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The secret life of loss in the work of Jacques Derrida and Helene Cixous.

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Abstract

This research report is an exploratory study that attempts to carve out possible ways of theorising the experience of loss. It maps and interprets an intellectual field (French poststructuralist approaches to loss) without, however, seeking to arrive at definitive answers or conclusions. It makes use of the work of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, who have each adopted a unique approach to considering the complex and challenging patterns of response that emerge in the face of loss, or as a consequence of loss. For Derrida, reckoning with the dead is extremely demanding and we risk consuming or colonising the other by attempting to internalise the other within the self. Moreover, our encounter with the other also alludes to experience that may not necessarily be readily available to our conscious minds. Derrida focuses on how best to honour this unique and intricate engagement with the dead other. He is interested in the scope of our responsibility to the other and how we can create renewed exchange even though the other is now dead. Cixous proposes that we are never quite prepared for the moment of the death of a loved one. She is interested in finding ways to reclaim (for life) what we have lost in the death of another; she views the other's death as an opportunity for us to live life more creatively and vitally. Cixous identifies writing and dreaming as two possible and productive ways to consider the condition of surviving and living in the aftermath of death. She suggests that they take us further than we thought it possible to go. In short, writing and dreaming hold out the hope that we may begin to confront death from within life, which in turn affirms the immensely creative work of living.