

## [Secrecy as Survival and Resistance in French and Francophone Literature: Call for Papers, MLA 2021, Toronto](#)

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To whom are secrets revealed, and from whom are they concealed? How can secrets ensure survival, or threaten it? Do practices of secrecy aid marginalized cultures to resist erasure? Those who inherit, harbor, or disclose secrets do so for various reasons. The "secret of secrecy" constitutes the mystery of not only what it means to be fully human, but also what it means to persist despite threats to cultural and linguistic survival, especially for marginalized or subjugated individuals and communities: people of color, refugees, and peripheral cultures. Women, too, adopt practices of secrecy to protect themselves.

For Derrida, the absolute "secret" that "has to do with not-belonging" and "the sharing of what is not shared" is integral to memory and storytelling (Derrida and Ferraris, 58-59). Derrida articulates his thoughts on secrecy in *The Gift of Death* (1992), and again with philosopher Maurizio Ferraris in *A Taste for the Secret* (first published 1997). In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida re-narrates the story of the sacrifice of Isaac to uncover an original constitutive trauma, a secret that humans inherit, which imposes a violence at the origin of all discourse. When Derrida writes about le secret in French, the word contains polysemic meaning for both the object as secret, hidden, confidential, and the concept and practice of secrecy, keeping things unknowable. But what happens when the unknowable or unknown becomes known? This panel will explore the inevitable trauma associated with secrets and the self in French-language literature, and how secrecy is related to what we do to survive.

Derrida, Jacques. Trans. David Wills. *The Gift of Death*. U of Chicago, 1996.

Derrida, Jacques, and Maurizio Ferraris. *A Taste for the Secret*. Polity, 2001.

Please send a 250-300 word abstract in English or French along with a short biography to Lisa Karakaya ([lkarakaya@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:lkarakaya@gradcenter.cuny.edu)) and Antoinette Williams-Tutt ([awilliams2@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:awilliams2@gradcenter.cuny.edu)) no later than **6 March 2020**. This is a non-guaranteed session.

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