

## DECONSTRUCTION AS THE THINKING OF SECRET

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**Abstract.** Secrecy is essential to human life, shaping personal identity and social bonds. It enables individuals to protect their inner lives and fosters intimacy and community through selective sharing. Secrecy involves ethical and political judgment, requiring decisions about what to conceal or disclose, when, and to whom. In Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophy, secrecy is deeply tied to responsibility. His late seminars, especially *Respond to Secrecy*, explore secrecy across various domains and highlight its critical role in literature and ethics. This paper analyzes the importance of secrecy within Derrida's thought, focusing on responsibility and key works like *Passions*, *The Gift of Death*, and *Respond to Secrecy*.

*Keywords:* Jacques Derrida; deconstruction; secrecy; responsibility

Deconstruction starts from the possibility of, if not grace,  
then certainly a secret, an absolutely secret experience.  
(Derrida, Caputo, Hart & Sherwood 2005, p. 39)

Secrecy is a fundamental aspect of human existence, manifesting in various forms and serving distinct purposes. Maintaining a private secret allows individuals to establish their interiority and protect a realm of tranquility, separate from the external world. Sharing private secrets with family and friends, in contrast, strengthens intimate bonds within a social group. Similarly, the sharing of public secrets among larger social groups fosters social cohesion. Overall, the act of keeping and sharing secrets is vital for the formation and preservation of human relationships. Without the ability to keep and share secrets, fundamental human experiences such as friendship, love, and community would not be possible.

Secrets are a cognitive function of the intellect, involving the ability to discern what to reveal and what to conceal. They also hold ethical and political significance, and their value—whether good or bad—depends on how they are used. The practice of secrecy is always accompanied by moral judgment, as there is a risk that secrecy can create problems. The essential questions regarding secrecy are as follows: To what extent should secrets be retained, and to whom and how? When, with whom, and under what conditions should secrets be revealed?<sup>1</sup>

The concept of secrecy plays a pivotal role in Jacques Derrida's deconstructive thought.<sup>2</sup> Derrida's seminars continue to be published; to this date, 14 books have been released, with eight also translated into Japanese. The manuscripts of his seminars, totaling 43 volumes, reveal a new aspect of Derrida's thought. In his later years, from 1991 to 2003, Derrida held a series of seminars under the theme of "The Questions of Responsibility." This theme varied every year, with themes such as testimony, hospitality, perjury and forgiveness, death penalty, the beast and the sovereign; the first year the theme was the secret. In his recently published seminar, *Répondre du secret (Respond to Secrecy)* (Derrida 2024),<sup>3</sup> he asked what a secret is and how it is connected to the question of responsibility. To answer this question, Derrida diffracted the semantics of secrets through different dimensions (science, technology, society, politics, and religion).

This paper elucidates the significance of secrecy in deconstruction, particularly in relation to the notions of responsibility and literature, in the context of key works such as *Passions*, *The Gift of Death*, and the seminar *Respond to Secrecy*.

### 1. Definition of Secret

The concept of "secret" is deeply rooted in linguistic and philosophical dimensions, revealing its complex nature through etymological exploration. The term derives from the Latin "secernere," which means "to separate." This is further traced back to the Indo-European root "krei," conveying a sense of sieving or sorting. Thus, the essence of a secret involves a distinction between the inner and outer realms, between disclosure and concealment. Secrets can be understood as personal truths tucked away from public view or shared only with trusted individuals. The dualistic nature of secrets is reflected in the interplay of light and darkness, where disclosure brings clarity, while concealment invites mystery. Associated notions such as sacredness, intimacy, privacy, silence, and prohibition all underscore the significance of maintaining the boundaries of what is shared and what remains hidden. Various methods are employed to safeguard secrets, including encryption and camouflage, as well as psychological tactics like deception and denial. Moreover, phenomena such as confessions, gossip, and leaks serve as indicators of the fluidity of secrets in social contexts.

Derrida's analysis of "secret" enriches the understanding of its semantic network, drawing upon the term's Latin, Greek, and German roots. He points out that, alongside "secernere," the Greek term "crypte" denotes "concealment" and "covering," shifting the focus from mere separation to the dynamic act of hiding and revealing. The German "Geheimnis," in contrast, emphasizes a sense of interiority and intimacy, where "heimlich" conveys notions of the domestic sphere and protection from outsider scrutiny. Derrida acknowledges the heterogeneous linguistic genealogy of these terms, emphasizing their multifaceted implications in discussions of secrecy and its role within human experience. Thus, the exploration

of the semantics surrounding “secret” reveals a profound complexity embedded in cultural, social, and philosophical contexts.

Huge problems await us, which I can only point out today. This does not mean that etymology must make the law – that, in historical uses and translations, the passage has not cut deep between these semantic networks, or that there is a unity of meaning to be presumed behind each of these semantic foci or between them. Perhaps the secret of the secret is that what is promised or appears to be hidden as a unity of meaning behind this multiplicity of linguistic-semantic phenomena does not exist, has no unity, no meaning, or nothing that is properly identifiable. (RS 81)

According to Derrida, the essence of the concept of secret (the secret of secret) lies in the absence of uniformity in its meaning, as it weaves different networks between different languages. Derrida’s unique approach is evident here. He is a philosopher who focuses on the untranslatable and develops his thoughts flexibly from that point.

Traditionally, philosophy is grounded in the unity of meaning. One of its roles is to present a unified meaning of concepts, even though languages and cultures may differ. For example, Heidegger believed that etymology constitutes a privileged law. He explored how the original meaning of a word, such as “Sein,” has been distorted in the Christian world and in modern times. Heidegger traced it back to Greek and attempted to uncover its pure meaning. For him, etymology is the only way to remove obstacles and restore unity of meaning.

Derrida, in contrast, puts philosophy to the test of the untranslatable and thinks within that fluctuation, which lacks a unified meaning. For Derrida, this does not imply that etymology must establish the law. Derrida’s unique way of thinking about secrets in an untranslatable state reveals many facets.<sup>4</sup> “The secret would also be homonymy, not so much a hidden resource of homonymy, but the functional possibility of homonymy or of *mimesis*.” (Derrida 1995, p. 26.)

## 2. The Topic of Secrets in Derrida

Derrida’s deconstruction has critically examined the “metaphysics of the present,” which is deeply connected with Western philosophy, and has questioned the structure that makes pure self-existence possible. When interpreted from a deconstructive perspective, self-presence is no longer pure but is always separated from the self by the arrival of the other, and numerous traces of the other are marked on the self. Deconstruction leaves room for secrecy in its pursuit of self-presence, based on what cannot be present or separated from the self. Derrida has published several texts on secrecy.

First, in *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, all sorts of secrets are written in the form of love letters. Love letters in private writing are the highest form of secrecy. In this text, however, “the secret correspondence on which I am writing at this moment” (Derrida 1987, p. 62) is openly disclosed. It is also difficult

to determine the identity of the recipients of this autobiographical procedure. It is as if the narrator enjoys a game of secrecy and disclosure with the addressee. "My taste for (a-b-s-o-l-u-t-e) secrecy: I can take pleasure only on that condition." (Derrida 1987, p. 46.) "[A]nd the secret circulates with full freedom, as secret you promise I swear, this is what I call a post card." (Derrida 1987, p. 185.) Later, Derrida's writings included more confessional ones, such as *Circonfession* (Derrida 1993). However, like Rousseau's confessions, what is distinctive about them is that, even though everything is confessed, secrets remain.<sup>5</sup>

In *How to Avoid Speaking: Denials*, the relationship between secrecy and negative theology is pointed out. In negative theology, God's name can be considered indescribable, so it is important to pray to and call out to a hidden God who cannot be named. Derrida's deconstructive thought resembles negative theology because of its esoteric ambiguity, as it is spun out while detecting traces of differences that cannot be actualized. For example, "Those people, adepts of negative theology or deconstruction [...] must indeed have a secret. [...] They pretend to have one [a secret] in order to organize themselves around a social power founded on the magic of a speech that is skilled at speaking in order to say nothing." (Derrida 2008a, p. 157.) However, according to Derrida, negative theology differs decisively from deconstruction in that it retains the authority of the divine name and secures a transcendent being beyond any negation. Deconstruction does not rely on the unifying authority of the name, nor does it explore supraessentiality beyond existence. Deconstruction is incompatible with thinking that revolves around a single ultimate secret such as God.

*Passion* is a text written in response to a specific context (Derrida 1993a, 1995). As part of a collaborative volume on Derrida (Wood 1992), 11 essays were prepared, and Derrida was asked to respond. How should he engage with his friends' writing? What obligation does he have to honor their friendships? To address these questions, Derrida drew on Kant. Because the book was created collectively, responding to others' contributions was a ceremonial obligation. However, if his response was merely a matter of etiquette – an act performed out of a sense of duty – it could become a formalized gesture that undermined friendship. The responsibility of responding to others differs from that of acting in accordance with a prescribed duty. If one genuinely respects the other and seeks to respond, then the best response might be a form of "non-response" that departs from the notion of a duty-bound reply. How, then, can a non-response that does not adhere to an already established ceremonial obligation still fulfill the responsibility to respond? As will be discussed later, Derrida explored this question by developing a preliminary reflection on secrecy, which lies at the core of non-response.

In *The Gift of Death*, "the secrets of European responsibility" are described in line with Jan Patočka's text (Derrida 1995a). The genealogy of secrets in Europe has shifted from manic secrets to Platonist secrets to Christian scaremongering

secrets. The hidden sacred is something external, beyond the human subject. However, through Christianity, self-internal dialogue with God became possible, and the secret gradually shifted to the inner world of human beings. Based on this genealogy of secrecy, the second half of the book discusses the aporia of responsibility and the tension between publicity and secrecy in relation to the gift of death in Abraham's consecration of Isaac.

In the Seminar *Respond to Secrecy*, the subjects of secrecy and responsibility are analyzed in the field of literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis, politics, etc. In his later years, Derrida gave a series of lectures at the EHESS under the general title "The Questions of Responsibility," to which this seminar constitutes a "general introduction" (RS 11). In the seminar, Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, Poe's *The Man of the Crowd*, Baudelaire's *The Crowd* and *The Painter of Modern Life*, Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, Oedipus' *The Metamorphosis*, and others are referenced to analyze the problematic of secrets in literary works. The fifth to eighth sessions were roughly equivalent to the previously published *The Gift of Death* and were the climax of the middle part of the seminar.<sup>6</sup> Other examples include the consideration of a preference for secrecy from Heraclitus' fragment "Physis prefers to hide" (3rd lecture), the thematization of curiosity in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (4th and 9th sessions), and Freud's *The Uncanny*, which is analyzed under the themes of alterity and narcissism (10th session).<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Apophatic Exercises on Secrets

Derrida intensively discusses secrets at the conclusion of *Passions*, calling his description "an exercise on the essence and existence of such a secret, an exercise that will have an apophatic aspect" (Derrida 1995, p. 24).<sup>8</sup> Apophatics, derived from the Greek word *apophanai* (to negate, say no), is a method of attempting to recognize negative expressions that cannot be grasped by ordinary means of recognition. Negative theology is a typical example of this. Indeed, in Derrida's description, the negative proposition "the secret is not X" is repeated to bring out his own concept of the secret.

"There is something secret (*Il y a là du secret*)."<sup>9</sup> Derrida repeats this striking phrase seven times in search of the secret's whereabouts. The noun *secret* is marked by the article *du*, a partitive article in French grammar that indicates a certain amount of something uncountable. A secret thing is not a countable object, and its outline is indefinite. Insofar as it lacks an enclosing outer edge, it is "a secret that is without content, without a content separable from its performative experience, from its performative tracing" (Derrida 1995, p. 24).

Because it is difficult to identify an object, it is also difficult to distance oneself from the secret. This relationship between myself and the intimate is suggested by the redundant adverb *là* (there), which recalls the French translation of the word *da* (present) in Heidegger's ontology. What is implied in the expression *là* is the

question of where is the time and space in which the intimate exists are. In other words, with the phrase “there is something secret,” Derrida does not ask what the secret is but rather what the situation in which it exists is.<sup>9</sup>

The secret that Derrida investigates is not an object concealed by the conscious subject, nor is it something hidden within the depths of the unconscious. Typically, the object of a secret is what I conceal within my inner self, separated from the outer world, but Derrida does not define the secret through such a division between the inner and outer realms. The secret does not emerge by revealing itself from concealment into the light of day. According to Derrida, the tradition of subjectivity – spanning the Cartesian-Kantian-Husserlian *cogito*, the Freudian unconscious, and Heideggerian unconcealment – embodies a desire for truth through the disclosure of secrecy. Derrida, however, reexamines the relationship between secrecy, subjectivity, and truth (RS 153). In this regard, secrecy differs from the opposition between non-phenomenon and phenomenon. Secrets are non-phenomenal in my experience.

[...] the being-there of the secret belongs no more to the private than to the public. It is not a deprived interiority that one would have to reveal, confess, announce, that is, to which one would have to respond by accounting for it and thematizing it in broad daylight. (Derrida 1995, p. 25)

In general, a secret must first be “mine.” If it is known or observed by others beforehand, it cannot be concealed as a secret. The secret must first belong to me, be understood, and be controlled by me. A secret is established when it is separated from the public space and hidden in the private sphere by one’s own abilities. Therefore, the secret is proximate and unique to me. Only when it is properly self-possessed can I share this secret with someone else.

However, from Derrida’s perspective, a secret is not something that is separated through boundaries, such as public and private, outside and inside. A secret is not something concealed in my inner self and owned by me. A secret is something that causes separation and gives rise to otherness. The ability to separate gives rise to my secret – not because the secret belongs to me, but because I myself am separated from the secret. The word “absolute” comes from the Latin *absolvere*, and the “absolute secret” that Derrida speaks of is a secret that is free from the separation between outside and inside that I carry out and is also free from my faculties. “It [the secret] simply exceeds the play of veiling/unveiling, dissimulation/revelation, night/day, forgetting/anamnesis, earth/heaven. etc.” (Derrida 1995, p. 26). Normally, secrecy is made possible by negativity, such as not showing or not telling. Derrida focuses on secrets that do not involve negativity. “Is there not a possibility of something hidden, a secret, prior to any negativity? Not only prior to any word, but prior to any negativity, any unexpected appearance of negation.” (RS 37).

Conditioned secrecy is a social necessity. Professional confidentiality is imposed to protect the interests of those involved; political, trade, and military secrets are kept; and secrecy is maintained in religious and medical circles. Under certain social conditions, what is to be kept secret is selected and withheld from the public. However, sometimes excessive secrecy can lead to mistrust and demands for openness under the “right to know.” Secrets may also be uncovered through tip-offs, accusations, or investigative journalism and disclosed as necessary information. Certain social conditions must be appropriately observed to be responsible for a secret. Accountability is required to withhold the social relevance of secrecy.

By contrast, for absolute secrets, no negotiation over the conditions is possible. Absolute secrets do not belong to me in the first place and, therefore, to no one else. The secret is “mine” only because it is “mine,” which calls into question the condition of openness. Since absolute secrets are not kept secret based on private/public boundaries, they cannot be brought out of the darkness and held accountable. It should be the “absolute non-response” that does not provide an answer.

It is no more in speech than foreign to speech. It does not answer to speech, it does not say “I, the secret,” it does not correspond, it does not answer [*répondre*]: either for itself or to anyone else, before anyone or anything whatsoever. (Derrida 1995, p. 27)

#### 4. Non-response in Literature

In discussing secrecy, Derrida confides in his preference for literature. Literature provides an excellent example of absolute secrecy.

But if, without liking literature in general and for its own sake, I like something about it, which above all cannot be reduced to some aesthetic quality, to some source of formal pleasure, this would be in place of the secret. In place of an absolute secret. There would be the passion. There is no passion without secrecy, this very secret, but no secret without this passion. In place of the secret: there where nevertheless everything is said and where what remains is nothing – but me, the remainder, not even of literature. (Derrida 1995, p. 28.)

It is now a common idea in contemporary literary criticism that the writer is detached from the work he or she has created and that the work remains a secret. What is important is how one discusses the distance between the writer and the work. For example, Blanchot states:

[...] the writer never reads his work. It is, for him, illegible, a secret. He cannot linger in its presence. It is a secret because he is separated from it. However, his inability to read the work is not a purely negative phenomenon. It is, rather, the writer’s only real relation to what we call the work. (Blanchot 1982, p. 23)

In Blanchot’s case, the estrangement between the writer and the work is expressed as wandering into the “space of death” through linguistic activity. When writing, the writer becomes an impersonal character, no longer the “I” who controls the work. At the moment of death, the “I” disappears, and the space in which “anyone”



experiences death is called the “literary space.” The writer is involved in the work through this distance; however, the work remains a distant secret.

Derrida attempts to determine the secrets of literature from the perspective of response or responsibility. The French verb “répondre” has different meanings depending on the preposition, and Derrida uses at least three expressions. They are “répondre à” (respond to ~), “répondre de” (be responsible for ~), and “répondre devant” (take responsibility for ~) (RS 65). Literature suspends the responsibility of the authorial subject and “makes the author a person who is not responsible to anyone” (Derrida 1995, p. 28). Literature gives a glimpse of a “right to absolute non-response” (Derrida 1995, p. 29) that transcends the aspect of what the subject can/cannot and should/cannot respond to. The power to be responsible for and respond to one’s words and deeds shapes the subject’s capacities and duties, but such “hyper-responsibility” and “absolute non-response” are secret.

In *Répondre du secret*, Bartleby is referred to from the beginning and emphasized throughout, but his character is one of Derrida’s “favorite literary paradigms” (Derrida & Ferraris 2001, p. 26). Bartleby’s repeated formula, “I would prefer not to,” is a word that neither responds nor does not respond. As he keeps calling out these words, he stops even transcribing administrative documents. This formulation seems to keep him away from what he does not want to do and even erases any preference. His formula became contagious and affected his employer’s lawyers, eventually causing them to move to their offices. In the context of this singular formula, Blanchot holds that Bartleby is not an active subject who decides to resist with a clear will but rather represents a further dimension of passivity that takes on an active/passive dimension of refusal (Blanchot 1986, p. 17). Deleuze also points to a “zone of indetermination” in which the boundaries of what one wants to do and does not want to do are eroded by Bartleby’s formulation, and the emptiness of the will proliferates (Deleuze 1997). Taking these arguments into account, Derrida regards Bartleby’s formulation as an “absolute non-response.” This formulation does not indicate either affirmation or denial and, indeed, responds, “it is better not to do so,” not that it responds to anything. It is not hiding a secret by being silent but unveiling a statement about its own preferences. There is here a relationship with the other in which I respond without responding and defend my freedom without resisting.

### 5. Incognito

In literature and secrecy, let us consider the case of Baudelaire, who Derrida discusses in his seminar. In “The Painter of Modern Life” (Baudelaire 2017; hereafter abbreviated as PV), chapter 3, Baudelaire tells the story of the life of the painter Constantin Guys. Guys, who painted Parisian customs in drawings and watercolors, was an eccentric character. Despite being a well-known painter, he refused to sign his work or reveal his identity. He preferred to roam among the



people and depicted the way of life from the upper classes to the lower classes. Guys is described as “a passionate lover of crowds and incognito” (PV 421). Indeed, Baudelaire followed his demands and, without mentioning Guys, wrote a text in which he praised his talent as a curious world citizen. Derrida focuses on the expression *incognito*, which is used twice in the text.

*Incognito*, originally an Italian word implying “unknown,” occurs when a person of prominence or high status travels under the cover of his or her identity. Ordinary citizens do not need to conceal their appearance and are not said to travel incognito, unrecognized. Incognito is the act of a prominent person in a public space while keeping his or her identity undetected. There is a negative relationship between the public and private in terms of behaving in a public place in such a way that their private appearance is not revealed.

The public fades into the private, but it can only fade incognito by confirming belonging to the public; and above all, incognito supposes that the public figure shows himself publicly in his private condition [...]; we are therefore dealing with a secret which consists of hiding by publishing, making public something which is public knowledge, but which is publicly passed off as private, etc. (RS 96)

In this case, the prominent figure was not hidden in plain sight. He acts in public and exposes his form to the public while maintaining private secrecy. Conversely, a prominent person identifiable to everyone may become unidentifiable when mixed with a large number of people. Despite revealing everything to the public, their true identity (in private form) is hidden. Derrida sees a different way of being a secret from the opposition of secret/open and visible/invisible.

The complex relationship between secrecy and openness is also evident in Guys’s unsigned work. Guys consistently refused to sign his work, even requesting Baudelaire “to suppress his name, and to speak of them as if they were those of an anonymous artist” (PV 421) when writing his criticism. Baudelaire complies, telling him that “the reader and I will preserve the fiction that Monsieur G. does not exist” (ibid.). Like a surreptitious blending into the crowd, Guys’s work exists within a broader range of anonymous works. “Yet all his works are signed – with his dazzling soul; and art-lovers who have seen and appreciated them will readily recognize them from the description I am about to give” (ibid.). On one hand, Guys’s name is absent from the works, and his image is hidden. On the other hand, his soul is so deeply imprinted in the work that it cannot be kept secret, much like Pulcinella’s secret, and we can feel Guys’s unique presence in the work. Derrida also identifies an ambivalence between secrecy and openness here, where the most secret state is the most revealing form of secrecy. Guys, with his preference for snobbery and anonymity, is considered another form of Bartleby in that he remains unresponsive and unaccountable for his words and actions (RS 106).

If this is indeed the case, the most secret is no longer secret at all. In describing his drawings, Baudelaire no longer reveals a secret. He perhaps describes the secret of his

works as art, but this secret is not a secret name, a representable secret, or a secret that one keeps within oneself. Baudelaire is exonerated; he acquits himself at the moment of the greatest betrayal. We can no longer distinguish between the ring of secrecy and the ring of non-secrecy, namely, the line of the drawing publicly exposed, or even exhibited (RS 117).

## **6. The Right to Say Everything: Literature and Democracy**

At first glance, Derrida's definition of literature is clear. He defined literature by repeating the following formulation:

I have often found myself insisting on the necessity of distinguishing between literature and belles-lettres or poetry. Literature is a modern invention, inscribed in conventions and institutions which, to hold on to just this trait, secure in principle its *right to say everything*. Literature thus ties its destiny to a certain non-censure, to the space of democratic freedom (freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc.). *No democracy without literature; no literature without democracy.* (Derrida 1995, p. 28)

Derrida thus defines (modern) literature as "the right to say everything." The authors can say anything in their work, but only insofar as they do not bear any real responsibility for it. However, this differs from the irresponsibility of the authors. The right to say anything does not mean that racist statements and violent expressions towards someone are permitted in an unregulated manner. If an expression that harms others goes too far, it will be a touchstone for the ethics of literature. If excessive freedom is abused, literary activities will be constrained. The "right to say everything" in literature is not so much a given and established right, as a right to put literature to the test at all times.<sup>10</sup>

Normally, the condition of democracy is the principle of responsible subjectivity: a rational subject that can take responsibility, a subject that can act appropriately before the law, a subject that can tell the truth, a subject that can reveal secrets... In order for democratic discussion to mature in the public space, a subject that can take responsibility for its own actions and thoughts is necessary.

Derrida's aim in deconstruction is to consider the other in such a democratic structure. For the rational public space to be transformed, and to prevent political behavior from being completely controlled by calculable programs, the other must intervene and offer a glimpse of new possibilities. In literature, neither the author nor the reader can be held responsible for the entire work. Literature presents an irresponsible subject, such as Bartleby. The right to say everything, embodied by literature, constitutes the hyperbolic conditions of democracy. Derrida emphasizes the importance of secrecy against the transparent space of democracy.

I have a taste for secret, it clearly has to do with not-belonging; I have an impulse of fear or terror in the face of a political space, for example, a public space that makes no room for the secret. (Derrida & Ferraris 2001, p. 59.)

Derrida is sensitive to the totalitarian tendency of transparent public spaces and views them as a risk to democracy. For him, secrets remain intact even in a transparent space of openness. There remain secrets that resist the light of the day of phenomenality in which everything is revealed. There are secrets that remain when everything is said. Even when everything is publicly shared, something remains unshared. This is absolute secrecy, which differs from the opposition between secrets and the public (non-secrecy). This is the right to absolute non-response as embodied in literature.

Derrida's fascination with secrecy is closely linked to his Jewish heritage. Born into a Jewish family in Algeria, he also belonged to the Sephardic lineage, which contributed to his deep and lasting affinity for Marrano. The Marranos were Jews in medieval Spain who, under persecution, converted to Christianity. Even after their conversion, they continued to practice their faith in secret, while the Inquisition sought to expose those who merely feigned conversion. Derrida once remarked, "Little by little, I identified with those who carried within them a secret greater than themselves—a secret even they could not fully grasp. It is as if I were a secular Marrano, one who has lost his Spanish-Jewish heritage, a kind of *universal Marrano*."<sup>11</sup>

For Derrida, the Marrano was not merely a historical or cultural designation limited to persecuted Jews. Rather, he extended it to any subject constituted by an absolute secret. The Marrano serves as another name for those who pursue a secret embedded at the core of their being – one they themselves do not fully know – and who remain faithful to a secret they did not choose. Derrida's meditation on secrecy, shaped by his own identity, continues to resonate with our own fascination with secrets.

## NOTES

1. For a comprehensive study of the secret, see (Bok 1982).
2. Studies on Derrida's notion of secrecy remain limited. For example, Charles Barbour examines this concept not only in relation to literature and philosophy but also in connection with sociology, offering a comprehensive discussion on perjury, testimony, and solitude (Barbour 2017).
3. Hereinafter abbreviated as RS. The translation in English is mine.
4. Let me also mention the Japanese word 秘密. Both of the two kanji that make up the secret use the 必 (necessary) part. 必 is a hieroglyph that represents a rod being tightened with battens on both sides. Since it becomes a solid state, it means necessity. 秘 is a kanji character consisting of the words 示 (God) and 必 (necessity), which represents the mystery in which God will definitely appear. Additionally, 密 is a kanji character that represents a deep mountain. 宀 + 山 (mountain) = 密 (deep mountain, secret mountain). It can be seen that Japanese kanji also contain the etymology of concealment and mystery, which we have confirmed earlier.

5. "From this point of view the autobiographical is the locus of the secret, but not in the sense – as some would have it – that it holds the key to a secret, be it conscious or unconscious." (Derrida, Ferraris 2001, p 57).
6. Reading *Seminar: Respond to Secrecy* allows for a deeper understanding of the context and scope of *The Gift of Death*. In particular, this includes the discussion on the dilemma of two forms of responsibility in the case of an interrogated resistance activist and its implications for the decision of responsibility (RS 145 – 152), the analysis of Abraham's solitary relationship with God and the position of the witness (RS 448 – 453), as well as complementary reflections on the economy of sacrifice and the sacred (RS 401 – 418).
7. Furthermore, In *Donner le temps*, it is argued that the inviolable secrets of the characters in Baudelaire's *Counterfeit Money* form the literary structure of the entire work (Derrida 1992). Chapter 9 of *The Politics of Friendship* deals with secrets in Kant, stating that "[a] reflection on the Kantian ethics and politics of friendship should in fact organize itself around the concept of secrecy" (Derrida 1997, p. 257). In an interview from his later years, there are parts where he touches on secret questions in his own thoughts (Derrida, Ferraris 2001).
8. This passage on secrecy bears a stylistic resemblance to *Letter to a Japanese Friend* (Derrida 2008b), in which Derrida attempts to define deconstruction. In the latter, a series of negative propositions – "Deconstruction is not..." – are repeated, asserting that deconstruction is neither analysis, critique, method, tool, act, operation, nor subject. The text culminates in a statement that holds negation and affirmation in tension: "What deconstruction is not? Everything of course! What is deconstruction? Nothing of course!" (Derrida 2008b, p. 6.) Similarly, in *Passions*, Derrida's discussion of secrecy ultimately suggests the coexistence of the right to say everything (publicity) and the right to (absolute) secrecy (Derrida 1995).
9. A similar expression can be found in works such as *Dissemination* and *Feu la cendre*, where the phrase *Il y a là cendre* ("There is ash there") repeatedly appears. In this case, the adverb *là* is phonetically indistinguishable from the definite article *la* modifying *cendre*, creating an effect that prompts reflection on the place in which ash is designated as particular.
10. The expression "the right to say everything" is later invoked in Derrida's discourse on the university, where it is considered a defining characteristic of the humanities. He writes: "But it is also what fundamentally links the university, and above all the Humanities, to what is called literature, in the European and modern sense of the term, as the right to say everything publicly, or to keep it secret, if only in the form of fiction" (Derrida 2002, p. 205).
11. In the film by Safaa Fathy *D'ailleurs, Derrida* (Arte, France, 2000).

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