

## **LACAN'S DOCTORAL THESIS: TURBULENT PREFACE OR FOUNDING LEGEND?**

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"Il arrive que nos élèves se leurent dans nos écrits de trouver 'déjà là' ce à quoi notre enseignement nous a porté depuis. N'est-ce pas assez que ce qui est là n'en ait pas barré le chemin?" (Lacan 1966, 67)

Lacan poses this question in *Écrits* in the section introducing his earliest contributions to psychoanalytic theory, and goes on to pinpoint his doctoral thesis, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* published in 1932, as opening up the pathways which led to his discovery of Freud. "Ainsi approchions-nous de la machinerie du passage à l'acte, et ne fût-ce qu'à nous contenter du portemanteau de l'autopunition que nous tendait la criminologie berlinoise par la bouche d'Alexander et de Staub, nous débouchions sur Freud." (Lacan, 1966: 66).

The republication of this thesis in 1975, at a time when Lacan was widely recognised as one of the intellectual giants of the twentieth century understandably created a hospitable terrain for its enthusiastic and uncritical appropriation by the psychoanalytic world. A 1976 review shunts it unhesitatingly into the unique category created by Freud's own case histories, "Suite aux cinq psychanalyses, en prélude aux *Écrits*". (Allouch, 1990: 636), while the historian of psychoanalysis in France, Elisabeth Roudinesco, echoing this view, elevates it to the position of founding text. "It took on the importance that had previously been accorded to studies in hysteria in the rise of the international movement. Just as Freud had given hysteria its patents of nobility in endowing it with full-fledged existence as an illness, so Lacan, forty years later, gave paranoia, and more generally psychosis, an analogous place within the French movement" (Roudinesco, 1986: 114).

In her more recent biography of Lacan, Roudinesco mutes this tone of fanfare and views Lacan's thesis less as a moment of rupture than as the locus of an intrication of two disciplines: "encore une œuvre de psychiatrie tout en étant déjà un texte psychanalytique" (Roudinesco, 1993: 79). Lacan's own ambivalence with regard to the re-publication of this work is cryptically inscribed on the back cover of the Seuil edition. "Thèse publiée non sans réticence. A prétexter que l'enseignement passe par le détour de midire la vérité. Y ajoutant: à condition que l'erreur rectifiée, ceci démontre le nécessaire de son détour. Que ce texte ne l'impose pas, justifierait la réticence" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]).

As is now well known, it would appear that the ambivalence referred not only to the signified of the text, its out-worn theories, but to the very existence of this thesis itself in its status as signifier. Some years after its original publication Lacan bought up all the remaining copies. The reasons for this are unclear, but Jean Allouch's conjecture is plausible. A bizarre coincidence in the early fifties, around the time when Lacan was pondering the topic of the "Purloined Letter", had placed this thesis in a position analogous to that of the letter in Poe's eponymous story. Didier Anzieu, the son of the patient described in Lacan's thesis had entered analysis with Lacan without either man realising the identity of the other. It was possibly at the moment when the truth dawned on Lacan that this hurried purchase took place.

Since Anzieu was a known opponent of Lacanianism, these facts, made public in 1986, a decade after the republication of *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*, provided this little read thesis with a neat novelistic fillip which lifted it a notch further out of the domain of critical assessment into that of founding legend.

The foregrounding of the doctoral thesis of 1932 as an inaugural moment in Lacan's work has not been entirely unsupported by the scattered allusions in his own written and oral teaching which swerve over time from confident assertion of its "doctrinal" importance, through ironic disclaimer, into eventual acknowledgement "que c'est ... autour de cette malade que j'ai épinglée du nom d'Aimée, qui n'était pas le sien bien sûr, que j'ai été, c'est ça, aspiré vers la psychanalyse" (Allouch, 1990: 605).

At the time of its publication in 1932, its importance appeared to reside in the fact that in the chapter devoted to the literary productions of "Aimée", Lacan's patient, these writings are recognised as literature rather than realigned as psychiatric symptom. Certainly it was this feature which was seized upon by its first surrealist readers, and which gave to this medical thesis right from the start a position in contemporary, even avant-

garde thinking, which was markedly different from the usual dust-gathering oblivion that is the fate of such work. This view even found one small echo in the world of psychiatry. Gaston Ferdière, the doctor who tended Artaud at Rodez in 1942, highlights Lacan's lengthy citations from the two unpublished novels of his patient as literary productions, and insists for his own part on the validity of the term *littérature des aliénés*. In an article entitled "Écrits d'aliénés", written in 1935, he quotes from Aimée's work as it appeared in Lacan's thesis, in order to contradict the classic tenet of psychiatry "chez les aliénés, toujours des ébauches; on n'assiste jamais à l'éclosion d'un génie". Aimée's talent allows him to declare: "Quel renversement brutal dans l'ordre des valeurs soigneusement établi! Voici que maintenant fiunt poetae sous la baguette de quelque fée-psychose et que le Parnasse se transporte à l'Asile – bien rarement il est vrai!" (Allouch, 1990: 614).

However to readers of Lacan, perusing this densely written work in late 2000, it would appear that its contribution to the theory of psychotic writing is to be found less in his reading of Aimée's novels than in his first attempt to come to terms with certain Freudian texts which allow the question of identification, already posed for Lacan by psychiatry in such phenomena as *folie à deux*, to be explored in a new and more radical fashion, and this exploration does indeed in some respects, presage important developments in his later teaching.

In this paper I would like to point up the doubleness of Lacan's positions in the doctoral thesis in relation to psychoanalysis, and to focus on a kind of theoretical turbulence which energizes it. In order to do this, it will be necessary to examine both the theoretical axis and the clinical exposition which precede Lacan's double approach to psychoanalytic theory. Also I would like to indicate the directions opened up by certain features of the Freudian texts chosen for his exposition, which would be crucial in the elaboration of his later thinking on the function of writing.

### *Theoretical axis*

The central stance adopted by Lacan in this work is the necessity of recognising the direct link which can exist between psychotic breakdown and the lived experience of the patient. *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*, in opposition to constitutionalist or organicist schools, focuses on the psychogenesis of paranoia. Leaning on German psychiatry, particularly on the work of Kraepelin, Bleuler and Kretschmer, Lacan defines paranoia as a mode of reaction rather than a

developmental anomaly or an organic process. In privileging psychogenesis he runs counter to the dominant currents of thought in French psychiatry, notably the current which had carried him in his earlier papers, exemplified in the teachings of de Clérambault. Here, the concept of psychogenesis which denotes the etiology of psychosis as a reaction formation is strongly linked to the notion of psychic process as expounded in the work of Karl Jaspers. In addition, Lacan's methodological approach, which is that of the clinical monograph, is sourced in Jaspers' example. What Lacan wishes to present is a prototype – "le cas Aimée" – which will demonstrate that psychosis has the closest links with the lived experience of the patient and with her individual character or personality: This approach is new, he says, but not without precedent: "qu'on ne croit pas que notre proposition soit utopique; une telle pratique est actuellement appliquée dans certaines cliniques allemandes", he warns, adding in a footnote: "Le fait est signalé par Jaspers...Il insiste...sur ce que des types valables ne pourront être fondés que sur l'étude de vies individuelles dans leurs totalité" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 267).

Given that this is 1932, almost forty years since Freud had begun to insist on the intimate connection between symptom and story, and indeed that this connection was widely recognised even in the non-Freudian psychotherapies with cases of dual and multiple personalities at the end of the nineteenth century as documented by Ellenberger (1970: 138), Lacan's assertion of the originality of this approach seems anachronistic. It would appear that this originality is contextual, a function of the backwardness of French psychiatry rather than an intrinsic quality, as Lacan himself points out in his "Exposé général de nos travaux scientifiques" (Lacan 1975 [1933]: 401).

In view of the fact that it was Jaspers who inspired Lacan's monographical approach, it is a little surprising that in this thesis which includes extracts of the patient's literary creations, no reference is made to Jaspers' own monographical study, *Strindberg and Van Gogh*, which explored the relationship between psychosis and creative activity, and appeared in 1922, ten years before *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*. Jaspers' own choice of the monograph as a mode of access to mental processes is anti-metaphysical in its thrust, and not remotely psychoanalytic. His ambition was to shift the human sciences out of the domain of metaphysics into the domain of history. Throughout his career he energetically asserts this view: "We arrive at what is essential only by a certain examination of each individual case, by arranging the arising questions, and through contrasting comparisons. Only thus can we come to an understanding of what I consider our problem, not by supposedly

supreme insights, by which we might discover 'the truth' but by insights which provide the perspective from which the actual problems can be recognised" (Jaspers, 1977: ix.). From the outset Lacan defines his field of exploration as certain mental problems, which are disturbances of psychic synthesis. This psychic synthesis is what Lacan calls personality, a definition which stands in vivid contrast to his later discourses on the decompositions of the ego and its beyond, the subject who speaks, unknown to this ego. Even in this early work, what David Macey (1988) has dubbed a certain sleight of concept is in evidence. The "psychic process" as used by Jaspers is not used in contrast with that of organic process, as was usual in current debates in French and German psychiatry. Lacan begins his theoretical exposition using these oppositional terms in the manner familiar to psychiatry, but deflects his argument along the way into the terminology of Jaspers. Jaspers explored the phenomenon of psychosis along two axes, that of the development of the personality wherein certain reactions to lived experience can be inscribed as readily understandable, and that of psychic process where something new intervenes, a factor which may be either of organic or of psychic origin, which insinuates itself into the subject's life usually by a series of what he calls primary disturbances. These primary disturbances often manifest themselves by a gradual awareness of irritating noises, unease, impressions of being somehow targeted, presentiments of danger. The subject has difficulty in pinpointing an origin for these sensations, since it is difficult to differentiate between disease and normality over the long years during which the process develops. In the 1910 article: "Eifersuchtswahn. Ein Beitrag zur Frage, Entwicklung einer Persönlichkeit oder Prozess?" to which Lacan refers a number of times, Jaspers focuses on delusional jealousy in order to point up the distinctions he establishes. He examines three kinds of delusional jealousy, that provoked by organic causes, e.g. alcoholic jealousy, that provoked by real betrayal, and that provoked by what he terms psychic process, by which he means the intervention of something new and heterogeneous to which the personality reacts.

In sourcing his own approach in the writings of Jaspers, Lacan insists on the comprehensibility of certain delusions when examined in this way. Indeed in privileging the comprehensibility of certain delusional formations, Lacan sets out to cross the frontier of incomprehension at which Jaspers stops short. To a very great extent, Jaspers' focus on comprehension was in fact an abiding interest in the limits of comprehensibility. He did not hesitate to assert that "a complete grasp is out of the question", and distanced himself unambiguously from

psychiatric pathographies which try to reach a goal diametrically opposed to his, namely, "to grasp the incomprehensible by means of comprehension" (Jaspers, 1977: 12). Particularly with regard to psychic process he emphasises: "One may try to understand much in the schizophrenic process through comparison with one's own experience, but it remains no more than an attempt, and it is well to remember at all times that something remains to be explained, something inaccessible and foreign which for this reason language defines as deranged."<sup>1</sup>

In order to cross this barrier Lacan will invoke the work of Freud. Freud and his followers, dismissed at the end of Lacan's own 1930 article "Structure des psychoses Paranoïaques" as the technicians of the unconscious, now provide an essential reference point, but the position of psychoanalysis in Lacan's thesis is notably at odds with all of his later writings. In *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* it is an important but ancillary discipline which supplements what is lacking in the Jaspersian framework with respect to comprehension. Its importance derives from its contribution to the elucidation of meaning. "Ce qui nous semble en effet original et précieux dans une telle théorie, c'est le déterminisme qu'elle permet d'établir dans certains phénomènes psychologiques d'origine et de signification sociales, de ceux que nous définissons comme phénomènes de la personnalité. Examinons quelles lumières une telle hypothèse peut apporter dans notre cas. Elle explique le sens du délire" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 252).

In view of the privileging of "non-sens" in the later seminars this emphasis is to be remarked. It is not the Freud of the *Traumdeutung* which interests Lacan in 1932, but the later Freud who has left the murky domains of subjective semiology for the clarity of scientific objectivity. He cites *The Ego and the Id* to show that: "cet exposé des doctrines Freudiennes sur le Moi et le Sur-moi fait bien ressortir l'accessibilité scientifique de toute recherche sur une tendance concrète" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 326) and draws a clear line of demarcation in Freud's writings, signalling his approval of this later development: "l'analyse des déterminismes autopunitifs et la théorie de la genèse du sur-moi qu'elle a engendrée représentent dans la doctrine psychanalytique une synthèse supérieure et nouvelle. Mais les premières théories, concernant la sémiologie symbolique des refoulements affectifs, s'appuyaient sur des faits que seules montraient dans leur plénitude les données expérimentales

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1. Maurice Blanchot approvingly signals this refusal on Jaspers' part to embrace facile comprehensibility in his preface to the French translation of *Strindberg and Van Gogh* in 1953 (Blanchot, 1953: 11).

de la technique psychanalytique. Ici, au contraire, l'hypothèse se dégage bien plus immédiatement de l'observation pure des faits, dont le seul rapprochement est démonstratif, dès lors que, comme en toute observation des faits, on a appris à les voir" (*Ibid.*: 251).

Clearly an immense gap stretches between this sociological appropriation of psychoanalysis and Lacan's later life-long soundings of the Freudian unconscious.

In setting out the premises of this thesis Lacan is at pains to define personality in strictly objective terms as comprising three essential elements: the individual, the structural and the social. Of these three, Lacan will lay most emphasis on the social as best suited to provide firm foundations for a science of personality. As Bertrand Ogilvie remarks, Lacan's phenomenological focus targets consciousness but this focus will lead him in an unexpected direction. "La thèse fait donc accomplir à la notion de la compréhension le chemin qui va de la conscience et de l'intentionnalité phénoménologique à l'inconscient Freudien. Mais ce déplacement n'est possible que dans la mesure où il est commandé par un projet fondamental qui accomplit, d'une certaine manière, un trajet inverse" (Ogilvie, 1987: 27).

While pointing out the ancillary position of psychoanalysis in the theoretical armature of this thesis which is essentially Jaspersian, one may however anticipate a little by signalling a crucial convergence in the dual influence of Jaspers and Freud on Lacan in 1932. Although the explicit link is the concept of comprehensibility, another latent, more fruitful connection can also be discerned. The most frequently cited Jaspersian text in *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* is the 1910 article, "Eifersuchtswahn. Ein Beitrag zur Frage, Entwicklung einer Persönlichkeit oder Prozess?" which is Jaspers' study of paranoid jealousy. In the same year, 1932, Lacan had just translated Freud's 1921 paper, "Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia, and Homosexuality". This translation appeared in *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* and is used as an essential reference in his thesis. Out of this point of confluence, which is the study of jealousy, as much as from his encounter with Dali, will emerge Lacan's first major innovative incursion into psychoanalytic theory, his exposition of the Mirror stage, and of *connaissance paranoïaque* in general.

Finally, the densely written exposition of Lacan's argument, which comprises the first section of *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* will lean on Janet's description of psychaesthesia and Kretschmer's account of the "sensitif" character in

order to provide a solid backdrop in psychiatry for the delineation of a personality type which legitimates the concept of a psychogenic psychosis. Janet links psychaesthesia to congenital weakness and describes as signs of psychic deficiency such features as slowness of action, unrealistic ambition, and a pronounced need for moral guidance. Kretschmer's "sensitif" is impressionable, vulnerable, but also tenacious, highly intelligent and with a refined, ardent and intensely private sensibility. What these theories share is a common foregrounding of personality. In the event, the inclusion of extracts from his patient's novels in Lacan's thesis will owe more to Janet and to Kretschmer than to Jaspers or to Freud. To a large extent these writings are invoked as proof that the personality of Aimée conforms to the psychaesthetic and sensitive type described by these authors. Jaspers had examined the impact of psychosis on the work of writers such as Swedenborg, Hölderlin and Strindberg, and had perceptibly distinguished between psychoses which offer only material relating to the substance of the work, as in the case of Strindberg, and psychoses which re-cast the formal structure as in the case of Hölderlin. Freud for his part had subjected Schreber's *Memoirs* to a psychoanalytic reading based on the techniques elaborated in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Aimée's novels will receive neither a Jasperian nor a Freudian reading but will be explicitly linked to those theories of Janet and Kretschmer which permit Lacan to establish his case for a psychosis which is psychogenic in origin.

Having thus laid the theoretical foundations for his argument with an erudition which was not only exhaustive but also exhausting for his examiners according to anecdote, Lacan, with a dramatic change of style, proceeds in this thesis to the clinical presentation of his patient, Aimée, who represents "un véritable point géométrique du problème des rapports de la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 316).

### *Clinical Presentation*

Lacan was inspired in his choice of patient. Marguerite Anzieu's crime had been front-page news in Paris only one year before, and its immediacy is re-created in Lacan's opening paragraph which glints with the razor-sharp drama of a news item. "Le dix avril 193 ... à huit heures du soir", he begins, and deftly sketches a snappy vignette in which *Mme* Anzieu, lurking at the stage door of a well known theatre, stabs a famous actress *Mme* Huguette Ex-Duclos, in the belief that she has been plagiarizing her



private journals. The high point of *Mme Anzieu's* drama evoked, Lacan returns to more sober medical mode, but the clinical monograph is for the most part eminently readable, and at times altogether absorbing. Roudinesco exaggerates somewhat when she describes this section of the thesis as "un roman de cent cinquante pages rédigé dans un style flaubertien, c'est-à-dire dans une langue littéraire irréductible à la langue de bois du discours psychiatrique" (Roudinesco, 1986: 127). It does, however, possess an undoubted literary flavour, less perhaps on account of Lacan's literary style than because of the literary backdrop of the crime itself. Marguerite Anzieu, to whom Lacan gives the name Aimée A., had committed what was on the one hand a very modern crime. Celebrity-stalkers and attacks upon a star who has become the fulcrum of the perpetrator's existence, whether in love or in hate, are a not uncommon twentieth-century occurrence. On the other hand, these crimes frequently, though not always, contain elements of the late nineteenth-century obsession with the *Doppelgänger* or psychic double. It is notable that this element, which will not be absent from Lacan's commentary, is clearly discernible in the earliest newspaper reports which highlight a certain effect of literary doubling in the plagiarisms and copycat ploys enumerated by Aimée as justification for her attack. This was a bookish crime as *L'Echo de Paris* pointed out the following day: "L'abus de la lecture peut avoir parfois sur certains esprits faibles une étrange influence. Témoin le drame surprenant ...". It goes on to cite Aimée's explanation following her arrest: "Ce qui m'a poussée à attaquer *Mme* Huguette-ex-Duflos? Vous allez le savoir. Je dois vous dire tout d'abord que je ne connaissais pas du tout *Mme* ex-Duflos. Je n'avais assisté qu'à une ou deux représentations où elle jouait, mais j'ai contre elle de nombreux griefs. Il faut vous dire que lectrice assidue des romans de Pierre Benoit, je me suis aperçue depuis longtemps que j'étais l'héroïne de l'écrivain. Dans tous ses livres, je retrouve des passages de ma vie privée et il me met chaque fois en cause, sous des noms fantaisistes bien entendu. Je me suis aperçue aussi que *Mme* Huguette ex-Duflos, qui interprète ses pièces, me tournait en ridicule, de connivence avec l'auteur" (Allouch, 1994: 190).

*Le Petit Parisien* of the same date completes this testimony: "elle ajouta 'Atinéa, vous savez, l'Atinéa de M Pierre Benoit le romancier, c'est moi. Et voilà pourquoi j'ai voulu avec *Mme* Huguette une explication'" (Allouch, 1994: 191). This literary dimension, quite as much as the dramatic impact of stabbing a celebrity, sparked the imagination of the public. Newspaper coverage on the following days includes an interview with Pierre Benoit, who had been contacted in Tunisia by a radio station and had commented on the affair, as well as on a previous encounter he had had with the

accused. Also, an inquiry into her past had revealed an earlier assault which had equally been triggered by a bookish motive, this time the disappointment of a failed novelist. Six months before, she had tried to strangle a *Mlle* Kirsch, secretary to the literary director of the house of Flammarion, on discovering that her novel, *Le Détracteur*, had been rejected. The paparazzi hastened to garner a statement from Flammarion and fascination with this literary criminal extended to the point of examining the bookshelves in her apartment and finding them to be in fact bare. "La romancière ne lisait guère", runs a caption in *Paris-Soir*, and goes on to ponder this: "Il est vrai que, contrairement à ce que l'on aurait pu croire, la perquisition dans la chambre n'a fait découvrir que quelques pages adressées au roi d'Angleterre avec promesse de lui dédier son prochain roman. Il est probable que le refus de son premier manuscrit par le comité de lecture de la librairie Flammarion avait tari sa verve" (Allouch, 1994: 192).

One might note in passing, however, that even at this remove, the secretary from Flammarion clearly remembers the opening lines of Aimée's novel, and quotes them in her statement: "Ce roman, je me le rappelle fort bien, commençait ainsi: 'A l'ombre de tes cils, comme à l'ombre des haies'" (Allouch, 1990: 192). In the extracts cited by Lacan, this phrase appears, but not in the opening paragraph.

Roudinesco implies a kind of lateral literary dimension in Lacan's choice of patient when she suggests that this choice aligns him with the Surrealist invention of a new figure of femininity through the celebration of the female criminal. In 1928 Breton and Aragon had identified themselves as "we who love nothing so much as these young hysterics", and Roudinesco sees in this figure a Valkyrie "annonciatrice de crépuscules". She continues: "Baudelairienne, nocturne, dangereuse, fragile, une nouvelle vision de la féminité prend corps, qui témoigne d'une transformation de mœurs en partie induite par la découverte freudienne, mais dont l'accomplissement ne se produira qu'après la Deuxième Guerre" (Roudinesco, 1986: 36). But, despite its veneer of modernity, the Surrealist vision of femininity is essentially a nineteenth-century one and the same could arguably be said of Lacan.

Lacan's presentation of his patient, like the Parisian papers, will focus no less on the literary aspects of this crime than on the crime itself and the story which lay behind it. The gravitational pull of the story, told in two different places in the thesis, will draw Lacan strongly towards the insights which fuelled the Mirror Stage and the Dalinian *connaissance paranoïaque* which marked his thinking in the thirties and forties, but the

further implications of this theory will only be applied to the function of writing itself from the time of his path-breaking Seminar on Identification onwards. The place of Aimée's writings in this case-history, while central, will also to some extent remain untouched by the dominant currents which shape the story and confer upon it its considerable imaginative lure.

The story emerges in two phases in Lacan's monograph which is made up of four chapters. The first chapter is in psychiatric mode. After the dramatic opening depiction of Aimée's crime, her biographical details are filled in under dry and functional headings. Chapter two scans this biographical material for evidence of psychic process as described by Jaspers, but concludes that this is not a fruitful line of inquiry. Chapter Three returns to a further examination of the biographical details in order to reach a diagnosis of self-punishing paranoia. Chapter Four will justify this diagnosis by an exposition of psychoanalytic theory, but as will be discussed further on, this theory is taut with inner tensions, and, one might venture to suggest, somewhat at odds with the story itself as it has been presented.

The first phase of the story is structured like a psychiatric report. The reader learns that Aimée is thirty-eight years old, married but separated, living in Paris, but of rural, "peasant" background. Files reveal a previous detention in a mental institution for a period of six months. This initial survey notes that she is obsessed by the safety of her only son, that the onset of paranoid symptoms can be clearly linked to her first pregnancy, that they intensified after the stillbirth of her daughter, for which she blamed her best friend, and that they returned again with her second pregnancy and in the first months of her son's life. It was on this occasion that she was first hospitalised.

At first glance Aimée's accounts of her pregnancies seem to offer some purchase to Jaspers' concept of psychic process, as representing the introduction of a new, heterogeneous and morbid element into the patient's life. During the first pregnancy something changed in the world around her. "Elle reconnaît dans les journaux des allusions dirigées contre elle ... Elle se serait souvent dit à elle-même. 'Pourquoi m'en font-ils autant? Ils veulent la mort de mon enfant. Si cet enfant ne vit pas ils en seront responsables'" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 159).

By a cruel coincidence the child was born dead, strangled by the umbilical cord. Aimée's delusional world began to take shape.

The birth of her son after a second, highly anxious pregnancy seems to have triggered both her literary ambition and her first breakdown. Her plans to emigrate to America, abandoning her child, in order to become a

novelist, as well as her general delusional behaviour alarmed her family who had her interned in a private asylum. After her release she had in fact left her family who lived in the suburbs, without altogether abandoning them, and had moved into Paris where she became increasingly obsessed by the fear that her son's life was threatened and that this threat emanated from the world of letters and of the arts in general. Journalists, writers, actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt were all somehow involved. She herself was being plagiarised. "Ces personnages l'ont plagiée, ont copié ses romans non publiés et son journal intime" (*Ibid.*: 165-166). At around this time she developed an erotomanic fixation on the Prince of Wales to whom she addressed a daily sonnet first in her journal and eventually posted off to him. It is probably thanks to this erotomania that Lacan got access to her novels, one of which had been rejected by Flammarion. As a last recourse she had sent copies of the two novels, typed and beautifully bound, to Buckingham Palace. It was while she was in prison following the stabbing of *Mme Ex-Duclos* that these novels were returned to her with a polite note explaining that "it is contrary to Their Majesties' rule to accept presents from those with whom they are not personally acquainted" (*Ibid.*: 171). Aimée therefore presumably had them in her possession when she was transferred from prison to the hôpital Ste. Anne where Lacan met her. The only other biographical detail to emerge in this chapter is an anecdote situated at the end of a routine section entitled: "Examens et Antécédents Physiques". Following banal medical observations such as "caries dentaires multiples" and "caféinisme" a small story is told. Given that the entire thesis will rest on the importance of doubling effects, it is notable that this incident is related as having primarily affected the mother. It is recounted fairly laconically and never mentioned again. "La famille insiste beaucoup sur une émotion violente qu'a subie la mère durant la gestation de notre malade: la mort de l'aînée des enfants est en effet due à un accident tragique, elle choit aux yeux de sa mère dans l'ouverture béante d'un fourneau allumé et meurt très rapidement de brûlures graves" (*Ibid.*: 175).

Research has shown this family version to be slightly inaccurate, but what Lacan doesn't mention is that this first child was also named Marguerite. Salvador Dali has written rivetingly of the shadow cast by the same-name dead brother "whose ghost was there to welcome him" and of the madness which can threaten those who are born double. Of course Marguerite, or Aimée as she is called here is not Dali, but this doubling at the very inception of life which Lacan's patient shares with Dali, forms an

interesting substratum to the interconnection between this thesis and Dali's own work.

Lacan's preliminary report ends with an account of the patient's present behaviour in hospital and a first discussion, accompanied by extended extracts, of her writings.

In scanning this material for signs of psychic process, chapter two focuses less on the delusional system itself than on the mental state of the patient at the time of onset. In Jasperian mode Lacan cites four elementary phenomena present at the commencement of his patient's illness: "états oniroïdes souvent colorés d'anxiété; – troubles d'incomplétude de la perception; – interprétations proprement dites; – illusions de la mémoire" (*Ibid.*: 216).

However he is not satisfied with this diagnosis, since the majority of these are equally explicable as signs of psychaesthesia. He therefore rejects the diagnosis of psychic process, and in the next chapter will explore "les rapports du délire avec l'histoire et avec le caractère de la malade, avec ce que nous allons tenter de connaître de sa personnalité" (*Ibid.*: 217). He returns to Aimée's story in chapter three where a fuller picture will emerge. This time the focus is on Aimée's childhood, but that this focus is not at all psychoanalytic is evident from the fact that almost all Lacan's information is gleaned from her sister, her brother and later, her husband, rather than from Aimée's own speech. Lacan is well aware of the unreliability of such accounts, which Freud had specifically excluded from psychoanalytic case-histories in 1918, and in fact cites Freud to explain the difficulties encountered in pursuing this method: "Nous pourrions dire que, sur l'enfance d'un sujet, les enregistreurs familiaux semblent subir les mêmes mécanismes de censure et de substitution que l'analyse freudienne nous a appris à connaître dans le psychisme du sujet lui-même" (*Ibid.*: 219).

In this more detailed telling, Aimée's sister, previously unmentioned, emerges as a prime mover in the whole affair. She, the elder sister by five years, had looked after Aimée as a small child, and described her as occupying an altogether special place in the family due primarily to her very close relationship with the mother who was herself subject to bouts of paranoia. The slowness which characterised all Aimée's actions as a child, her intellectual ambition coupled with her intense sensibility as evidenced in her writings, allow Lacan to build a strong case for a diagnosis of psychaesthesia. The reminiscences of this sister as well as Aimée's own accounts of her youth evoke Kretschmer's "sensitif" with classic exactitude. "Intériorisation exclusive, goût du tourment sentimen-

tal, valeur morale, ... s'accordent avec les réactions que Kretschmer rapporte au caractère sensitif" (*Ibid.*: 225).

Her scholastic failure, early love affair with the "poet" and exclusive friendships which easily turn to hatred all support this argument. From the beginning of her married life Aimée's mental state is dubious. Indeed her family had felt she was unsuited to marriage. For Lacan however, it is her relationship with her older sister which is pivotal. He sees the inception of Aimée's seriously delusional state as a reaction to the intrusion of this older sister, who, widowed in 1918, came to live with Aimée and her husband eight months after their marriage. Clearly this begs certain questions, since the onset of her illness has already been linked to her first pregnancy which was in 1921, therefore three years after the arrival of her sister. There are, as Jean Allouch has pointed out, a number of apparent discrepancies in this study. A powerfully coherent theoretical welding will be necessary in order to forge them into a consistent clinical exposition. At this point something like a classic *folie à deux* syndrome is suggested.

In a striking departure from the neutral tone of the narrator, Lacan signals the arrival of Aimée's sister under the conjugal roof as a decisive event and goes to considerable lengths to establish this sister as herself psychically unbalanced. Mordantly described as "la vertu frappée par le malheur" and "cette Ruth d'un Booz épicier", she had admitted in an interview with Lacan that her own frustrated maternal instincts had found fulfilment in taking over the care of Aimée's son. Lacan's account of this interview paints a picture of far more serious disequilibrium than is evident in his portrait of Aimée. "Le sujet nous a présenté durant près d'une heure, sans fléchissement, un état d'agitation extrême. L'éréthisme verbal et gestuel où il s'exprimait nous a semblé traduire un fonds de sthénie authentiquement hypomaniaque. Des spasmes glottiques, ébauches de sanglots sans cesse imminents, en révélaient par ailleurs le caractère essentiel de paroxysme émotif; ils s'accompagnaient de signes névropathiques manifestes, tics de la face, mimique grimaçante ..." (*Ibid.*: 231).

As a psychaesthetic personality, Aimée is incapable of a direct aggressive response and it is only in moments of inattention and unguardedness that Lacan can elicit such admissions as: "Ma soeur était trop autoritaire. Elle n'était pas pour moi. Elle a toujours été du côté de mon mari". And that Aimée found intolerable "les droits pris par sa soeur dans l'éducation de l'enfant" (*Ibid.*: 232). In view of the accounts already in place regarding Aimée's marriage, it is difficult for the reader to be convinced that all of this is to be seen as the cause rather than the result of

her illness. The picture painted by Lacan is one of domination, at first glance familiar to psychiatry in the substantial literature on the phenomenon known as *folie à deux*, or shared delusion. However Lacan will create a more subtle, more complex, and ultimately more fascinating picture. This relation with her sister is at the heart of Aimée's story. Profiled behind it is the unspoken relationship with the dead sister who bore the same name, and profiled behind that again, indeed intricated with it, is the very close relationship between Aimée and her mother. While she speaks with feeling of her son, it is only the thought of her mother which elicits tears. "Nous étions deux amies", dit la malade ... Aucune réaction n'est chez elle comparable à celle que déclenche l'évocation du chagrin actuel de sa mère: 'J'aurais du rester auprès d'elle', tel est le thème constant des regrets de la malade" (*Ibid.*: 220).

If the central relationship of Aimée to her sister relies for its unconscious opacity on the shadowy doubles of the dead sister and the mother, its immediate and ongoing intensity is evidenced in her early close friendships which easily turn to hatred, and in the succession of admired and hated female figures whom she feels duplicate and plagiarise her, and whom she in turn eventually murderously attacks in the person of the famous actress. In this central relationship Lacan has found the key to Aimée's psychosis.

The theme of the double was an immensely evocative one in the latter part of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century. It captured popular imagination, roused scientific interest, and opened new pathways into the psyche for writers as diverse as Nerval, Dostoievski, de Maupassant and Poe. In the twentieth century, while its thematic impact will continue to be felt, writers and artists like Dali, Roussel and Beckett will also impressively extend its formal implications. For Lacan however in 1932, the questions raised by this case of psychic doubling are not literary. The examination of Aimée's relationship with her sister becomes the locus of intersection between his previous training and psychoanalysis. Aimée's writings are ultimately tangential to this theme while remaining a central element in the thesis as a whole.

### *Psychoanalysis*

Nothing could be further from the Lacanian style familiar to readers of *Écrits* than the treatment of psychoanalysis in *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*. More than thirty years later in 1965 at one of the closed sessions of the Seminar *Problèmes cruciaux*

*pour la psychanalyse*, Jacques-Alain Miller launched a scathing attack on the deployment of psychoanalytic concepts by the psycho-sociologists and psychologists, who, in the thirties, began to interest themselves in the personality of the individual and in his relationships with his milieu (Lacan, 1964-1965: 23.6.65). Lacan, not surprisingly perhaps, does not remind Miller of this thesis.

In 1932 psychoanalytic theory is annexed quite explicitly to the Jasperian framework because of the scientific "accessibility" of the Freudian super-ego. At the end of chapter three, the point in *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* where psychoanalysis enters the picture, Lacan has succeeded in establishing that the personality of his patient Aimée conforms to Janet's psychaesthetic and Kretschmer's *sensitif* type. He has drawn a distinction between the psychaesthetic personality and the so-called paranoiac disposition in order to show that the well-known traits of the latter – megalomania, accusations of plagiarism, distrust, hostility, etc. – appear only secondarily and do not in themselves constitute a foundation for delusion. The problem now facing him is the forging of a causative link between Aimée's personality and her delusion. He has pinpointed the central conflict in her life as her relationship with her intrusive older sister and her inability to respond to the intrusion with aggression. It is this inability which leads Lacan onto the terrain of the unconscious and his first direct appropriation of the language of psychoanalysis: "Tentons-nous au contraire d'attaquer activement l'énigme de cette sœur qui en est venue depuis plusieurs années à suppléer Aimée si complètement que l'opinion de sa petite ville admet qu'elle l'a supplantée –, alors nous nous heurtons à une réaction de dénégation (*Verneinung*), du plus pur type dont la psychanalyse nous ait appris à reconnaître les caractères et la valeur" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 232-33)

It is interesting that Lacan's incursion into psychoanalysis should begin by invoking this concept of *Verneinung*, although Freud's 1925 paper "On Negation" is not cited in the bibliography. It will be from the baseline of this paper of Freud's as debated with Jean Hippolyte in 1954 that he will develop the concept of foreclosure. In 1932 however his grasp of *Verneinung* appears a little blurred. He equates it with something much closer to displacement, which he describes as "méconnaissance systématique", introducing a term which will be extensively developed in the early years of the seminars.

Out of a vague sense of being menaced by those around her, Aimée's delusion had crystallised on the occasion of the stillbirth of her first child,



a daughter, and had focused on the best friend: "La personne ainsi désignée a été pour Aimée à la fois l'amie la plus chère et la dominatrice qu'on envie; elle apparaît comme un substitut de la sœur elle-même" (*Ibid.*: 233).

Aimée's delusion can then be classified as a flight reaction from her aggression towards this sister, as was also her departure from home and from her much loved son. A reactive psychosis is clearly not without meaning, but how is one to uncover the hidden mechanisms of this meaning? Freud (1911c [1910]), on a similar quest in his study of Schreber, looked to the exciting causes of Schreber's illness. Posing this question for himself at the beginning of chapter four, Lacan in an astonishing leap, having apparently been primarily interested in the events leading up to Aimée's psychosis, suddenly changes tack completely and announces that an examination of the cure will elucidate the cause: "Peut-être, selon la maxime antique, la nature de la guérison nous démontrera-t-elle la *nature de la maladie*" (*Ibid.*: 249).

Twenty days after her attack on the actress, Aimée's delusional state abruptly disappeared. Lacan sees in this sudden cure the key to the specific psychosis to which she had been prey, a form of psychosis fuelled by "des mécanismes psychiques d'autopunition". As Jean Allouch (1994) points out more than once in his study *Marguerite ou l'Aimée de Lacan*, this diagnosis is somewhat speculative. Aimée remained delusional for almost three weeks following her assault on the actress. According to Lacan, it is only when she "realises", in the strongest sense of the word, that she has punished herself in that she is now cast among delinquents and prostitutes, that her delusion vanishes. It is not the aggressive act in itself which appeases the unconscious desire, but the realisation that she has struck herself by this action which eventually brings the delusional impetus to a halt. "Ce qu'elle 'réalise' encore, c'est *qu'elle s'est frappée elle-même*, et paradoxalement c'est alors seulement qu'elle éprouve le soulagement affectif (pleurs) et la chute brusque du délire, qui caractérisent la satisfaction de la hantise passionnelle" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 250).

The mechanisms which underpin the drive to self-punishment are unconscious, and require Freudian "doctrine" to elucidate them. Just as he begins to wrestle with the enormous mass of psychoanalytic theory he has assembled in support of his thesis, Lacan, in a deft and graceful movement, smoothly draws this unconscious mechanism into convincing continuity with the most prominent characteristics of the psychaesthetic personality by way of an erudite literary reference. Aimée is one of the

"héautontimorouménos". An appendix to Allouch's study traces the literary etymology of this Greek term meaning "self-punishing". It was the title of a play by Terence adapted from a lost work by Menander and first performed in 163 B.C. This rather elegant epithet which belongs more properly to classical antiquity than to clinical nosography had been more recently revived by Baudelaire in his poem "L'Héautontimorouménos"

Je suis la plaie et le couteau !  
 Je suis le soufflet et la joue!  
 Je suis les membres et la roue,  
 Et la victime et le bourreau! (Baudelaire, 1961: 74)

At this point, in Lacan's argument the Freudian theory of the super-ego needs to be hefted into place in order to provide the coping stone for what should be a sophisticated theoretical edifice encompassing the relations between self-punishment and the unconscious. This however will prove to be a more unwieldy operation than was perhaps envisaged.

Although the term super-ego does not appear in Freud's vocabulary until the publication of *The Ego and the Id* in 1923, from as early as 1907 he had focused on the self-reproaches of the obsessional neurotic: "the sufferer from compulsions and prohibitions behaves as if he were dominated by a sense of guilt, of which however he knows nothing, so that we must call it an unconscious sense of guilt ..." (Freud, 1907b: 123). One part of the ego is set against the other as critic and judge. In the 1914 paper "On Narcissism", the ego is depicted as carrying within itself its own ideal, named by Freud as the ideal ego or ego-ideal. Much confusion arises from the fact that these agencies, distinguished as separate moments of development in later psychoanalytic theory, are all but interchangeable in Freud's paper. An infinitesimal but important line of demarcation can be discerned in one explanatory gloss furnished by Freud himself: "What he projects before him as his ideal is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal" (Freud, 1914c: 48). To add to this confusion, in *The Ego and the Id*, where the term super-ego appears for the first time, it is presented as indistinguishable from the ego-ideal. A single agency is formed through identification with the parents as a corollary of the decline of the œdipus complex. This combines the functions of prohibition and promise. Further difficulties arise here due to an internal twist in Freud's theory, not picked up by the first psychoanalytic generation, but eventually and brilliantly highlighted by Lacan himself at the moment when he began to theorise with the help of

the internal twist which is the Moebius strip. The official definition of the ego-ideal/super-ego is that it is a late form of identification, "heir to the œdipus complex", and this definition is justified by Freud's italicised summary, in chapter three of *The Ego and the Id*: "*The broad general outline of the sexual phase dominated by the œdipus complex may therefore be taken to be the forming of a precipitate in the ego, consisting of these two identifications in some way united with one another. This modification of the ego retains its special position; it confronts the other contents of the ego as an ego-ideal or super-ego*" (Freud, 1923b: 34).

Freud's assertion appears however to be undermined in the text itself, which specifies the super-ego or ego-ideal as originating not as an œdipal outcrop but very much earlier: "behind it there lies an individual's first and most important identification, his identification with the father in his own pre-history" (*Ibid.*: 31). Indeed Freud is clear about this strange doubleness: "The super-ego owes its special position in the ego, or in relation to the ego, to a factor which must be considered from two sides: on the one hand it was the first identification and one which took place while the ego was still feeble, and on the other hand it is the heir to the œdipus complex and has thus introduced the most momentous objects into the ego" (*Ibid.*: 48).

In *L'identification*, Lacan (1961-1962) will approach the enigmas posed by this statement of Freud's by way of Frege's question on the relations between the zero and the one, which allows him to "explain" the constitution of the Moebius strip, and in the process he will open up crucial paths for the exploration of psychosis and psychotic writing.

For the moment however Lacan is caught in a dilemma. He is not unaware of the difficulties in this theory, yet he needs it to make his case. He opts for an odd solution. In chapter four he embarks on a highly turgid exposition of this theory, cross-fertilised confusingly with several others, and appears to be trying by sheer cumulative weight to legitimate its claims, while in the appendix which comprises the third and final section of the thesis as a whole, he follows up the vigour of the case he has just made by an equally vigorous critique of the psychoanalytic concepts utilised.

One of the major difficulties Lacan encounters can be spotted if one looks at the two psychoanalytic references most frequently used to underpin the theory he is attempting to prove. These references are *The Ego and the Id*, which explores identity in what is, despite its rather arid tone, an extraordinarily dense and rich manner. This is the work in which Freud most fully posits the idea of ego as surface, and also the relation

between desire and identification, ideas which were to open up a huge intellectual and imaginative arena in Lacan's own teaching. The second reference is *Certain Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality*, the article translated by Lacan earlier in 1932 and which is the only place in Freud's work where he theorises homosexuality as resulting from an identification sourced in what Lacan will call the fraternal complex. One might say, paraphrasing Lacan's opening remarks in the *Seminar on Identification*, (Lacan, 1961-1962: 15.11.61) that *The Ego and the Id* is concerned with "that which in identification poses itself immediately as identical, as founded on the notion of the same, and even of the same to the same" while the 1922 article more explicitly evokes mirror identification and the phenomenon of transitive jealousy. A large portion of the tension which strains the credibility of the psychoanalytic theories introduced is due to Lacan's difficulty in building a bridge between these two sets of ideas. The imaginative weight of the picture he has created impels both Lacan and his readers to see this case as a drama of transitivity, but he has set himself the task of arriving at a diagnosis of: "un arrêt évolutif de la personnalité au stade génétique du Sur-Moi" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 348).

Given that the internal twist which subtends identity, as located by Freud in *The Ego and the Id*, is the starting point for Lacan's most important theorisation of representation, identity and the function of writing, the prominence of this work here in his first discussion of psychoanalytic theory is significant. It has to be said however that the attempt to establish the diagnosis cited above with the help of this work, and to solder it to the concepts of jealousy and homosexuality leads Lacan onto very thorny terrain. In pursuit of this aim, Lacan invokes not just *The Ego and the Id*, but also a number of other works by authors from the French school such as Hesnard and Laforgue, and from the Berlin clinic such as Alexander and Staub, using them to substantiate the link Freud had posited between self-punishing mechanisms and certain types of crime. In itself, this link causes no problems. Neither does the link between homosexuality and paranoia often pointed up in Freud's writings. The attempt to shunt all of these phenomena together via a fixation at the level of anal sadism however, creates a concentrated conceptual clump which is jammed together more by rhetoric than by evidence. To justify this synthesis he refers without quoting from it to an obscure and untranslated article by Otto Fenichel. He also reproduces a development grid from Abraham's 1924 paper, *The Development of the Libido*, in order to demonstrate the relationship between these early stages and certain

forms of psychosis (Abraham, 1988). The trouble with this grid is that the phenomenon Lacan wishes to isolate is nowhere to be seen on it. Freud had put forward the notion in *The Ego and the Id* that the mechanisms underpinning the drive to self-punishment are associated with the super-ego and therefore with what he calls secondary narcissism, but Abraham's grid locates psychotic disturbances at the level of primary narcissism. Lacan, having drawn attention to the grid, acknowledges that "la formation des mécanismes autopunitifs ou du sur-moi" occurs at a later stage, and goes on in a few compressed sentences to intricate this stage with anal sadism and infantile homosexuality. This reference to early homosexuality opens the way to a mention of Freud's article on jealousy, but this assimilation is an artificial one. The "acidulated" homosexuality which is, Freud says, a component in delusional jealousy is not linked by Freud either with anal-sadism or with the super-ego. Neither is the homosexuality based on the fraternal complex, discussed in the same article.

There is evidence that the logic of these links escapes Lacan himself, and his bafflement or perhaps his scepticism shows itself in the sudden accretion of appeals to the authority of the Freudian "doctrine" which appear each time he evokes this synthesis. It is as if this tottering assembly of ideas must be bolstered by phrases such as "dite par la doctrine" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 260), "Freud y insiste" (*Ibid.*: 260) and "d'après la théorie" (*Ibid.*: 264), quite absent throughout the rest of the thesis.

The most bizarre feature of this turgid theorisation is that it hardly seems necessary. Aimée's story will not be elucidated in terms of anal sadism and Lacan's rhetorical flick at the end of his exposition of this cluster of psychoanalytic concepts – "Ces points théoriques étant rappelés, il nous paraît manifeste qu'ils permettent de saisir les corrélations cliniques les plus importantes qui se présentent chez notre malade" (*Ibid.*: 260) – is a feint. The case he goes on to make is grounded in Aimée's moral conflict with her sister, a case which in itself is both fascinating and plausible, and arguably has no need whatever for this strange theoretical plinth.

The relation of the super-ego to language in psychosis will be taken up in the fifties when Lacan discusses the persecutory voices to which the psychotic is prey, and will be evoked again in a very powerful image in the Seminar on Anxiety when Lacan compares it to the Shofar, the mighty horn which represented the voice of God for the Israelites. Its importance in *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* is however not linguistic, but scientific: "cet exposé des doctrines

freudiennes sur le *Moi* et le *Sur-moi* fait bien ressortir l'accessibilité scientifique de toute recherche sur une tendance concrète, la *tendance auto-punitive* par exemple" (*Ibid.*: 326).

Having established a diagnosis of self punishing paranoia for Aimée via these psychoanalytic concepts, Lacan in the appendix to his thesis, swerves abruptly away from the near sycophancy of references to "l'immense génie du maître de la psychanalyse" and embarks on an energetic critique of these concepts. In part this appears due to his desire to establish psychoanalysis as converging on his own insights rather than constituting a dominant influence. Psychoanalysis has provided: "des confirmations majeures à notre assimilation doctrinale de la psychose à un phénomène de la personnalité," but "à constater ce concours des faits, seule nous a mené l'exigence de notre propre méthode, à savoir la loi qu'elle nous imposait d'une information aussi exhaustive que possible sur la vie de la malade" (*Ibid.*:319).

This downsizing is quite striking. It would appear that Lacan's position in relation to psychoanalysis at this time retains a degree of ambivalence, and indeed a certain haughty autonomy. On the one hand it is an essential adjunct to the theory of personality as he has defined it. On the other hand he is unwilling to acknowledge any real debt. Psychoanalysis has only been useful insofar as, like a number of other new disciplines, its insights converge on the creation of a new science, which is the science of personality. It is one tributary among many: "sous les divers appareils que désignent les titres de psychanalyse, de psychologie concrète d'Individual psychologie, et de caractérologie (dans la portée que donne à cette dernière science Klages), une science a posé déjà ses points d'ébauche, qui n'est que la part proprement humaine de la psychologie: nous l'appelons science de la personnalité" (*Ibid.*: 324).

Even the ideas which had clearly excited him in the earlier discussion of psychoanalysis are now diminished and drained of their originality. Its technique, for example, has offered one helpful notion only, which is the concept of resistance, here footnoted as already well established in the long tradition of French moralists, among whom Nietzsche is mysteriously numbered.

Early on in the thesis Lacan had offered an extraordinarily deep reaching definition of resistance which could be said to presage the celebrated commentary on Antigone in the Seminar on Ethics in 1960 (Lacan, 1959-1960). He alludes to: "ces résistances 'morales' qui en nous, imposent des limites aux influences du réel. Nous éprouvons au reste ces résistances sous une forme ambivalente, soit qu'elles nous assurent contre

l'émotion qui nous saisit où la réalité qui nous presse, soit qu'elles s'opposent à ce que nous nous soumettions à telle discipline, pour normatif qu'ils puissent paraître. Pierres d'achoppement de la personnalité, sources de conversions et de crises, elles sont par ailleurs la base d'une synthèse plus solide. C'est pourquoi nos actes nous appartiennent et nous 'suivent'" (*Ibid.*: 41).

Also Lacan had clearly been gripped earlier in the thesis by the role of libido in shaping the universe inhabited by the subject and had translated Freud's Latin term into the much more suggestive "désir", although, perhaps in the interests of the case he wishes to make, his extensive paraphrases of Abraham on the topic of libidinal fixation omit Abraham's own caveats and doubts about the accuracy of what psychoanalysis has understood of these processes and are therefore notably unsubtle. In the appendix however, libido theory is no longer as it was earlier in the thesis, Freud's enormously innovative contribution to psychology (*Ibid.*: 256). On the contrary, as thinkers like Meyerson had demonstrated, it is now a necessary postulate in all attempts to reflect on psychic phenomena. "C'est que l'introduction de ces concepts énergétiques tient non aux faits, mais aux nécessités mêmes de l'esprit" (*Ibid.*: 327). It is important to note nonetheless, that this appendix does much more than simply dilute and diminish Lacan's debt to psychoanalysis. It puts in place a trenchant and illuminating critique of the confusions which beset Freud's theory of narcissism, and psychoanalytic thinking on the ego in general. This critique includes an accurate and perceptive account of the history of these concepts, drawing attention to the often forgotten fact that it was in the Burghölzi clinic where Bleuler had trained young psychiatrists like Jung and Abraham to listen to the language of madness, that the shatterings which could attend upon the self in psychosis were first examined psychoanalytically. It was as a result of work done in the Burghölzi that as Lacan points out: "la théorie rapporte à ce stade narcissique de l'organisation libidinale tout le domaine des psychoses, sans distinction assurée, depuis la paranoïa et la paranoïdie jusqu'à la schizophrénie en passant par la maniaque-dépressive (cf. le tableau emprunté à Ferenczi, p. 258). Le narcissisme en fait se présente dans l'économie de la doctrine psychanalytique comme une *terra incognita*, que les moyens d'investigation issus de l'étude des névroses ont permis de délimiter quant à ses frontières, mais qui dans son intérieur reste mythique et inconnue" (*Ibid.*: 322).

Despite the casual confusion of Abraham and Ferenczi in this comment, Lacan is obviously already an astute reader of psychoanalytic literature

and his assessment is entirely accurate. For all its sociological overlay, this thesis represents in embryonic form Lacan's first exploration of the theme of identification, a first questioning with respect to the ego which will issue in almost half a century of teaching. Indeed echoes of the questions outlined at the end of *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* pervade Seminar One, *Les Écrits techniques de Freud*, where Lacan begins by remarking of *Studies in Hysteria*: "la notion de l'ego laisse déjà pressentir chez Freud tous les problèmes qu'elle nous pose maintenant" (Lacan, 1953-1954: 31). He adds: "il y a un monde de parcouru entre l'ego tel qu'on en parle dans les *Studien*, masse idéationnelle, contenu d'idéations, et la dernière théorie de l'ego, encore problématique pour nous, telle qu'elle a été forgée par Freud lui-même à partir de 1920" (*Ibid.*: 33). His confident assertion in this appendix that he will take up this topic where Freud left off is, in retrospect, a simple statement of truth. Already in his critique, he enters upon what he has called the terra incognita of the theory of narcissism by incisively isolating the manner in which two quite different definitions of the ego are intricately intertwined in Freud's theorisation. "La conception freudienne du *Moi* nous semble pêcher par une insuffisante distinction entre les tendances concrètes, qui manifestent ce *Moi* et seules comme telles relèvent d'une genèse concrète, et la définition abstraite du *Moi* comme sujet de la connaissance. Il suffit en effet de se rapporter à l'étude de Freud pour s'apercevoir qu'il fait de la '*conscience-perception*' (*Wahrnehmung-Bewusstsein*) le 'noyau même' du *Moi*, mais que pour autant, il ne se croit pas tenu de différencier le *Moi* par une genèse autre que *topique*. Le *Moi* ne serait que la 'surface' du *Soi* et ne s'engendrerait que par contact avec le monde extérieur" (Lacan 1975 [1933]: 324).

The impact of this distinction on Lacan's later work, in particular with regard to theories of representation including the relation between psychosis and language, are very far-reaching. The topical implications will preoccupy him increasingly from about 1960 onwards but the first outcrop of a recognizably Lacanian teaching will burgeon as a result of a cross-fertilisation between his own and Dali's thinking on the "Moi" as subject of knowledge, but of a knowledge that is in essence, paranoiac.

The psychoanalytic section of this thesis then leans heavily on the "doctrine" of the super-ego, but the dense picture he creates is not applied with any rigour to the details of Aimée's case and remains in the domain of generalisation. It would seem that both the reader and Lacan himself are more convinced by the relatively fewer pages devoted to Aimée's relationship with her older sister, and most of the theory which backs this



up is culled from the study of shared delusion in psychiatry. Lacan's basic thesis is that this psychosis has its roots in the biographical facts of the patient's life, and these roots are unambiguously identified as pertaining to Aimée's relation with her sister: "Pour la genèse historique de la psychose, notre analyse ... nous en a livré le noyau dans le conflit moral d'Aimée avec sa soeur. Ce fait ne prend-il pas tout sa valeur à la lumière de la théorie qui détermine la fixation affective de tels sujets au complexe fraternel?" (*Ibid.*: 261).

The theory of the super-ego accounts for the structural causes, while the relation to her sister accounts for the historical causes, but the latter are much more lucidly and convincingly presented. This is the first time Lacan refers to the fraternal complex, not found in Freud, but to some small extent mooted in the article Lacan had just translated. By the time Lacan published the long article "La Famille" in the *Encyclopédie Française* the fraternal complex has become established as an identifiable moment in development and is named the intrusion complex. Although far less extensively discussed, it is this theory which constitutes the imaginative lode-stone of the thesis.

While this more convincing argument rests upon the latter half of Freud's article "Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality" (Freud, 1922*b*: 223-232), the impact of this small section of Freud's work on Lacan, cannot be separated from his reading of Jaspers' not dissimilar article on jealousy mentioned above, nor is it unconnected with the fact that Lacan was already engaged in the study of the forms of psychic doubling found in shared delusion. His brief paper the previous year, "Folies Simultanées", written in collaboration with MM. Claude and Migault (Lacan, Claude, Migault, 1931: 483-490), had focused on two cases of mother-daughter couples. The more popular theory favoured the notion of induction, with the stronger character imposing its delusion on the weaker. Lacan on the contrary emphasises the reclusive life-styles favoured by such couples, as well as the similarity of the psychotic anomaly present in both; that of the younger one being reinforced by living in such close and isolated proximity with the elder. His interesting article on the Papin sisters published in *Minotaure* in 1933, returns to Freud's article in order to emphasize the unconscious homosexuality subtending *folie à deux*. At the height of her delusion Christine, the elder sister had made announcements like: "Je crois bien que dans une autre vie, je devais être le mari de ma soeur" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 394), and having torn out the eyes of her female victims, had attempted to do the same to herself in prison. Aimée is caught in a mirror relation not just with her

sister but also with her mother. Indeed she may be said to inhabit a hall of mirrors: "La malade n'a pas hésité à accuser son amie la plus chère d'être sa persécutrice, puis l'informatrice principale de ses ennemies. Elle s'arrête devant sa soeur aînée, qui a été un instant le substitut de sa mère" (Lacan, 1975 [1933]: 282).

This hall of mirrors will provide a starting point for Lacan's first theorisation of the ego and its relation to the subject of the unconscious. As Lacan himself remarked fourteen years later in "Propos sur la causalité psychique", the implications of this theorisation of "the Aimée case" became more sharply defined in retrospect. In this paper delivered to a conference of psychiatrists at Bonneval, he spoke of "l'approfondissement que cette thèse a pris chez nous ultérieurement" (Lacan, 1966: 170), and indeed by 1933, when he came to write about the crime of the Papin sisters, a certain crystallisation had already taken place.

In spite of its own stated intention which is to render Aimée's psychosis understandable in terms of her personality, this thesis is a first step in Lacan's lifelong exploration of "les déterminations inconscientes qui supportent l'affirmation même du Moi" (Lacan, 1966: 144).

### *Conclusion*

The two dominant strands in this, Lacan's first incursion into psychoanalytic theory, converge on the question of identification which Lacan will later call "la causalité psychique même" (Lacan, 1966: 188). The problems posed by the psychical agencies of the self as set forth by Freud in *The Ego and the Id* and those inherent in the transitive relation to the other, present subliminally in "Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality" both open onto the dilemma of the psychotic who lives in acute awareness of what Starobinski has so aptly described as "the dangerous compact between the ego and language". The concluding sentences of the thesis call for a further examination of: "a) des *situations vitales* qui déterminent la psychose, et tout spécialement des situations initiales de l'enfance (anomalies constantes de la situation familiale); b) des types de *structure conceptuelle prélogique*, révélés par la psychose, et particulièrement de la valeur significative des créations esthétiques, souvent remarquables, ou seulement imaginatives, mais singulièrement énigmatiques, que produit la psychose; c) des *pulsions agressives*, spécialement *homicides*, qui se manifestant parfois sans épiphénomène délirant et 'à la muette', n'en révèlent pas moins une anomalie spécifique, identique à la psychose" (Lacan 1975 [1933]: 350).

Lacan will return to these three questions throughout his teaching years; the subjective structure which underpins psychosis, the manner in which this impacts on creative expression and by extension on language itself, and thirdly what he will call in the *Seminar on Identification*, the abolition of the temporal dimension in a-subjective aggressivity. All of these questions lead him to the topic of identification, most fully examined by Freud in *The Ego and the Id* in 1923 and in chapter seven of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* two years earlier. In the doctoral thesis, Lacan had puzzled over the fact that Freud saw the super-ego as a passage from the outside to the inside, a "reincorporation": "la réincorporation, dit-il, au Moi, d'une partie du monde extérieur" (*Ibid.*: 325). By the sixties, a daunting panoply of topological surfaces will be invoked to account for the particular properties and functions of outside and inside in the constitution of all subjectivity, normal or psychotic.

In this thesis, as also in his very earliest reference to the writings of psychotic patients, Lacan had pointed out the resemblance between the themes favoured by certain types of psychotic writing and those which characterize many familiar folkloric and mythological tales of cyclical occurrence, perpetual recurrence. The distinctions which Freud had established a decade earlier, between different forms of repetition, in works like *The Uncanny* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, raise questions not only for psychoanalysis but also for literature about the possibility of staking out demarcations between different types of narrative. Since repetition can serve both sameness and difference, both the stability of identity and its disruptions, can one posit a type of narrative in which the tropes of repetition would reflect the particular mode of inhabiting time which immobilizes the psychotic subject? Already in the 1930s at the time when Lacan was undertaking his doctoral thesis, literature was quite remarkably extending the formal implications of what Lacan would call the radical duplicity of the subjective position. Most notable among French writers was Raymond Roussel, who died in 1932, and whose work, with its stunning coda, published posthumously in 1935, is an extraordinary exploration of the virtualities inherent in the repetitions of the signifier, and of the strangeness of the narrative space available in a language beset by doubleness. One might note too as a sort of aside that the year 1932 marked the beginning of Samuel Beckett's career as a creative writer. He spent the summer of 1932 in Paris writing *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, "in a white heat", an early and somewhat fragmented prologue to what would arguably be the most

penetrating exploration of the relation between language and an embattled subjectivity in twentieth century literature.

For the moment however, Lacan does not appear to see the literary implications of this dilemma. Although he has devoted almost twenty pages of this thesis to extracts from Aimée's novels designated "productions littéraires" destined for publication, their inclusion, not surprisingly, is in the service of his clinical exposition. They are highly unusual certainly, but they are primarily of interest in that they offer proof of the central tenet in this thesis, which is the relationship between psychosis and personality. No real connection is made between the kind of psychic doubling which he highlights in her biography and these writings. It is only by way of the psychoanalytic texts which he invokes to delineate Aimée's self-punishing paranoia, and also by way of certain Dalinian concepts imported into this psychoanalytic discussion that this thesis to some extent opens onto the literary preoccupations of his own era, and carries within itself germs of his important future thinking on identity, representation and writing.

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## Summary

### *Lacan's Doctoral Thesis: Turbulent Preface or Founding Legend?*

This paper presents a close reading of Lacan's doctoral thesis with a view to disentangling the reality of Lacan's thought in 1932 from the glosses of retrospection imposed on it by its republication in 1975. At this time Lacan was at the height of his fame as the most innovative psychoanalyst of the twentieth century and the complexities and rough edges of this work were smoothed by many commentators to create the impression of a simple developmental curve. It is hoped that this close reading will allow the reader to assess both Lacan's neophyte status at the time and the early indications of what were to become lifelong preoccupations in his later psychoanalytic work.

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### Key words

Aimée, Paranoia, Jaspers, Janet, Freud.