Specters of Translation: Jacques Derrida, Safaa Fathy, and *Nom à la mer*

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Safah, the name of the ‘lip’ and of my mother.
—Jacques Derrida, ‘Telepathy’

As synonyms for ‘language’ and synecdoches for the speaking subject, the English word ‘tongue’, the French word ‘langue’, and the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) word ‘lisān’ each encompass both tangible and intangible dimensions of speech: from embodied communication to linguistic abstraction. This essay interprets the translingual congress and contest of tongues that, through the spectral workings of translation, constitute the written and cinematic collaborations of Franco-Egyptian director, poet, and playwright, Safaa Fathy, and Franco-Maghrebian philosopher, Jacques Derrida. After briefly outlining the history of their relationship and the contexts of their collaborations, I’ll proceed with a close reading of Fathy and Derrida’s final collaborative effort—in the 2004 film, *Nom à la mer* (*Name To the Sea*)—to understand the conditions of their situation at the nexus of translation, exile, gender, and the parting and return of the dead.

In 1958, almost three decades after Derrida’s birth in El Biar (a suburb of Algiers), Fathy was born in the Egyptian city of Minya. She was educated chiefly in Cairo and, later, in Paris, where she has continued, for the most part, to live and work and where, from 2010 to 2016, she served as program director at the Collège International de Philosophie (CIPH), which had been co-founded by Derrida in 1983. Fathy and Derrida first met one another toward the end of 1995, in his seminar at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Their
personal and professional relationship continued up to the time of Derrida’s death on October 9, 2004, which followed hard upon the completion of the last of their three principal collaborations: 1) Fathy’s documentary film, *D’ailleurs, Derrida* (*Derrida’s Elsewhere*, 1999), an hour-long exploration of its subject’s life and ideas, shot in a variety of settings, from Paris to Toledo to Santa Monica; 2) their co-authored book, *Tourner les mots: Au bords d’un film* (*Shooting Words: At a Film’s Edge*, 2000), a series of dialogic meditations and essays on film and on the making of *D’ailleurs, Derrida*, specifically; and 3) Fathy’s short film (the conventional term in French is ‘court métrage’, but Fathy tends to refer to it as a ‘film-poème [film-poem]’), called *Nom à la mer*, in which verses written by Fathy in MSA are recited in French translation by Derrida, while the camera dwells, from various angles, on a single exterior scene: an irrigation basin in an Andalusian village (Figure 1). (Another film by Fathy, *De tout coeur* [*With All My Heart*, 1999], is a montage of three of Derrida’s last public appearances.) *D’ailleurs, Derrida, Nom à la mer*, and *De tout coeur* are part of a substantial cinematic oeuvre that is still largely unknown to English-speaking audiences. An implicit aim of this essay is to broaden its anglophone audience’s familiarity with Fathy’s work, in part by taking advantage of their more likely familiarity with Derrida’s oeuvre, including his writings on translation. Indeed, one pretext for both *D’ailleurs, Derrida* and *Nom à la mer* is Derrida’s widely read 1996 book on ‘monolingualism’, in which he reaches before and beyond ‘situations of linguistic oppression or colonial expropriation [to] a terror inside languages...a terror soft, discreet, or glaring.’ In the torques and tensions of their collaborations, Fathy and Derrida reach both separately and together toward this ‘terror inside languages’. In other words, they explore this powerful affective relation to language(s) as it is experienced both intra- and intersubjectively and, moreover, spectrally: that is, at odds with any facile representations of the certainty of the living present.

There are five principal languages—French, MSA, Masrî (the Egyptian Arabic of Fathy’s Minya and Cairo), Dârijah (the Maghrebi Arabic of Derrida’s El Biar and Alger), and English—implicated in what I’ve called their congress and contest of tongues: relations of intimacy, misunderstanding, displacement and silencing, translation and transliteration, and various forms of haunting. Unlike Fathy,
Derrida never learned Arabic, in any of its dialects or registers. But, just as Derrida was, Fathy is fluent in both English and French. Although she writes most of her poetry in Arabic, many of her prose works and—with some early exceptions—her films, including both D’ailleurs, Derrida and Nom à la mer, have been produced in French. And, to an even greater extent than the superb documentary, Nom à la mer participates in multiple and complex ways in the problematics of speech and voice that are among the most pervasive and familiar concerns of Derrida’s oeuvre. The film is also a meditation on specifically cinematic relations between the diegetic and the extradiegetic, as well as between audible and inaudible, gendered voices. In D’ailleurs, Derrida (his) voice seems to be more or less coextensive with self-narration: Derrida frequently reads, in voice-over, from his autobiographical
work, *Circonfession* (*Circumfession*, 1991), and he also appears as a speaking subject in many of the film’s sequences, several of which include exchanges with Fathy, who speaks in voice-off. In *Nom à la mer*, however, Derrida is never seen, but only heard, in voice-over (one of cinema’s hauntological techniques), reciting Fathy’s poetry in translation, in a language she calls ‘wet with the teeming foam of (other) words, this virtual Arabic latent in the French [*cette langue arabe virtuelle et latent dans la langue française*].’

I’ll return to the haunting question of this ‘latent’ Arabic and its ‘virtual’ presence in the French-language film-poem. But, first, there is more to say about its dynamics of voice as such. For, in addition to the audible—and, as Fathy describes it, ‘posthumous’—voice of Derrida-the-narrator, other voices, too, haunt the film in various ways. These include the entextualised voices of Fathy-the-poet and of her translator, Zeinab Zaza; the voice of the tenth-century (C.E.) Sufi mystic al-Niffari, who is repeatedly cited in the text; Fathy-the-filmmaker’s figural voice, as the one who, as Derrida puts it in *D’ailleurs, Derrida*, ‘writes’ and ‘signs’ her films; and the absent, metaphorical, maternal voice alluded to in the film’s polysemic, punning title (*nom* [name]/*non* [no], *mer* [sea]/*mère* [mother]), which is represented in various ways in the text of *Nom à la mer*. None of these voices are embodied by visible persons in the film; neither Fathy nor Derrida ever appears on-screen. Yet they both haunt the film’s mise-en-scène as ‘foreigners’—displaced from motherlands and mother-tongues alike—in the Moorish, Lorca-haunted town in the province of Almería, where the picturesque irrigation basin is located (Maribel Peñalver Vicea calls it a place ‘réel et paradisiaque à la fois’). *Nom à la mer* is also, very self-consciously, a valediction, shot and edited during Derrida’s last illness and screened for him by the filmmaker shortly before his death, making it an example, as well, of the distinctive role that cinema—and what Derrida elsewhere calls its ‘phantoms’ or ‘specters’—plays in the audition of voice at the limit, not just of intelligibility, but also of possibility, reproducing the ‘foreign’ voice in and as an audition of the dead.

Indeed, long before his death, Derrida described his own filmic presence as that of a specter or ‘ghost’. In Ken McMullen’s *Ghost Dance* (1983), in which he plays the role of himself, Derrida is asked by another character if he believes in ghosts. He replies:
You’re asking a ghost whether he believes in ghosts. Here, the ghost is me. Since I’ve been asked to play myself, in a film which is more or less improvised, I feel as if I’m letting a ghost speak for me. Paradoxically, instead of playing myself, without knowing it, I let a ghost ventriloquize my words, or play my role, which is even more interesting. Cinema is the art of ghosts, a battle of phantoms. . . . It’s the art of allowing ghosts to come back. . . . Therefore, if I’m a ghost, but believe I’m speaking with my own voice, it’s precisely because I believe it’s my own voice that I allow to be taken over by another’s voice—not just any other voice, but that of my own ghosts. So ghosts do exist. And it’s the ghosts who will answer you. Perhaps they already have.  

Derrida anticipates here the congress and contest of tongues in *Nom à la mer*, where, in one sense, Fathy’s voice—her tongue and also her mother-tongue (Arabic)—is ‘taken over’ by the ‘posthumous’ voice of Derrida, the voice, as Mireille Calle-Gruber puts it, ‘of a revenant [both] alive and posthumous’. Yet, in another sense, Derrida’s voice—his tongue and also his mother-tongue (French)—is ‘taken over’, or crossed, by the entextualised voice of Fathy, whose words, which have been translated specifically for this ‘battle of phantoms’, fill his mouth and, in doing so, often make him speak as if from the gendered position of the female author (an effect compounded by the fact that French is a heavily gendered tongue). Still, the only audible voice in the film-poem is Derrida’s, as he recites the verses composed by Fathy in MSA and subsequently rendered into French for the film by professional translator Zaza (with Derrida’s own occasional, unspecified modifications of the French text). (The only other sounds one hears are those of the film’s score, by Kinshi Tsuruta and Katsuya Yokoyama.)

Fathy’s verses themselves are tremendously complex in form, syntax, and style. The original Arabic text, which Fathy describes as ‘latent’ in the French version, consists of passages selected and adapted from her 2010 volume, *Ism yasa fi zujājah* [*A Name Striving Inside a Bottle*], which is characterised by widely varying line lengths and a mixture of lineated and unlineated strophes. Whatever remains ‘latent’ in the French version has little or nothing to do with the spoken, vernacular qualities of the Maṣrī dialect of Fathy’s Egypt.
Moreover, her poetic practice, in *Ism ya’sa fi zujājah* and elsewhere, seems for the most part to be disengaged from the particular concerns of the Arabic Modernists—those mid-to-late-20th-century poets, such as Nāzik al-Malā‘ikah (Nazik al-Malaika), who remained in dialogue with traditional Arabic metrics (primarily, the strict metrics of the classical *qaṣīdah*) even as they experimented with new metrical forms, while continuing to reject non-metrical verse (western-style ‘free’ verse and prose-poetry), which to this day remains controversial and often difficult to assimilate into the discourse of Arabic poetics. Fathy’s non-metrical and non-lineated strophes, like those of many other twenty-first-century Arabic poets, have more in common with the ‘second generation’ Arabic ‘prose-poets’ of the 1980s and 1990s than with the more traditional genealogies of Modernist Arabic poetry. Indeed, in the manifesto-like preface to her 2010 volume, Fathy writes: ‘Poetry is a child that does not beget children [al-Shīr huwa ṭifl alladhiba la yunjibu al-affal].’

The passages translated into French and adapted for the film are formally similar to the original Arabic text in their alternating non-metrical and non-lineated strophes and, all told, run to almost 4000 words. The translation is paraphrastic rather than metaphrastic, and Fathy also adds various new words and phrases to the French version. In both languages, the verses’ themes are large and profound, encompassing light, time, birth, death, language, the primordial, the transcendent, and the apocalyptic. They are densely, almost vertiginously allusive and culturally syncretic, and, for the most part (again, in both languages), they dispense with conventional syntax and punctuation. Yet, for all its irrealism and opacity, *Nom à la mer* is also quite reflexive—even (auto)biographical in some respects, for it alludes to key events in Fathy’s life, including the source of her given name, the early death of her sister, and her relationship with Derrida. The film makes of both Fathy and Derrida wanderers and exiles in one another’s company, as it were, against the film’s Andalusian backdrop. And yet, without his having been physically present for the shoot, Derrida’s voice haunts (rather than synchronously inhabiting) the scene that Fathy—also invisible, and moreover silent—nevertheless physically occupies, there, behind the camera, as she manages the shoot. If, as Fathy elsewhere suggests—adapting Derrida’s comments in *Specters of Marx* on the face of the ghostly father—‘the camera occupies precisely
the same topography as a specter that sees without being seen’, then she and Derrida are here, too, spectralised and displaced, sounding each other out in an exilic chronotope.\textsuperscript{21}

Indeed, as a meditation on exilic voices, \textit{Nom à la mer} manifests certain aspects of what Hamid Naficy has called ‘accented cinema’—in terms of both setting and technique—at ‘the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices.’\textsuperscript{22} The film is ‘accented’ with regard to setting, because its Andalusian location places both Fathy and Derrida, geographically, between France, which is home-but-not-homeland to both, and their respective North African homelands, Egypt and Algeria. Moorish southern Spain is a place they are both not from, yet from which they both derive sensations of belonging. The town of Níjar’s chronotopography is what Fathy calls a ‘village-mémoire’, a memory-village, where she and Derrida share an uncanny but nonetheless welcome feeling of home. As Fathy reminds us: ‘It may be that Derrida’s family is originally from Spain…. The biographical narrative stops at “it may be.” However, the non-belonging of the Marrano didn’t forestall a certain identification. Shadow-memory of a tragic and romantic revenant that Spain has given us.’\textsuperscript{23}

The film is ‘accented’ (still in Naficy’s sense) with regard to cinematic technique, because Fathy’s interval-filming forces open the temporal interstices, or gaps, endemic to the technology of the imaging device. Positioning her camera at various angles around the pool, Fathy films it at a rate of one or two seconds per hour, from morning to evening, over a period of four days.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, whereas in more conventional cinema filmmakers often strive to make the frame-artifact disappear into the viewer’s illusory experience of temporal continuity, in \textit{Nom à la mer} Fathy deliberately reminds us of the capacities and limitations of the image-making device—accenting, as it were, the filmmaker’s magician-like control over the frame-rate—and of what we both do and do not see, including the images that are, as Fathy puts it, rendered by the cuts ‘invisible’, ‘missing’, and ‘disappeared’.\textsuperscript{25}

In \textit{Nom à la mer}, Derrida, like Fathy, is an eye that cannot be seen—insofar as ‘the voice-over would also be an eye that sees.’\textsuperscript{26} His voice implies (announces) a distinct subjectivity even as it conforms itself to the means of expression provided by Fathy’s poetic script. He is the
medium of a production of meaning that is both under his control (with regard to accent, intonation, pace, pitch, timbre, etc.) and recalcitrant to what Fathy herself calls the ‘virtual Arabic latent in the French’—as what is retained by and projected from the Arabic text that Derrida can neither enunciate nor understand, but which haunt him as phonemes and graphemes that will not communicate with him directly. Fathy’s text dictates to Derrida the written dimension of the other, of which he in turn, entrapped, becomes the intractable, disembodied voice that is encoded and embedded in the film-artifact, in which neither person is an object of the camera’s gaze.

However, both the unseen filmmaker and the unseen narrator—these two nomadic bodies, these phantoms of presence—‘appear’ in the poem’s recitation through numerous figurations and allusions, which, in their aggregation, place Fathy and Derrida in a highly overdetermined series of genealogical relations to one another: most strikingly, as one who sees but cannot see and one who both sees and is seen: ‘le père aveugle de la légende et sa fille [the blind father of the legend and his daughter].’ This particular image of the two of them is a central motif in their book, Tourner les mots, which includes a long chapter by Derrida called ‘Lettres sur un aveugle: Punctum caecum [Letters on a Blind Man: Blind Spots].’ Derrida’s remarks on blindness in relation to the making of D’ailleurs, Derrida resonate with his frequent tropings on blindness elsewhere in his oeuvre (for example, in Writing and Difference [1967], Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins [1990], Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International [1993], and Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews [1996]), while also pinpointing one of the conditions of on-set conflict between the film’s ‘Auteur’ (Fathy) and its ‘Actor’ (Derrida) as they shoot the film at various sites, from California to Île-de-France to Andalucía:

One fine day, regarding our various disputes at Toledo and Almería, Safaa told me I was blind. That was the word she used. She called me a blind man and kept saying that I couldn’t see the film and that all of my incomprehension, my impatience, my outbursts of anger, my tantrums were due to the fact that I saw nothing, that I couldn’t see, from her point of view, the truth of the film in preparation.
Derrida interprets Fathy’s insistence on his blindness as the filmmaker’s frustration at her subject’s inability to comprehend, to envision, to ‘see’ the film as it is being made about him—that is, both being made to comprehend him as its proper subject and also in the process of being made all around him, as Fathy and her crew stage direct, light, and otherwise manipulate their equipment, the mise-en-scène, and their subject, and as he himself is forced to remain not so much an ‘Actor’ as someone who is acted upon. His own impatience with the process—especially his impatience at being made to wait, passively, while the activity of director and crew proceed about him—is attributed by Fathy (so Derrida tells us) to a kind of willful blindness or self-blinding to ‘the truth of the film in preparation’, a ‘truth’ that is presumably intended to be a pertinent, or proper, or faithful representation of himself. Derrida is not literally blind, so one could say, borrowing an English idiom, that he and Fathy are not seeing ‘eye to eye’. In cinematic terms, one could say that their ‘eye-line’ (the perceived correspondence of their respective lines-of-sight, or what Akira Mizuta Lippit calls ‘the trajectory of a look charted in space’) has been disrupted, not in the film itself but on the film-set, where ‘Author’ and ‘Actor’ lose sight—at intervals, at least—of one another’s vision or view of the shoot (tournage), ‘the film in preparation’.

Earlier, in Echographies of Television (1996), Derrida had described the experience of working with another actor (Pascale Ogier) to help director Ken McMullen create the ‘eye-line’ effect in a scene from Ghost Dance as ‘an experience of strange and unreal intensity . . . even if it is only fictional and “professional.”’ Holding the gaze of another—to go on seeing them seeing you—is difficult to sustain (as anyone who has ever had a staring-contest knows); the experience of seeing oneself being seen as one sees another seeing themselves being seen by oneself is both too agonistic and too erotic an experience for anyone to withstand for very long. Indeed, to withstand it means giving oneself over to another, to be drawn, along with the other, into a network of substitutions that could lead almost anywhere—as with the network of substitutions that Fathy and Derrida draw one another into as ‘the blind father of the legend and his daughter.’ For this allegorical pairing is the stuff of no single legend, but rather a common topos in countless traditions, sacred and secular, classical and modern: in the stories of Oedipus and Antigone, for example; in Shakespeare’s story
of Lear and Cordelia; in the *pansori* story of *Simcheongga*; in the life of John Milton; and in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s ‘Coliseum’ fragment. Such examples generate further associations, to blind patriarchs more generally, including Homer, Dhritarashtra (in the *Baghavad Gita*), and Didymus of Alexandria, as well as the prophets Tiresias, the Deuterocanonical Tobit, Abraham’s son Isaac in his old age, and Isaac’s son Jacob. Indeed, as Paul Claudel points out, ‘the Bible teems with blind patriarchs.’ And while, as Derrida himself reminds us in *Memoirs of the Blind*, virtually all of these filiations are father-son, nevertheless—from the two-sexed Tiresias to Melanie Klein’s breast-penis—both positions are always at least potentially transgendered.

In *Nom à la mer*, they are promiscuously so. These positions are transgendered as well, in certain remarks on the spectrality of voice that Fathy elicits from Derrida in a scene toward the end of *D’ailleurs, Derrida*—a scene shot at the Cortijo de Fraile: the farmhouse setting of the love triangle and murder upon which Lorca based his 1933 play *Bodas de Sangre* [*Blood Wedding*]:

I think that repression—all forms of repression—and in particular sexual repression and the sexual repression of women begins when one tries to silence a voice or to reduce these skeins or tresses to a single voice, to some sort of monologism. Thus the multiplicity of voices is from the start the space open to phantoms or revenants, and the return of what has been repressed, excluded, shut out. So I try to think together the multiplicity of voices, the haunting, and the spectrality and also what we have just been speaking of [in relation to Lorca] regarding murder, the repression of sexual differences, of women, and so on.

Like *D’ailleurs, Derrida, Nom à la mer* is a film about exile, made by a pair of wanderers. And, along with the paternal/patriarchal figures with, for, and against whom Derrida stands, there are many maternal figures associated with him as well. One of these is Hajar, mother of Ibrahim’s son Isma’il, whose name in Arabic comes from the same Semitic root as the Hajj, or pilgrimage, to Makkah (Mecca) and its Grand Mosque, in which millions of visitors every year drink from the sacred well, Zamzam, that is believed to have originally and miraculously sprung up to slake the thirst of Hajar and Isma’il in
the arid desert. Fathy’s Andalusian basin is, perhaps, a kind of visual allusion to Zamzam and thus to the figure of Hajar, the mother of Islam. Mireille Calle-Gruber rightly links the pool with Derrida’s writings on *khôra*: ‘a kind of maternal space where all forms may be born [une sort d’espace matriciel où toute forme peut venir naître]’.36 Indeed, it evokes the maternal matrix of Abrahamic monotheism generally, given the close association between Hajar and Hagar in the Book of Genesis, who is denied and forced into exile by Abraham at the behest of Isaac’s mother, Sarah. Indeed, Ibrahim/Abraham’s ‘no-to-the-mother’ (‘non à la mère’) is one of the many names or titles of Fathy’s film.

There are, moreover, other mothers with, for, and against whom Derrida stands. Most important among these, for Derrida, is his own mother, Georgette Sultana Esther Safar (1901–1991).37 In a scene toward the end of *D’ailleurs, Derrida*, which was shot partly in the Spanish city of Toledo, whence his Sephardic forebears might have made their way to Algeria (recall Fathy’s emphasis, in the quotation above from *Tourner les mots*, on ‘it may be’), Derrida says that his work, *Circumfession*, is the ‘vigil’ that he wrote during the death of his mother. Poignantly, one effect of her illness and decline was that she often could not recognise, or even remember the name of, her son, ‘Jackie’—his very name, the name she gave him, forgotten by the mother (son nom oublié par la mère). The special name (nom) once bestowed by the mother upon her son was taken away by her aphasia or amnesia—her no (non) to language. Derrida consequently finds himself exiled from, as well as in exile with, his mother; that is, he finds himself thus, when, at age 59, he says he first discovered the word ‘dying [mourant]’ and his proper ‘being-unto-death [être-pour-la-mort].’38

Fathy herself further compounds the complexity of this network of maternal substitutions—for example, by standing not only as a kind of Hajar to Derrida’s Isma’il, but also for the ‘name-of-the-mother’ (‘nom-de-mère’) itself, through the play, or *destinerrance* (Derrida’s coinage for the way words have of wandering away from a single, predetermined destination or received idea; for the roaming, errant, deviant quality of textuality as such) of transliteration—a form of play in which she and Derrida can engage together, intertextually.39 In Derrida’s epistolary essay, ‘Télépathie’ [Telepathy] (a kind of lost
child that somehow wandered away from the text of *La carte postale* ([*The Post Card*, 1980]), there is a broaching of the mother’s name that is at the same time a breach of maternal unicity: ‘Safah, the name of the “lip” and of my mother.’ Here, as elsewhere, Derrida relies on transliteration from Semitic alphabets to create or compound polysemic effects (impressions of homophony and homology, and therefore of punning) in French and English: the root *shifr* is shared by Arabic words meaning not only ‘lip [of a mouth]’ (*mishfar*), but also ‘lip [of a vulva]’ (*shufir*), ‘cut’ (*shafar*), ‘edge’ or ‘border’ (*shafir*), and ‘cipher’ or ‘code’ (*shifrah*); and the root *shifly* is shared by other Arabic words meaning ‘lip’ (*shafah*) and ‘verge’ or ‘edge’ (*shafâ*).

It is as if, in ‘Télépathie’, Derrida is seeing ahead to the time—something like Fathy’s ‘non-time [*non-temps*]’, the chronotope with which *Nom à la mer* ends—when he would, with the filmmaker, yet again breach the repression of chance, randomness, and dissemination. Georgette Safar’s patronymic, which is also for Derrida the ‘nom-de-mère,’ sets lips flapping—for example, from ‘Safar’ to ‘saphah’, one of modern Hebrew’s words for ‘speech’, which Derrida, relying on the Latin script of transliteration to obscure or elide phonetics, attempts to pun on, in relation to the Arabic words for ‘lip’ (‘shafâ/shafah’) and for the second, autumnal month in the Islamic calendar (‘safar’), which also carries the senses of ‘void’ and the ‘whistling of the wind’. (One Arabic expression for ‘word’ is ‘daughter of the lips’ [*bint al-shafah*]). The filmmaker’s Arabic name ‘Safaa [Ṣafā]’ denotes ‘purity’ and is also the name of a hill in Mecca—one of the two hills (al-Ṣafâ and al-Marwah) between which Hajar ran in search of water for herself and Isma’il (*al-Qurâṅ 2:158*). The various Arabic versions and transliterations of her name, all related to the term ‘purity’, include ‘Safie’, which happens to be the name of the Turkish merchant’s daughter in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, from whose French lessons the eavesdropping, motherless monster learns French and who imbibes, along with the language, stories of exile that parallel his own.

Such transliterative *destinerrance* inscribes the rough traversal, across multiple languages, of linguistic elements that together compose an experience of spectrality, of the heterogeneity, hybridity, and monstrosity of origins—including the origin called ‘mother’, a monstrosity (*monstruosité*) that shows itself (*se montre*)—and thus
begins, once again, to be familiarised or domesticated, in and through *Nom à la mer*—as what Elissa Marder calls ‘a conceptual matrix that demands to be read’. In one way of reading the film, Fathy is Derrida’s *matrice arabe* or *Arabe matricielle*—his Arabic womb/mold/matrix: she stands for (in the place of) the versions of Arabic that he himself can neither read nor speak, as he explains in the following passage from an interview conducted in 1986:

I was raised in a monolingual milieu—absolutely monolingual. Around me, although not in my family, I naturally heard Arabic spoken, but, except for a few words, I do not speak Arabic. I tried to learn it later but I didn’t get very far. Moreover, one could say in a general way, without exaggerating, that learning Arabic was something that was virtually forbidden at school. Not prohibited by law, but practically impossible. So, French is my only language.

The place where Fathy shoots her film—the place that is neither his motherland nor hers—is thus the coordinate of what Derrida elsewhere calls ‘the inadequation of one tongue to another’, an aspect of the spatio-temporal concept of *destinerrance*. That place, in other words, is *translation*.

‘Nothing’, writes Derrida, ‘is more serious than a translation.’ He means by this that, whenever and wherever translation occurs, there are always two attendant conditions: responsibility and transference. Yet for Derrida there is also nothing more playful than a translation, for he frequently evokes what Borges, in a riff on the seventeenth-century adage about translations as *les belles infidèles*, calls the translator’s ‘happy and creative infidelity’. This is translation from the hermaphroditic perspective of what Derrida cryptically calls ‘the satyr galatea that I am’, representing himself through this hybrid figure as, at once, the ithyphallic (priapic) desiring subject and the milk-white (Gr. *galakteia*, ‘milk-white’) object of desire. For Derrida, translation is to be understood as the impossible attempt to ‘elude infidelity’. Its rhetorical figure is paraphrasis, not metaphrasis (that is, dynamic equivalence, not formal equivalence).

Moreover, from Derrida’s perspective, translation is also to be understood as the infidelity of any one language to itself: the alloerotic double-bind of the mono-language—signaled both by
Theodor Adorno’s ‘erotically charged’, unassimilated Fremdwörter and by what Yasemin Yildiz calls ‘internal multilingualism . . . lodged right in the mother tongue’. For Derrida, in relation to Fathy’s poetry specifically, it is also the Father’s ‘no’/‘non’ and the Father’s ‘name’/‘nom,’ in the French tongue, over and against the proscribed, interdicted, delegitimised, and therefore never-possible-to-have-been-learned Arabic tongue. It is his shared (mis)recognition (méconnaissance) with Fathy of the analogy between the specifically French universalism they have, as North Africans, adopted, and the sexual repression and the repression of women’s voices so common, as they both frequently discuss, in Islamic cultures. It is the never-successfully-disavowed patriarchalism of both laïcité (French secularism) and Islam—both say ‘no’ to the mother (‘non’ à la mère), as the film that bears this title, among its many titles, says ‘no’ to the Arabic mère-langue (mother-tongue) of the poet/filmmaker.

Yet, as Yildiz reminds us, to say ‘no’ to the mother-tongue (the Muttersprache of Herder and Schleiermacher) is also, in effect, to say ‘no’ to the father; to say ‘no’ to the Lacanian nom du père that, in so much contemporary feminist thought, stamps all ‘tongues’, despite the perduring association of the mother’s body and voice with conceptions of ‘first’, ‘native’, and ‘proper’ ethno-national languages; to say ‘no’ to the fount of language-based national character and monolinguistic inheritance; to say ‘no’ to the very phonemes of patriarchal linguistic pedagogy. Here is how Derrida describes his affective predicament in relation to the Arabic(s) he never learned as a schoolchild:

The elided language—Arabic or Berber, to begin with—certainly became the most alien. But this privilege did not come without a certain strange and confused proximity. Sometimes I wonder whether this unknown language is not my favorite language. The first of my favorite languages. And like each of my favorite languages . . . I especially like to hear it outside of all ‘communication’, in the poetic solemnity of the chant or prayer.

The Arabic lyrics sung by the popular Algerian-Jewish sha‘bī (folk) singer, Lili Labassi, heard on a car radio in D’ailleurs, Derrida, give Derrida one kind of opportunity to do just this sort of hearing-outside-of-communication. A more complex, imagined or projected, scene
of listening to Arabic, ‘outside of all “communication”’, involves the reasonable inference that, at some point, Derrida would have listened to a recitation of the original Arabic version of Fathy’s verses—in the translation of which, we are told, he had some sort of hand, despite his ignorance of Arabic. The spectator, thus, might imagine ‘hearing’ the Arabic poetry through Derrida’s recitation of the French translation, while also being implicated in the resentment, the longing to destroy, that is part of the film’s repression (‘in particular sexual repression and the sexual repression of women’) of the Arabic original.

For Paul de Man, in his tasking of Walter Benjamin, translation draws itself into a fundamentally linguistic pathos; it is a disarticulation that reveals the prior disarticulation of the original, in an impersonal, ahistorical phenomenology of the ‘suffering’ of language as such.\(^ {55}\) But, in Fathy and Derrida’s extended colloquy on and performance of translation, the ‘suffering’ of language is every bit as much a human suffering: it is the pathos of history and of remembrance, and the concomitant pathos of origins. Indeed, a psychoanalytic perspective on translativity—one that builds on Freud’s own Übersetzungstheorie (from his famous quip about ‘the necessity that forces a translator into crimes against his original’\(^ {56}\) to his more extensive and thoughtful observations on processes of displacement, symptomatic conversion, and so forth as forms or modes of Übersetzung)—helps further clarify Derrida and Fathy’s collaborative engagement with problematic crossings and displacements of Arabic, gender, and the Islamic world.\(^ {57}\)

In *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam*, Fethi Benslama asks:

Doesn’t translation contain murder within itself, to the extent that it necessarily involves the destruction of the literary body of the language of origin and the reappearance of what is translated in the literary body of the receiving language? The translation of the father as process of appropriation signifies that the father dies at his origin in the translation from one language to the other. Wouldn’t this be one of the events characteristic of an origin: a translation that provides the dead father with a grave in a different body? Through the exogamy of language known as translation, origins are indefinitely produced from one another.\(^ {58}\)
This psychoanalytic interpretation—affirming the agonistic view of translation that, as we’ve seen, characterizes to some extent the relation between French and Arabic in Fathy’s film—finds a strikingly apt correlative in Gayatri Spivak’s remarks on translation, rhetoricity, and love. In effect, Spivak asks: Does the translation communicate (in all senses) a desire for (an idealization of) the original, or a sense of culpable distance from (a resentment of, a longing to destroy) its rhetoricity? Or is there a kind of relation that can be facilitated that would at least partially escape both of these dead ends? In fact, Spivak argues that the translator may aspire to an earned intimacy of surrender, an act ‘more erotic than ethical’.\(^\text{59}\) Indeed, she posits translation’s indexical relation to *jouissance*: ‘a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries’.\(^\text{60}\)

Returning to the boundaries of ‘self’ in *Nom à la mer*, we find that the opening lines of Fathy’s film-poem speak precisely to the relation between original and shadow (shade, trace, specter), in both maternal and linguistic terms:

I will not hang my shadow [ẓillī] from a clothesline, but cast it where the road bends and I’ll come across you as you’re leaving me for her Inevitably, you’ll outpace me As for me, I’ll amuse myself: with the letters of my name [bi-ḥurūfī ismī], which slipped away from me one morning and scattered.\(^\text{61}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{lan anshura} \ zilli-\text{al-ḥibāli} \\
\text{wa-lākin, sa-ālqīhī ʿinda munḥānā al-ṭarīqī wa-sa-altaqī} \\
\text{bika wa-anta tughādirunī ʿilayhi} \\
\text{sa-tatajāwuzunī ḥatman} \\
\text{amma anā fa-sa-a’bathu lāḥiyyatan bi-ḥurūfī ismī allatī} \\
\text{taba’tharat minnī dhāṭ sabāḥ.}\(^\text{62}\)
\end{align*}
\]

Spivak writes that ‘[t]he task of the translator is to facilitate . . . love between the original and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or actual audience at bay.’\(^\text{63}\) Fathy’s ‘shadow’ (‘ẓilli’/’mon ombre’), in all three
languages, also suggests something akin to a shade, something that remains left behind, like a specter of the poet/speaker, even as the image of cast-off laundry transforms Walter Benjamin’s ‘royal robe’ of translation both through de-exaltation/domestication and through the hint of disrobing. Yet the subject’s agency with regard to casting aside (‘sa-alqhi’/‘la jetterai’) her shadow (her identity as/in the shadow of her mother [‘mère’] and the clinging folds of translation), and furthermore of playing (‘je m’amuserai’) with the letters of her name (the maternally bestowed, the untranslatable) acts as a continuation, or extension, of another pronouncement on the power of naming. This is the pronouncement on the name (sur le nom/non) with which the text of the film-poem truly begins: a quotation from al-Niffari: “And he told me: where you placed my name, there shall I place yours.”

This injunction to place, or utter, one name with or on top of (sur) another suggests a homonymy, or interchangeability, of names—or perhaps, in the convergence of two interlocutors, the creation of a shared cognomen (surnom), or a re-naming (renommant), or a translation, or even the superimposition (surnommant) of one name by another.

Al-Niffari’s name stands itself in the place of Fathy’s as (co)author of her text—as a powerful co-adjutant or conspirator, one whose own writings are fundamentally concerned with the self’s place, or standing (mawqif), in relation to a potentially overwhelming other. The film’s inaugural quotation (‘And he told me: where you placed my name, there shall I place yours’) and seven others elsewhere in the film are taken from al-Niffari’s Book of Standings (Kitāb al-mawāqif), a work of mysticism that builds on the complex semantic field conjured by its title-word, mawāqif. As Michael A. Sells explains,

the basic radical, w/q/f, yields the primary verb form waqafa (to stand, stop, halt). However, [al-]Niffari uses the less common causative form of the verb, awqafa, meaning ‘to make someone stand’. He then employs the standard verbal noun waqfa, not in its normal sense as the act of standing, but in a causative sense, from the point of view of the one standing, as the act of being stood somewhere. The prefix ‘m’ yields mawqif (plural mawāqif), as the place where the standing or being stood occurs. . . . waqf (‘standing’ or ‘staying’) is [al-]Niffari’s term for the state of being riveted, as it
were, in a particular place at the divine presence. The term *waqf*
resonates with the Qur’anic ‘standing’ of each person before the
revelation of his destiny during the apocalyptic moment of truth.
It also echoes the poet-lover’s standing before his fate of separation
from the beloved at the *ghadāt al-bayn* (morning of her departure),
and his standing before the abandoned ruins (*atlāl*) of the beloved’s
campsite.  

Given the interweaving of these motifs in Fathy’s film, *Nom à la mer*
might be thought of as being divided by the twelve quotations from al-
Niffari’s works into a series of ‘standings’ of Fathy’s own—or, indeed,
of her ‘standings’ in relation to Derrida. Like al-Niffari, whose words
he intones along with Fathy’s, Derrida occupies what film theorist
Akira Lippit calls a ‘space of inscription’ that is both inside and outside
the work. The quotations from al-Niffari, like the displaced voice of
Derrida, effectively sign and date ‘an outside made visible from the
work, but which also makes the work visible’; they each constitute ‘an
opening to another form or thought of the outside’.  

Al-Niffari is indeed another outsider, another traveler in the already
errant company of Fathy and Derrida—a major figure in Islamic
mysticism about whom very little is known. He died in the year 965
C.E. (A.H. 354) and was, according to one of his commentators, ‘a
wanderer in deserts, and dwelt in no land, neither made himself known
to any man. It is mentioned that he died in one of the villages of
Egypt: but God knows best the truth of his case.’ What we know
best from the writings collected under his name is that he was intent
on destabilizing the boundaries between the human and the divine,
between self and other. Fathy and Derrida may be said on some
level to share with al-Niffari both a stance (‘standing’ or ‘stationing’)
of openness and errancy (*destinerrance*) towards both God and text.
Throughout her verses, Fathy interpolates quotations from al-Niffari’s
writings (adapted by her from his archaic style of Classical Arabic),
thereby raising, among other questions, that of analogy—the truth, as
al-Niffari puts it, ‘that you cannot know except by analogy [*que tu ne
cconnais qu’au moyen de l’analogie*].’ And by ensuring, in *Nom à la mer,*
that Derrida, in his recitation of the poems, would speak al-Niffari’s
words, Fathy in effect forces him to dis-encrypt Islamic mysticism from
his own discourse, stationing Derrida at/as the crossroads of Islamic
mysticism (a tradition not without strong foundations in Moorish Spain) and the Western theo-philosophical tradition.

To be placed at such a crossroads is to be stationed as a petitioner for translation, and translation begins with the name, just as Fathy’s film begins with the question of the name—with the name in question: What occurs when one gives a name, as in the polysemous title *Nom à la mer* (‘name to the sea/mother’)? What does it mean to give (a) name to the sea/mother? Does it suggest, for example, something lacking in a prior naming—an im-proper name, a name still awaiting its determination or legitimation? Does it suggest the unnamable—that is, the name of God (al-Niffari’s ‘he’?) as that which cannot or should not be named? What comes in the place of the name? Perhaps the poetic text itself (the text that bears her name and the title/name for which she is responsible) is the place where another name is kept safe or excluded (*sauf le nom*)—safe from the seductions of naming, or from the duty to name (*nom dû*), something that is before-the-name (*pré-nom*): the maternal thing.

Indeed, Fathy’s verses extend the question of the name to the phantasmatic site or matrix of presignification and transformation—*khôra*—of the mother and the mother’s tongue:

There, there where I have no country [*pays*], in the no of the earth to the earth, in the no of the fatherland [*patrie*] to my fathers there where this name borders on the one my mother [*ummî*] planted
and her tongue [*lughah/langu*] is a shoot in the muddy patch [*ḥawdîn*] of my childhood,
The tongue she put in my mouth and which became a mother [*umman*]
in place of the mother-tongue [*dûna al-umm lughah*].
At the edge of the furrow, at its line I stop
and you pull me with a rope toward the trace, toward the sheet of blue
and just as you howl in my ear in some strange tongue,
I will murmur into yours in ultimate tongues
I will invade you with many things
and I will turn to straw in my belly.71
This complex fantasia of coming to language evokes a sense of the *khôra* that Fathy elsewhere describes as ‘a spacing where anything may appear [*un espacement où tout peut advenir*]’ and which is understood in this context to be a condition of the situation of what precedes signification: the preverbal semiotic space where, as Kristeva suggests, kinetic functioning in relation to a maternal body may come to involve connexion and orientation prior to any dependence on language. Yet the language that is made to appear in this spacing is, of course, densely symbolic. For example, ‘the muddy patch (‘hawd’) of my childhood’ may be a metaphor for confused or clouded memories, but it also has an excremental tinge, evoking the libidinally charged muck of both childbirth and infancy: the fecal gift exchanged for the fecundity—and destinerrance—of language. The Arabic word *hawd* could mean any simple basin, cistern, or contained space—such as the basin on which Fathy’s camera is trained in the making of *Nom à la mer*—and does not itself carry the association of muddy soil (‘le carré de boue’) introduced in the French version. However, *hawd* also has both ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ resonances within the Islamic prophetic tradition, particularly with regard to the Last Day or Judgement Day, when it is said there will be separate basins or pools for the saved and damned. Such possibilities for deferral and differentiation make the ‘space’ or ‘room’ for translation akin to Fathy’s sense of *khôra* as a site of *différance,* neither ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’ a particular language, but
rather a spacing that gives rise to the possibility of representation, of language as such (‘langue’, ‘lisān’, ‘tongue’). Initially, the mother’s voice is incomprehensible and invasive (‘you howl in my ear in some strange tongue’); nevertheless, it encounters a reciprocating murmur and a reciprocal invasion, experienced as somehow both enriching and depleting: ‘I will murmur into yours in ultimate tongues / I will invade you with many things, / and I will turn to straw in my belly.’

As the verses proceed, they revisit, again and again, the scenes—real or imagined—of coming to language and of coming to being in the presence of, in relation to, the maternal and its (Western) philosophical connexion to khôra. They are verses about being born(e)—about a time before one was on the scene as a subject—and thus about the maternal ‘one who touched me when I was not there’. And they are also about the times, or stations, or scenes of self-recollection: What, the adult asks, does infancy continue to do to me? How was I apprehended? Why was I banished? What can be recuperated? In relation to such questions, the film provides no linear history or resolution, but only a movement, or, rather, a series of captured movements, in and out of a loss that does not stop happening. The film works both for and against the logic of identity, of naming, that is conjured by its title, Nom à la mer/mère [Name to the Sea/Mother]. It also seeks to trace—both visually and verbally—fragmented landscapes of the encounter between self and other that are at once traumatic and desired:

And she treads like sorrow the path of fire
On a day with no evening
At the crossroads, the labyrinth
Of things like dislocated limbs, scattered
I reunite them with him in an instant
And the harvest, ears of S
And the face carries me to the essence of the place, it was like an abstract figure
And the hair overhangs the head and the rope draws me from the well just to the edge of the wild wood
A sun whose fire carries the night in gestation
And we are the elements of the day and two twins [taw’amāhu].
In the complex ravels and tangles of such verses, one hears the ‘handfuls of S’ that are scattered and played with throughout the film-poem. In Arabic, the hard ‘S’ (س) is the first letter both of Fathy’s first name and of the word for ‘prayer’. And of course ‘s’ is the pluralizing letter in both French and English. In French, it also bears the punning sense of ‘Est-ce…? [Is it?]’ and of ‘esse’ [‘hook’ or ‘linchpin’]. Each S is a version, an intonation, of an archaic scene of the psyche, and each is the trace of other repetitions, multiplicities, and possibilities, both past and present:

I’m captive to the bottle in which I seal the letter I will never stop writing, it will accompany me to the sea, I’ll live there for thousands of years. And I will see my breath condense on the surface of the bottle and I will be the daughter of my night and I will cast my body onto my body on the seat on your shoulder on the light and you, you will be my companion in irons and I myself will always be between glass walls and perhaps I will summon breath [al-nafsa] into a verse [اية] and gather the Ss that spring up from all prayerS [الصلاة].

Here, in one of the text’s non-lineated strophes, the figure of the bottle (central to the title of the 2010 Arabic edition, but absent from Fathy’s French title) makes its first of several appearances, resonating with images from Arab folkloric and Islamic traditions of jinn (‘spirits’ or ‘demons’) and the classic pot- or bottle-genes of world follores, as well as with all the many stories of messages in bottles from Theophrastus to Poe to Celan’s notion of poetry as eine Flaschenpost (literally, ‘a bottle-letter’)—messages of isolation, shipwreck, and desire, cast adrift to be found and read, or not, as dictated by chance: an archetype of publication, though here the text remains unfinished, forever accompanying its author ‘to the sea [à la mer]’. The receptacle of the message (letter/lettre/risalah) is also a maternal receptacle, an image of the womb, or intrauterine space, itself cast back, with the writer, into the maternal sea (mer/mère) of partial, uncompleted (‘I will never stop writing’) subjectivations. Fathy’s verses are about an aesthetic as well as ethical encounter with the other—about strange, and estranging, encounters with the world, a world that is always understood, though never unified, in relation to the matrixial. In the film-poem, this tale of what Bracha Ettinger calls ‘subjectivity-as-encounter’ folds into itself the relationship between Fathy and Derrida, who together become another version of what Fathy calls the ‘twins [jumeaux]’, sharing an quasi-uterine space (khôra) that is something other, something more than the infants’ original container. It is a space in which there can be no simple repairing of the separations, cuts, splits, and cleavages of oedipalised loss (the filmmaker’s time-lapse technique makes visible such cuts and cleavages), but that persists as a field of intersubjective encounters beyond the recuperative logic of castration that Derrida himself was always so intent upon deconstructing, for example in his own message-in-a-bottle, The Post Card:

[C]astration-truth is the opposite of fragmentation, the very antidote for fragmentation: that which is missing from its place has in castration a fixed, central place, freed from all substitution. Some thing is missing from its place, but the lack is never missing from it.
The phallus, thanks to castration, always remains in its place, in the transcendental topology.\textsuperscript{81}

Fathy, like Derrida, disturbs the transcendental topology of phallogocentrism. The bottle in and of which she writes is both uterine and phallic:

I played the Virgin Mary, yet the bottle was still sealed against my thirst, and my letter [\textit{ris\'alati\textacute}] silenced in her womb [\textit{f\textacute{i} batnihat}], its words flow in the mist of the breath that I breathed. The neck of the bottle was her neck, and my neck holds my head like a bottle stopped with a mirror.\textsuperscript{82}

\textit{wa-la\textasciiacute{a}b\textasciiacute{u} lu\textasciiacute{b}ata Maryam al-\textasciiacute{a}dhr\textasciiacute{a} ra\textasciiacute{q}hma an al-zuj\textasciiacute{a}jata l\textasciiacute{a} z\textasciiacute{a}lat masd\textasciiacute{u}datan al\textasciiacute{a}m\textasciiacute{a}m \textit{wa-ris\'alat\textacute} makt\textasciiacute{u}matun f\textasciiacute{i} batnihat wa-unqu al-zuj\textasciiacute{a}jati unquha wa-unqi yahmilu ra\textasciiacute{a}site mithlah\textasciiacute{a}, amm\textasciiacute{a} al-sadd\textasciiacute{a}datu fa-ta\textasciidot{l}u\textasciiacute{h}a mir\textasciiacute{a}tun.}\textsuperscript{83}

Derrida, in his recitation of Fathy’s words, ‘breathes’ her letter (\textit{ris\'alah}, a word that shares the same root in Arabic as the word for ‘messenger’ and, more specifically, with the term for ‘the messenger of God’) in(to) the bottle, in effect conspiring (\textit{con + spirare}) with Fathy in a joint articulation of her poetry and of the meaning of breath as life, as speech, as wind, as rhythm, as humectant (a sort of sea-spray), as body and psyche, as intersubjectivity. What is achieved in their conspiracy is an ethical, though not uncompetitive, relation brought forth through translation, which is also transference (Freud’s \textit{Übertragung} denotes both)—a border-crossing to another speech, another language, that necessarily involves displacements and substitutions on the unconscious as well as conscious level.

Attending to such transferences, Derrida and Fathy each seek, together, a different way of looking at the paternal as well as the maternal—at the question of origins (which encompasses the question of their repudiation), including the repressive practices that underlie the symbolic and institutional structures of all three Abrahamic religions and the European and Islamic cultures that intersect (that
is, encounter and divide) one another in the lives of both Fathy and Derrida and at the site of Nom à la mer. Nowhere is this intersection more personal or more consequential than in relation to their respective experiences of genital excision: Derrida’s circumcision, about which he speaks in detail in Circumfession, and Fathy’s ‘cutting’, about which she speaks in a 2006 interview with Chantal Zabus. Fathy begins her interview with Zabus with the poignant admission that she ‘would never be able to write on excision in my native tongue, Arabic’. Her assertion of this linguistic impossibility is one dimension of what Fathy recognises and describes as her dissociated relation to the event, as is her reimagining of the event as a scene of theatricality, of filmmaking, acting, montage (‘film-cutting’). One needs, she explains, years of silence to say something at long last of this inaugural event, which is intrinsically aporetic, since it takes place at the very site of the most intimate of intimacies and of phenomenal culture. In order to speak about it, one has to endure this aporia. Needless to say, speaking about it raises a suspicion of betrayal of one’s culture, one’s family, indeed one’s native land. It is a betrayal to write about one’s own excision. An air of embarrassment, of awkwardness, of inelegance goes along with it, as well as with the confession and the affect it entails. Or, more exactly, the affective complex that it brings along. Indignation (for those who are for and those against), shame, fear, disgust, compassion, hatred, shock, indifference, debate, suspicion.

For Derrida as well, genital excision is an aporetic experience. Yet he can say, quoting in Circumfession from an unpublished notebook: ‘Circumcision, that’s all I’ve ever talked about.’ For, while practices of both male and female genital excision are hidden, celebrated, vilified, and defended in a wide variety of ways from culture to culture, there are of course sweeping asymmetries across gender lines. Fathy highlights some of these asymmetries by comparing her own physically and psychically traumatic, clandestine, and uncelebrated excision with her brother’s circumcision:

I had a brother who was circumcised very young at a big party, to which we invited a lot of people . . . a huge celebration. For days on
end. We invited the family; it is a large family.... And I remember
my father holding the prepuce in his hand and looking at it... [l]ike
a trophy.\textsuperscript{87}

One is invited to imagine the crushing blows Fathy’s ego would
continue to sustain from such a paternal imago, and one is left to
consider how a multiplicity of projective identifications might include
Derrida, cast, in \textit{Nom à la mer}, in the role of ‘the blind father of the
legend’.

Blinded—castrated—Derrida is also made to ventriloquise a voice
that is not his own, a female voice whose ‘tongue’ (Fathy’s ‘mère
langue’, Arabic) has itself been sacrificed, excluded in favor of the
language of the father, the \textit{nom du père}. Across the full sonority
of Derrida’s authoritative and inimitable voice runs the otherwise
silent, and always twofold, textual inscription of Fathy’s verses and
the visual inscription of the \textit{mise-en-scène}. Each of these inscriptions
seems at many turns determined to resist intelligibility, including the
intelligibility of the father, his writing, his transmission, his translation.
Yet the film-poem also bears the trace of Derrida’s recognition, his
recognition by Fathy and by the listener/reader/translator, as someone
who speaks after and against the archaic forms of male domination and
sexual repression that abide in the ‘cut’ of the film—what Fathy archly
calls the ‘editing of an individual’.\textsuperscript{88}

Strikingly, in the visual text of the film-poem, the most dynamic
elements are also the most marginal: these are the various human
figures that frequently appear at the edge of the frame, walking around
the perimeter of the irrigation basin (\textit{hawd})—figures whose features
and movements are truncated, fragmented, and excised by the time-
lapse technique (Figure 2). Who are these specters—these seemingly
inconsequential revenants flitting about at the margins, stepping within
and beyond the borders of an already densely textured audiovisual
space? Once noticed, they lend the film’s largely static framing and
time-lapse camerawork the aura of the genre of the surveillance video,
a filmic artifact of the state’s sovereign authority to police and to
inhibit, repress, and exclude those who nevertheless continue to pop
in and out of the frame—to return (\textit{revenir}). These people who
have passed on yet who keep returning, partially and randomly, at the edges of the frame—these tourists, locals . . . who can say?—for almost everything about their fleeting, fragmented, scattered presences, including their unwitting implication in the scene, their obtrusive body parts, their discontinuous movements, and their spectrality, suggests something at once defaced and defacing. Among the many figures they potentially evoke are the culturally and psychically distorted figures of contemporary Muslims, as captured by the global surveillance apparatuses of Islamophobic security-states. There is also the powerful suggestion of far more abstracted subjects, orphaned by languages and cultures both known and unknown to us, riven and multiple, congeries of parts, or self-states, only imperfectly aware of one another, or not at all, potentially hospitable, or possibly on the worst of terms.

Figure 2. Still from *Nom à la mer*, showing some of the spectral figures (upper left and right corners) that appear at and vanish from the edge of the frame.
Like the fixed surveillance camera—which both ‘waits for’ the passersby and refuses them sufficient time (the temporal gaps of Fathy’s time-lapse technique) to project for video-capture a more complete image of themselves that would more plainly reveal or fulfill their narrative role\textsuperscript{89}—the translated, as it were murdered Arabic language haunts the scattered parts of subjects that try and fail to speak to one another in their various languages, as if Arabic were an inaccessible refuge from the injuries and offenses of a shattered life in their mother-tongue. Such a Renanesque, orientalizing fantasy is but one of the offenses by means of which many of us help ensure that we remain at odds with ourselves—borrowing it, as all fantasies are borrowed, in order to abase ourselves before an image of unyielding arduousness and post-dated desire, even as some of us may appease our narcissism through identification with Derrida’s own desiring relation to the Arabic he never learned to speak.

Fathy is less explicit than Derrida about the complexities of her own desirous relation to the French language, in which she does so much of her working and living. Their mutual friend, Jean-Luc Nancy, observes (echoing Fathy’s own remark, cited earlier) in his ‘Postface’ to Fathy’s book \textit{Où ne pas naître} that Fathy’s Arabic ‘is retained, or held, in her French [\textit{sa langue arabe est retenue dans sa française}].’\textsuperscript{90} Yet Nancy makes no effort to explain what, from his perspective, is ‘retained’—the resonance of particular phonemes? syntactical peculiarities? semantics? a set of figures or allusions? Although Fathy composes poetry only in Arabic, she nevertheless does not assume, in the manner of Abdelfattah Kilito, a defensive posture regarding Arabic’s untranslatability—whether as a sacred or literary language.\textsuperscript{91} She has participated in and facilitated much of her Arabic writing’s translation into many other languages, including French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew, and Japanese. For Fathy, the questions of language and voice are always \textit{Whence?} and \textit{Whither?}—that is, matters of translation and, thus, complex, even mystifying, matters of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural retention and transit, as expressed, for example, in the opening line of her poem, ‘Négativités’: ‘Enigmatic are the poems one writes from one continent to another [\textit{Énigmatiques les poèmes qu’on écrit d’un continent à l’autre}].’\textsuperscript{92} This line is itself enigmatic, folding together the image of writing for readers on
another continent and the image of writing while in transit from one continent to another.

Shuttling across continents, writing for readers of their mother-tongues and for readers of many other tongues, Fathy and Derrida have both shared abundantly in the enigmas of interlinguistic and interpersonal translation: the partiality and finitude of individual languages, as well as their malleability and rivenness; the dislocations of linguistic pluralism; the exposure to strangeness; the perpetual incommensurateness of self and other; the fragility and tentativity of correspondences; the finding of oneself in the foreign, and of the foreign in oneself; the knowledge that anything can always be said otherwise; and, not least, the puzzle of loss, of being at a loss for words and, inevitably, losing hold of the other.

Indeed, the release of Nom à la mer in 2004 coincided very nearly with Derrida’s death on October 9 of that year. Fathy had recorded Derrida’s voice-over in June, and by early October the film was ready for him to see: ‘I was able, to my great and profound gratitude, to finish the film and show it to Jacques Derrida while he was in the hospital, a few days before his adieu to the world. He told me that he’d like to live long enough to watch it on the big screen.’

Knowing that this film was no insignificant part of Derrida’s apprehension of death and, moreover, no insignificant part of Fathy’s work of mourning, lends the film the aura of being ‘about’ the untranslatable secret of death, about that secret’s untranslatability, and about her, and our, posthumous relation to Derrida’s work. ‘What happens’, Derrida asked in his eulogy for Emmanuel Levinas,

when a great thinker becomes silent, one whom we knew living, whom we read and reread, and also heard, one from whom we were still awaiting a response, as if such a response would help us not only to think otherwise but also to read what we thought we had already read under his signature, a response that held everything in reserve, and so much more than what we thought we had already recognised there?

Nom à la mer ends up feeling like a response, or a set of responses, to this question, a series of meditations on liminal states and the possibility of a (shared) future, of what is yet to come.
Reflexively speaking, one of the liminal events to which it testifies is the end of the film-poem itself, as it fades frame by frame into night, with these concluding words—its *adieu*—where Fathy uncharacteristically but crucially invokes the classical Arabic poetic tradition:

And then we will encounter the dead [*naltaqīʿindaʿidhin bi-al-amwātī*]

So as not to die
Beyond the wall of time we’ll drop once again into the heart of the city of stone and we will have a house ringed by a white garden and glasses of crystal and an orange tree
And a fountain at the summit of the mountain
And a beach looking out on the sea of places
And a poem [*qaṣīdatun*] that we will write [*naktubuhā*] with the echo of footsteps
With splinters of colored glass
When all things will be one and the same thing
Ultimate things
In the end
One abode, one only
With a wide balcony looking out at the non-time [*al-lāzamān*].

*naltaqīʿindaʿidhin bi-al-amwātī*

kay lā namūta
warāʿḥāʾiti al-zamāni sa-nasquṭu thānīyatan fī ʿalīqī balūmidān al-ḥājari
wa-sa-yakūnu lānā baytun tahadduḥu ḥadīqatun baydāʿun
   wa-akwābun min al-kriṣṭālī
wa-shajaratu burtuqālīn
wa-nāfūratun ʿalā saṭyhi jabalin
wa-shāṭīʿun yuṭillu ʿalā bahri al-ʾamkinat
wa-qaṣīdatun naktubuhā maʿ ṣadā al-aqdamī
wa-nāfīdhatun min qarʿi al-zujājati al-mulawinati
   ḥīna yakūnu kullu shayʿin huwa al-shayʿ al-wāḥid
   huwa quṣwā al-ʾashyāʾi
   huwa fī al-nihāyati
   manzilun wāḥidun faqāṭū
   lahu shurfatun wāṣiʿatun tuṭillu ʿalā al-lāzamān.95
Fathy approaches here, with Derrida, what he elsewhere calls ‘a certain enigmatic relation among dying, testifying, and surviving.’ The turn (‘And then’) is elegiac: ‘we will encounter the dead / So as not to die.’ The concluding scene registers not only a conventional, Western elegiac relation (indeed, Fathy’s ‘splinters of colored glass’ seem to allude to the trampled ‘dome of many-coloured glass’ of Shelley’s great elegy, ‘Adonais’), but also a highly conventional, indeed originally pre-Islamic, motif in the classical Arabic form of the qaṣīdah, the beginning (nasīb) of which situates the poet in the aftermath of loss, mourning over the abandoned ruins (atilāl) of the beloved’s encampment. Remembrance, in the qaṣīdah, takes a variety of solemn and inspired forms as it seeks not only to recall the lost or the dead but also to anticipate and commemorate a reverie or transformed vision (‘looking’/tuṭillu’) of what are at once vestigial and prospective maisons/abodes/manāzil for the poet and the beloved—and also, here, for an Arabic literary past itself returned (but at whose behest?), at the end rather than the beginning of a poem, a film-poem, turned (tourné) for the beloved in anticipation of his departure.

Yet there is a reluctance or refusal to discriminate, once and for all, between mourner and mourned, between present and absent, unfinished and finished. Unfinished—that is, still being written, translated, revised—is the ‘poem that we will write with the echo of footsteps [l’écho des pas].’ What might be said to happen, what might be hoped, is that further steps (pas) will be heard to echo: one step, and then another step, and so on, always in some sort of transverse or transgressive relation to the putative border between life and death, a trespass upon death, as in Derrida’s expression of the defeated wish ‘to live long enough to watch it on the big screen’.

We can share Derrida’s wish, his fantasy, his irresistible interest in the beyond and thus imagine watching Nom à la mer ‘on the big screen’ with Derrida and with others: encountering both the living and the dead in a shared spectatorial experience; haggling over possible subtitles; wanting to contest the imperium of global French; remembering or wondering about the Arabic text; glancing over at Derrida to see how he likes the sound of his own voice; glancing over at Fathy to see if her lips move to the French; glancing over at strangers and wondering what, or how much, they understand; shrinking under our own certain surveillance; pondering the chronotopes of ‘non-lieu.
[non-place]’ and ‘non-temps [non-time]’; wondering what is beyond the screen, ‘derrière le mur du temps [beyond the wall of time]’; anticipating what steps or negations (‘pas’) may be in store for us; what sort of communion, ‘lorsque toutes les choses seront une et seule chose [when all things will be one and the same thing]’ and what sort of loneliness; and, after all, what deaths might be revived in us—not in the service of nostalgia or melancholic entrapment or poetic mannerism, but rather as allies of the sort Derrida always strove to be to us—his collaborators, his co-conspirators, his readers—in our struggles against the present’s particular insufficiencies, exclusions, and devastations.

Notes
I wish, first and foremost, to express my gratitude to Safaa Fathy for her encouragement of my work. Thanks, too, to Cornell University’s Society for the Humanities, where she and I were both Visiting Faculty Fellows in 2007–2008. It was in Ithaca that I was first introduced to Fathy’s oeuvre and began—in conversations with Jonathan Culler, Anne-Lise François, Tsitsi Jaji, Charlie Kronengold, Dominick LaCapra, Chris Nealon, and Denise Riley—to conceive of writing about her collaborations with Jacques Derrida. After a long period of germination, my work first took shape in a translation of the first chapter of the book Fathy wrote with Derrida, Tourner les mots, which, along with a brief introduction, was published in 2016. Warm thanks, as well, to Geoffrey Bennington, Michael Naas, and their colleagues at The Oxford Literary Review and to those who commented on various drafts of the present essay or shared valuable information and insights in response to my inquiries: Julien Brugeron, Nesrine Chahine, Tim Corrigan, Rodrigo Fernández de Gortari, Ruqayya Yasmine Khan, Suvi Kaul, Ania Loomba, Jean-Michel Rabaté, and Emily Wilson. Finally, I want to express my deep indebtedness to Michael Karam and, especially, to Rawad Wehbe, who provided essential help with Arabic texts, dialects, and transliterations.

2 The French noun ‘langue’ is feminine and the Arabic noun ‘lisān’ is masculine. The more common term for ‘language’ in MSA is ‘lughah’ (a feminine noun). Throughout this essay, I’ve done my best to follow consistently the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration system for MSA as well as for other dialects of Arabic. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations and transliterations are my own.
Safaa Fathy, dir., *D’ailleurs, Derrida* (Paris, Éditions Montparnasse, 2008). This film was released in an English-subtitled version as *Derrida’s Elsewhere*, which is a satisfying translation of the title inasmuch as it speaks both to the importance of the term *ailleurs/elsewhere* to Derrida as well as to Derrida’s own place ‘elsewhere’—the elsewhere (or ‘non-lieu/non-place’ Fathy refers to in *Nom à la mer*) where he is (perhaps) to be found. However, in French, ‘d’ailleurs’ has additional meanings such as ‘moreover’, ‘otherwise’, ‘besides’, and ‘furthermore’. which are also played or troped upon in *D’ailleurs, Derrida*.

‘One meaning of the word *tournier* in the book’s title is “to film”. But the word also shares with the English verb *to turn* a wide range of meanings and associations, including “to turn”, “to revolve”, “to depend”, “to shape or form”, “to consider”, and “to trope”. Thus *Tourner les mots* refers to cinematic practice (*le tournage*: “filmmaking”, “the shoot”) and to the relation between cinema and language (*les mots*: “words”).’ Jacques Derrida and Safaa Fathy, ‘Contre-jour,’ trans. Max Cavitch, *PMLA* 131.2 (2016): 540.

Recent examples of the minimal attention to Fathy’s work in anglophone scholarship include: 1) the fact that, in a 2015 special issue of *Discourse* devoted entirely to ‘Derrida and Cinema’, there is *not a single mention* of the film *Nom à la mer*, and far more attention is given to the American film, Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman’s *Derrida* (New York, Jane Doe Films, 2002), than to *D’ailleurs, Derrida*; and 2) in Sarah Dillon’s monograph, *Deconstruction, Feminism, Film* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2018), there is only a very brief discussion of *D’ailleurs, Derrida* and no mention at all of *Nom à la mer*. Moreover, as this essay goes to publication, there is still, to my knowledge, no plan to publish an English translation of Derrida and Fathy’s book, *Tourner les mots: Au bords d’un film* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000), which contains Derrida’s most extensive writing on cinema. (For a translation of the book’s opening section, see Derrida and Fathy, ‘Contre-jour.’)

Fathy’s corpus of feature-length films and shorts includes *al-Wujūh al-khaﬁyah* (*Hidden Faces*, 1990); *Doisneau* (1993); *al-Ghāzīyah, rūqisāt Miṣr* (*Ghazeia, danseuses d’Egypt/Ghazeia, Dancers of Egypt*, 1993); *al-Šamt* (*Le silence/The Silence*, 1996); Maksīm Rodinson, *Mulhīd al-āliḥah* (*Maxime Rodinson, L’athée des dieux/Maxime Rodinson: God’s Atheist*, 1996); *D’ailleurs, Derrida* (*Derrida’s Elsewhere*, 1999); *De tout coeur* (*With All My Heart*, 1999); *Nom à la mer* (*Name to the Sea*, 2004); *Hidden Valley* (2004); *Dardasha, Socotra* (*Conversations on Socotra*, 2006); *Tahrir, lève, lève la voix* (*Tahrir, Lift, Lift Your Voice*, 2011); *Mohammad sauvé des eaux* (*Mohammad Saved from the Waters*, 2013); and *J’ai laissé mes yeux là-bas* (*I Left My Eyes Behind*, 2017).


The area is the setting for Lorca’s play, *Bodas de Sangre* [*Blood Wedding*] (1933), which Fathy and Derrida discuss toward the end of *D’ailleurs, Derrida*. For an account of rural life under Franco, see also Juan Goytisolo, *Campos de Níjar* (Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1960).

Many a French ear would also hear in the film’s title the phrase ‘un homme à la mer’—the French equivalent of the English expression ‘man overboard’.

As Anne-Emmanuelle Berger points out, all ‘mother-tongues’ are developed and disposed under historical circumstances of heterogeneity, conquest, and—in the modern era—nationalization and thus defy myths of purity and ‘homogeneous origin’ (‘The Impossible Wedding: Nationalism, Languages, and the Mother Tongue in Postcolonial Algeria,’ in *Algeria in Others’ Languages*, ed. Anne-Emmanuelle Berger [Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002], 64), while nevertheless retaining the erotogenic power (and concomitant shame) of the mother-child bond (where ‘mother’ is understood to be ‘whoever plays her role’ [77]: the first, primary caregiver and companionate presence—whether a...
biological mother, father, or other relative, or a non-biologically-related person of any gender—in the child’s life). The ‘cultural polarization around the figure of the mother’ (76) that Berger so persuasively charts for postcolonial Algeria is a phenomenon that, to greatly varying degrees of course, subjects of all modern nations experience: the association of ‘national’ and ‘native’ language-speaking with the status of women and with the ‘intimate’ and ‘domestic’ spaces, once much more commonly and rigidly policed as ‘spheres’, but still widely metonymised by the figure of the mother, specifically—to be celebrated and self-empowered or segregated and silenced, by turns, in accord or in discord with each nation’s specific, historically contingent, sociopolitical matrices of linguistic belonging and participation.


23 ‘Il se peut que la famille de Derrida soit originaire de l’Espagne. . . . Le récit biographique s’arrête à “il se peut que”. Cependant, la non-appartenance du marrane n’excluait pas une certaine identification. Mémoire fantôme de revenant dramatique et romanesque dont l’Espagne nous a fait don’ (Derrida and Fathy, Tourner les mots, 133).

24 Fathy, ‘La mère’, 86.


26 ‘La voix off’ serait aussi un œil qui regarde’ (Fathy, ‘Momie’, 287).


28 Fathy, ‘Nom à la mer’, 113.

29 On the figure of the blind man in Derrida’s oeuvre, see also Kamuf, ‘Stunned’.


‘[J]e crois que la répression—toutes les répressions—en particulier la répression sexuelle et la répression sexuelle de la femme, commence là où on essaie de faire taire une voix ou de réduire ces écheveaux ou cette tresse à une seule voix, à une sorte de monologique. Donc, la multiplicité des voix est aussi, d’entrée de jeu, l’espace ouvert aux fantômes ou revenants, aussi le retour de ce qui est refoulé, exclu, for clos. Donc, moi j’essaie de penser ensemble la multiplicité des voix, la hantise, et la spectralité et aussi tout ce dont nous parlons depuis un moment, du côté du meurtre, de la répression, des différences sexuelles, de la femme, etc.’


‘I have a pain in my mother’ (Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993], 23); also, ‘Mummy if you prefer’ (73). Bennington takes some liberty in his translation of the word ‘Maman’ (Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* [Paris, Seuil, 1991], 73). Unlike English, French has no homonym for ‘la momie’ (that is, a preserved corpse) that means ‘mother’. Yet the cross-linguistic pun underscores both the ambivalence of the filial relationship and also the broad range of Derridean necromantic and spectral associations that Fathy and Derrida develop in their later collaborations. See also, Fathy, ‘Momie’, 282–94.


Derrida, ‘Des Tours de Babel’, 184.


See, for example, Safaa Fathy, ‘Cutting and Film Cutting/Ashes: An Interview with Chantal Zabus’, in *Fearful Symmetries: Essays and Testimonies around Excision and Circumcision*, ed. Chantal Zabus (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 219–33.

Yet, by way of implicitly acknowledging the culturally inflected distinctions between *langue* and *parole*, Fathy—writing about her efforts to secure permission to do some location filming at the Casbah in Algiers—observes: ‘Algerians don’t like to say “no”. Their “no” always takes the form of a short phrase, as if it were a kind of name or diminutive: “we’ll see”, and sometimes even a cheerful “no problem” [Les Algériens n’aiment pas dire non. Le non prend toujours la forme d’une petite phrase, qui sonne comme un prénom ou un diminutif : “on verra”, et parfois même un joyeux “pas de problème”]’ (‘Tourner sous surveillance’, in Derrida and Fathy, *Tourner*, 46).

Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, 11–12.


(Here and throughout, when quoting from ‘Nom à la mer’ in the text, I will pair my English translation with the corresponding passage transliterated from the Arabic original, and the French version will appear in the notes.) ‘Je ne suspendrai pas mon ombre sur une corde à linge / mais la jetterai au détour du chemin et / Je te rencontrera / alors que tu me quittes pour elle / Tu me dépasseras fatalement / Quant à moi, je m’amuserai : / avec les lettres de mon nom qui m’ont échappé un matin et se sont épappillées’ (Safaa Fathy, ‘Nom à la mer,’ trans. Zeinab Zaza and Jacques Derrida, in *Écritures migrantes du genre (II)*, 111).


‘Là, là où je n’ai pas de pays, dans le non de la terre à la terre, dans le non de la patrie à mes pères / là où ce nom avoisine ce que ma mère a planté / et sa langue est une poussée dans le carré de boue de mon enfance, / La langue qu’elle a mise dans
ma bouche et qui est devenu une mère / à la place de la Mère langue. / Au bord
du sillon, sur sa ligne je m’arreste / et tu me tires par une corde vers la trace, vers le
drap bleu / et de même que tu hurles dans la mienne une langue quelconque, / Je
murmurerai à ton oreille en des langues ultimes / Je t’envahirai de bien des choses/
et je deviendrai de la paille dans mon ventre’ (Fathy, ‘Nom à la mer’, 111–12).
74 Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York:
75 Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Prescription’, trans. Christopher Fynsk, in *Toward the
Postmodern*, ed. Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts (London: Humanities Press,
1993), 179.
76 ‘Et elle marche comme le chagrin sur le chemin du feu / Dans une journée à laquelle
il a manqué un soir / A la croisée des chemins, le labyrinthe / Des choses comme
des membres disloqués, éparées / Je les réunis avec lui en un instant / Et la moisson
ce sont des épis de S / Et le visage m’emporte, moi à l’essence du lieu, il était comme
une figure abstraite / Et la chevelure surplombe la tête et la corde me tire du puits
vers le bois sauvage / Un soleil dont le feu porte la nuit en gestation / Et nous
sommes les éléments du jour et deux jumeaux’ (Fathy, ‘Nom à la mer’, 115).
78 ‘Je suis captive de la bouteille où j’enferme la lettre que je ne finirai pas d’écrire, elle
m’accompagnera à la mer, j’y réside pour des milliers d’années. Et je verrai mon
souffle se condenser sur la surface de la bouteille et je serai fille de ma nuit et je
jetterai mon corps sur mon corps sur le siège sur ton épaule sur la lumière et tu
seras toi ma compagne dans les fers et je serai moi toujours entre les murs de verre
et peut-être rassemblerai-je le souffle en un verset et cueillerai-je les lettres S qui
surgissent de toutes les oraiSons’ (Fathy, ‘Nom à la mer’, 113).
80 Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 2006), 63.
82 ‘[J]’ai joué à la vierge Marie pourtant la bouteille était toujours scellée sur ma soif,
et ma lettre tue dans son ventre, ses mots coulent dans la vapeur du souffle que j’ai
soufflé, le cou de la bouteille était son cou et mon cou porte ma tête comme une
bouteille le bouchon surmonté d’un miroir’ (Fathy, ‘Nom à la mer’, 113–14).
84 Fathy, ‘Cutting and Film Cutting/ashes’, 219.
Fathy, ‘Cutting and Film Cutting/Ashes’, 220–21.

86 Bennington and Derrida, Jacques Derrida (1993), 70.

87 Fathy, ‘Cutting and Film Cutting/Ashes’, 226–27.

88 Fathy, ‘Cutting and Film Cutting/Ashes’, 221.


93 ‘J’ai pu, à ma grande et profonde gratitude, monter le film et le montrer à Jacques Derrida alors qu’il était à l’hôpital, quelques jours avant son adieu au monde. Il m’a dit qu’il aimerait pouvoir vivre pour le voir sur grand écran.’

http://safaafathy.org/fr/films/25-nom-a-la-mer


