commemorating (and by the same gesture concealing) the encrypted secret of the text: as I have already mentioned, Abraham provided not only an interpretation but also a (literary) solution to the haunting effect of the Father's Ghost in his “The Phantom of Hamlet or The Sixth Act preceded by The Intermission of ‘Truth,’ ” which thus may be heard as an echo in Derrida's “staging.” For Derrida, however, it is no longer the expert (i.e. the analyst) to decipher the ventriloquist drive behind the stage apparition, but the spectator:

What seems almost impossible is to speak always *of the* specter, to speak *to the* specter, to speak with it, therefore especially *to make or to let* a spirit *speak*. And the thing seems even more difficult for a reader, an expert, a professor, an interpreter, in short, for what Marcellus calls a “scholar.” Perhaps for a spectator in general. Finally, the last one to whom a specter can appear, address itself, or pay attention is a spectator as such. At the theater or school.³¹

30. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1998), pp. 82–84. Derrida introduces a strange confluence at this juncture: he blends the distinct concepts of the Lacanian *gaze*, the Abrahamian *phantom*, the Heideggerean *spirit* and his own formulation of the *specter* (intended undoubtedly as a reference to the Marxian notion). It should be clear that these concepts are not only far from each other in their theoretical scope, but that more often than not they are also mutually exclusive with regard to one another.

31. Derrida, *Specters*, p. 11.

With this above quote, Derrida seems to take the concept into a fairly different direction: first, he blends it with the philosophical concept of the spirit (see his discussion of Heidegger³²); second, he thinks one should let the specter speak (whereas in Abraham we should *notice that it is a phantom speaking*); and third, Derrida believes that the phantom does appear (while in Abraham the phantom works in complete silence). With this move Derrida implicitly changes routes, as his description of the moment of facing the specter or phantom more or less matches the Lacanian definition of uncanny spectral apparitions in visual representation. According to Slavoj Žižek, the Lacanian Real “(the part of reality that remains unsymbolized) returns in the guise of spectral apparitions.”³³ This would mean that the specter comes forth to appear in front of the spectator as the messenger of the Real.

However, Derrida’s original working concept of the specter – as circumscribed in the first chapter of *Specters of Marx* – retains implicitly the Abrahamian notion, which should imply that the phantom never appears: it is present via its very absence. I wish to address another already mentioned issue here as well, notably the shift from an essentially linguistic definition to a topographical and thus visualized notion that Derrida seems to work with, however implicitly. To shed light on Derrida’s textual process of encrypting that ends up in a visualized form and to understand the “flaw” in his mentioning of the phantom as an “apparition” put on the stage, I wish to open up the original Abrahamian definition of the phantom toward a visual type of haunting as well. In so doing, it is perhaps best to refer to the etymological root of the word *phantom*. The Greek word *φάντασμα* translates as “vision,” “specter,” which is the synonym of “phantom.” When looking further, it becomes apparent that the word *φαντάζεν* means, “to display.” This etymological trace discloses that the very word “phantom” encrypts in itself the condition of visibility, of being a ghost-like medium, and also the potential to show and to present. But this definition also calls attention to a crucial detail: the phantom never appears – it returns in silence, hiding itself and the cause of its return.

What appears, thus, is a mere display created in order to hide something else more effectively. In other words, the phantom does not return *in the form of uncanny apparitions*, but it returns *to form uncanny apparitions*. What this strange display hides is, furthermore, not the Real (the traumatic kernel) *per se*: it can only

32. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

33. Slavoj Žižek, “I Hear You with My Eyes,” in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Slavoj Žižek and Renata Salecl (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 112.

hide the crypt – more precisely, that *there is a crypt*, i.e. one comes to know of the *presence of an unknown knowledge but not the knowledge itself*.

To return to the issue of the specter appearing in front of the spectator, I argue that the problem with Derrida's staging is that the spectator does not know what the apparition is, in the first place, and since it is an apparition (the staging of something that is properly off-stage), the spectator does not even know whether it *is* at all.

*It is something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent . . . one no longer belongs to knowledge.*³⁴

This is precisely the working of the Abrahamian phantom, which gives the logic of Derrida's project on Marx. As his discussion proceeds, however, he modifies the concept, making it appear, as if it were returning as the repressed content of some traumatic past in the Freudian fashion, forming strange symptoms in the present. Thus he displaces the concept of the phantom at least twice: to a seemingly Lacanian and then to a seemingly Freudian domain. The concept of the phantom is thus silenced, buried alive as it were under the conceptual whirlwind of philosophy and psychoanalytic trends, which thus marks the birth of the symptom of Derrida's text: it becomes haunting and haunted at the same time.

As Abraham is not mentioned explicitly in Derrida's text, his phantomatic presence returns, but not in the form of the Freudian scenario of "the return of the repressed," where the symptom is a compromise formation of a content repressed within. This symptom, however, returns from without, from the outside, insisting and persisting ever more forcefully. To understand this mechanism, I refer to Lacan's conceptualization of the symptom in his later seminars under the name of the *sinthome*. First, the subject forecloses a traumatic experience so that it results in more than simple forgetting, as the trauma is in fact erased. Nonetheless, it creates a rupture that needs to be covered to ensure consistency in the reality of the subject. This consistency, strangely enough, is achieved by the foreclosed traumatic Real returning from without the subject (who thus may not even recognize it as his own) standing in to cover the lack. This symptom figures not in the Symbolic, but in the Real.

34. Derrida, *Specters*, p. 6.

As Žižek explains, the *sinthome* is like a pathological “tic” that resists dissolving and insists stubbornly without any apparent reason.³⁵ He gives the example of the Harmonica man in Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West*, who significantly has no name, and is signified by his notorious harmonica. The harmonica, however, serves as his *sinthome*: it signals the traumatic scene where he was forced to support his brother, who had a rope around his neck. He had to play the harmonica as long as he had the power to, and when he stopped and collapsed, the rope around his brother’s neck fastened, and he died. As the world falls to pieces around him due to this tragic scene, the only support for him to continue his life is precisely the harmonica: it becomes his only positive support of his being, a symptom that cannot be integrated into his reality, a symptom that does not dissolve, i.e. a symptom that returns from without him.

This way the symptom *as sinthome* “ex-ists,” i.e. insists or persists from the outside. This may be seen to be the scenario at work in Derrida’s text. Haunting as it may be, with the same gesture, the return of the Real supports Derrida’s text while calling attention to the foreclosed content or reference it seeks to elude. Moreover, as the beginning of this essay testifies, it is not only Derrida’s text that is subject to the haunting effect of the foreclosure of Abraham and his concept of the phantom: Miller also takes over, so to speak, “inherits” the encrypted secret. This implies that what the reader faces in Miller’s and in Derrida’s texts goes further than the Lacanian return of the Real that appears – once again – as a strange apparition. Here one has to face the uncanny scenario because the Abrahamian phantom is at work, trying to hide the cause of its return. Indeed, the way the encrypted and silenced presence of Abraham and his theoretical heritage travels through the deconstructionist writings seems to perfectly illustrate the “transgenerational” sense of the concept of the phantom itself.

Once again, it is not the Real, not the trauma, or the traumatic experience or knowledge that returns to haunt, but the phantom that produces uncanny formations *in order to hide the Real kernel*, which in turn is the proper cause of its compulsive return. It returns to hide the presence of the crypt in Derrida’s texts and also to transmit it on and on, until its effect starts to fade – although this is rather *deferred*, since due to the endless play of signification in an intertextual model it is almost impossible to grant an end to haunting.

35. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 139.

4 Tearing Down the Walls of the Crypt

What I have attempted to present above is a kind of “anasemic” reading in the sense that I tried to locate the crypt in Derrida’s discourse that has been formed as an incorporation of some specific psychoanalytic thought in his theory of reading known as deconstruction. I briefly contrasted the way a deconstructionist reading of a concept proceeds with the way cryptonymy is performed. The basis of this comparison was provided by Miller, who argued that one of the most enigmatic and haunting texts Derrida ever produced was “Fors,” written as a foreword to Abraham and Torok’s *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word* – the book that presents a cryptonymic analysis for the first time. In that text Derrida presents his interpretation as if he were performing a cryptonymic analysis on the fragment of a word of the title of Abraham and Torok’s book: “crypt.” I argue that his technique or theory of reading is evidently different from what he claims to mime: he performs a deconstructive reading in the face of a theory of *readability*.

Derrida thus incorporates the pivotal concepts of cryptonymy, and utilizes them to a deconstructive end – thus silencing the psychoanalytic background or inheritance. This forms an uncanny kernel in his own discourse that gains its final formulation (symptom *qua* the return of the foreclosed subject matter, knowledge, in the form of an unknown knowledge) in his program of *hauntology*, being present via its very absence. Thus, the very program of hauntology or spectropoetics is already haunted by a silent and effective phantom, whose effect is the transmission of the Derridean crypt on and on.