

Laytour, Latetour, *L'étourdit*

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Where he taught – St. Anne's Psychiatric Hospital, The Ecole Normale Supérieure, The Sorbonne – was seen by Jacques Lacan as a determinant of the style of his discourse. The place-names that punctuate the earlier part of L'étourdit illustrate this, but may also be a barrier for uninitiated readers. They may also need a time-line showing how the recent emergence of the Four Discourses and the Four Formulae of Sexuation allows a condensed presentation of work spanning forty years of psychoanalytic teaching and practice. The author draws on Christian Fierens' meticulous Reading L'étourdit to show how this dense text can be articulated and many of its riddles solved.

Keywords: French psychiatry; sexuation; discourse; sense; meaning

Introduction

Introducing Lowell's Kilkenny reading, you said that 'To master the meaning of your art and to master the meaning of the word "poet" is the poet's task'. Wouldn't many poets prefer not to become too self-conscious about these matters and to discover the answers simply through performing the poetic act itself?

Maybe so, although I still think that those high terms about mastering the meaning of the art and the task were justified. ... Until you have had the experience of genuinely performing the poetic act, you won't have any reason to think about what it means.¹

The study day of May 2009 was one more stepping stone for our School in its struggle to master the meaning of the analytic art and of the word psychoanalyst. For more than twenty years this "self-conscious" effort involved confronting our practical experience of the psychoanalytic act with

¹ Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones. Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London, Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 218-219.

the work of Jacques Lacan as it has been transmitted through his seminars. This year it led to our tackling a unique “writing” – the notoriously convoluted *L'étourdit* – into which he compressed the clinical and theoretical discoveries of his life's work as a Freudian psychoanalyst and, in particular, the ways in which he extended the master's pronouncements on the relationship of the speaking being to sex.

While preparing to write up my introductory remarks, I came across a brief news item in the *International Herald Tribune*:

Harvard to Start Unique Endowment

Harvard University is creating an endowed professorship in lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transsexual studies, the first of its kind in the United States and reflecting a rise in gender-related academia nationwide. The School will invite visiting scholars to teach on sexuality and issues related to sexual minorities for one semester each, a Harvard official said Wednesday. (Reuters)

This announcement allows me to omit my remarks to the participants about the crucial need for a serious presentation of Jacques Lacan's thinking on sexuation to the English-speaking world. Here from the world's leading university is a validation of our recent work: the translation of and commentary on Guy Le Gaufey's critical analysis of the evolution of the formulae of sexuation,² and the englishing of *L'étourdit*³ which after almost forty years “in purgatory” – the expression was used at the June meeting of the *Inter-Associatif Européen de Psychanalyse* – had a redemptive light shone on it by the “A to Z” reading undertaken by Christian Fierens,⁴ our guest at the study day.

He had come to us along a curious path. I happened to attend a two-day conference on his book in Paris in 2003, organised by Jean-Pierre Lebrun, a friend and a close collaborator of Charles Melman. Melman was particularly interested in *L'étourdit* since, as editor of *Scilicet*, he had tried to dissuade

² G. Le Gaufey, “Towards a Critical Reading of the Formulae of Sexuation”, *The Letter. Irish Journal for Lacanian Psychoanalysis* 39 (2008) pp. 19-70.

³ J. Lacan, *L'étourdit*, *Scilicet* 4 (1973) pp. 5-52; *Autres écrits* (Paris, Seuil, 2001), pp. 449-496.

⁴ C. Fierens, *Lecture de L'étourdit. Lacan 1972*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002.

Lacan from publishing it⁵ because of its incomprehensibility and its lack of the imaginary props that would enable a reader to gain a purchase on it. He spent an unsatisfactory year on the first half before moving to other more fecund areas of the Lacanian corpus. Fierens' new reading, presented under the auspices of the *Association Lacanienne Internationale*, was then another opportunity for him to put his initial reaction to the test.

The learned presentations and discussions did not appear to have had much impact on listening analysts. Even as we left the lecture theatre I heard someone remark: "We'll need another commentary to explain what he's talking about". The extract included in this issue of *The Letter* shows that reading Fierens does indeed call for patience and attention. But we found him a precious guide to the riddling of a text that has confounded the subtlest of Lacanians and what follows is in large part inspired by him.

The task Fierens set himself was to unpack, *déployer*, this ultra-complicated artefact. Disentangling the enigmatic knots of *L'étourdit* required not only all of his long experience as a psychiatrically trained psychoanalyst, but also his privileged access to some academic philosophers who had been amongst the first to recognise Lacan. Alphonse de Waelhens, for instance, his thesis director at Louvain, had taken Lacan as dialectical partner in his classic Heideggerian study on psychosis.⁶ And there were others like Jacques Schotte and Antoine Vergote.

In this paper my aim is to clear away the difficulties – some fairly superficial – that might distract the English-speaking reader in approaching the bi-lingual presentation of the first "turn" which is the centre-piece of this issue.

Its content is summarised in the title: *Laytour* clarifies for the lay reader Lacan's frequent references to Parisian and other landmarks, especially in the opening paragraphs; *Latetour* offers a setting for this last of his major *écrits* in the context of previous "writings" and seminars; and finally, *L'étourdit* suggests how this apparently impenetrable text might be articulated and also mentions some of the many difficulties that arose in translating it.

⁵ See his article below.

⁶ A. De Waelhens, *La Psychose. Essai d'interprétation analytique et existentielle*, Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1972.

Laytour

Semblances: In a survey of his teaching in 1971-72,⁷ I referred to Lacan's preoccupation with the status of the place where he taught:

Places seem to be important to him at this stage. He had begun his teaching in 1953 at the psychiatric hospital of Sainte-Anne; had been ejected and moved to the *Ecole Normale* in 1964; and finally ended up in Law Faculty near the Pantheon in 1969. In the current year he continues his seminar near the Pantheon. But he rejoices at the fact that he is also able, for the first time in almost a decade, to return to the hospital where he had begun his psychiatric training nearly half a century earlier.

In fact this is not Lacan's first return to Sainte Anne since 1963 because, as he admits in the first sentence of *L'étourdit*, Dr. Georges Daumézou, Clinical Director of Henri Rousselle, had invited him to continue his case presentations there. What had happened after his "excommunication" from the International Psychoanalytic Association was the suspension of his right to hold his seminar there, although the link between these two exclusions remains unclear.

So what of the locations referred to in his introductory remarks? Googling a map of Paris will show the centrality of Notre Dame as a starting point for any exploration of the city. Heading up rue St. Jacques we come to the Sorbonne which officially lost its mythical status as the city's one university in the post-1968 reforms. It had been re-designated as the Paris-I mentioned in the third paragraph. Here was the Law Faculty, near the Pantheon, where he would give his seminar until the year before his death.

Freud in his joke book has a tourist ask: "Is this the place where Wellington gave his famous speech?", prompting the reply "Yes, this is the place but he never gave that speech!". For Lacan the places where he spoke were of more than touristic interest. In the first version of his Four Discourses, the very nature of a discourse is determined by the occupier of

⁷ C. Gallagher, "Where was Jacques Lacan in 1971-1972? ...ou pire and the Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst", *The Letter* 30 (2004) pp. 1-19.

the locus of agent and the actual physical locality plays a major role in specifying this locus.

Agent/Semblance	Other
Truth	Product

A hospital bed is not the usual locus from which the master lays down the law. An academic may find it difficult to make his point among partisan football supporters; a hysteric – this is trickier – is not really convincing if he speaks from the managing director’s armchair; and as for an analyst interpreting from the pulpit of a cathedral....

The locus of Agent will soon be renamed Semblance and as a first taste of the style of *L'étourdit* let us see how Lacan uses his discourse theory to relativise the universally unquestioned truth that “all men are mortal”:

...there is no universal that must not be contained by an existence that denies it. So that the stereotype that every man is mortal is not stated from nowhere. The logic that dates it is that of a philosophy which feigns ‘nullubiquity’, this in order to create an alibi for what I name the discourse of the master.

Now it is...from...the place...that I designate as semblance that a saying takes on its sense.⁸

The sense of Lacan’s own saying, his *dire*, is thus determined by the place from which he speaks. For it to have the effect he wishes he must not speak from the place of the master or the academic but from that of the analysand who takes his audience as analyst. Speaking to medics in a psychiatric hospital, he found it easy to identify himself with the Doras, the Ratmen, and the Schrebers with whom he and his listeners were familiar in their day-to-day work. They like him could recognise that, as he put it towards the end of *...ou pire*, “we are brothers and sisters of our patients”.

But in Paris-I, speaking week after week to a random audience of seven hundred who knew nothing of psychiatry or psychoanalysis, he ran the risk

⁸ J. Lacan, op. cit., *Scilicet*, p. 7. See p. 36 of this issue of *The Letter*.

of becoming the *maître à penser* which in fact he has become for the literary critics, the philosophers and, I recently learned, for the Scandinavian architects and town planners, who make use of his ideas without ever linking them to their origin in his work as an analyst.

Between the ten years at Sainte-Anne and the equally long time at Paris-I, Lacan had spent four years at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* with a new audience made up of the brightest students of the French hierarchical educational system. The *ENS* on rue Ulm is about halfway between Paris-I and Sainte-Anne and more or less on the direct route we have been taking up St. Jacques. It was here that his son-in-law, Jacques-Alain Miller, and many other logicians and mathematicians heard him for the first time and this new situation brought with it a radical departure away from the clinical cases and the concerns with psychiatric nosology that had characterised his teaching in the early days.

Henri-Rousselle: As we continue our way along rue St. Jacques we finally come to the vast complex of Sainte-Anne which has replaced the Salpêtrière, where Freud met Charcot, as the home of French psychiatric excellence.

Trying to find within its walls *l'hôpital Henri-Rousselle* whose fiftieth birthday celebrations were the occasion for *L'étourdit* is, however, a vain enterprise. There remains only a plaque on the main building, dedicated not to Jacques Lacan but to the Dr. Georges Daumézon he pays homage to in the first paragraph, honouring him as having headed up the now vanished *hôpital* in the 1960s and 70s.

Lacan's case-presentations, as he points out, went beyond the usual psychiatric model and like his seminars took place on a weekly basis well into the 1970s. Though intended principally for psychiatric students they also drew non-medics who were passionately interested in seeing the clinical applications of what they were hearing at the seminars in Paris-I. The "beyond" element of Lacan's presentations consisted in his privileging to an extraordinary degree what the patient was "saying" rather than the usual medical practice of using him or her to illustrate the features of a psychiatric condition.

I recall an occasion when a man spoke of hoping to buy a “*quatre-zero-cinq*” which everyone in the room, except Lacan, immediately knew was a Peugeot 405. Unlike the rest of us he was puzzled by the phrase and encouraged the patient to elaborate on what such a bizarre expression might mean, thus leading him, step by step, into hitherto unexplored areas of his story.

The second paragraph of the text refers explicitly to what he has taught at Sainte-Anne. But here, as his listeners would have known, he is not referring to the complex as a whole but to the chapel of Sainte-Anne where from November 1971 to June 1972 he had given six lectures now translated as “The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst”.⁹ Again one will search in vain for any sign that these lectures took place there but the building does remain having been converted into a laundry to meet the more obvious and immediate needs of patients. A genuine return to basics. From religious illusion through psychoanalytic esoterics to the bedrock of clean linen. Or to parody Victor Frankl: “You can live with any treatment as long as you have a clean pair of pajamas!”.

Milan-Paris: Still on the first page of *L'étourdit*, we leave Paris for Milan where, on 12 May 1972, Lacan wrote for the first time the two sentences that are his point of departure – and which form a *Leitmotiv* for *L'étourdit*. It was on his return that he first wrote on the board, at the seminar of 14 June 1972, what I translated some years ago as:

*That one says
– as a fact –
– remains forgotten behind what is said
– in what is understood*

followed by the comment:

*Naturally this statement which is assertive in its form as universal is connected with the modal in terms of what it is declaring about existence.*¹⁰

⁹ Unpublished translation by C. Gallagher.

¹⁰ J. Lacan, ...*ou pire*. Unpublished translation by C. Gallagher.

He was enticed away from further analysis of these sentences by an intervention from the audience. This was a fifteen to twenty page input by F. Recanati on three texts by C.S. Peirce. Lacan insists at the time that Recanati's paper could be summed up by the two sentences that he had just written. They are on the board again on 21 June, accompanied this time by the formula for the analytic discourse and the remark:

*This statement is assertive by its form;
belongs to the modal in terms of the existence (existence) that it
emits [sic].*¹¹

The fiftieth birthday celebrations to which Lacan refers on the first line of the text must then have occurred between the seminar of 21 June and 14 July, the date at which *L'étourdit* was completed.

This topographical overview has, I hope, given the English-speaking reader a clearer image of Sainte-Anne, Henri-Rousselle, the chapel, Paris-I and Milan as the geographical reference-points which Lacan thought it worth his while to provide us with and allow him to be less distracted by them as he gets into the meat of the text.

Latetour

Background reading: *L'étourdit* is Lacan's last great *écrit*, a final *tour d'horizon* in both senses of the word. It is a survey of all his work to date and a look forward to what is still beyond the horizon. There are still eight more seminars to go, including *Encore*, the best known of his works in English – so badly produced in the official French and English versions that I felt a duty to re-English it using reputable pirate editions¹² – and the seminar on Joyce which is of inevitable interest to the worldwide Joycean industry. We should also add the question and answer *Télévision* at Christmas 1973.

But as regards the long meticulous constructions which punctuated his career from the 1930s on, this is the end of the road. It has been compared to

¹¹ J. Lacan, op. cit.

¹² J. Lacan, *Encore 1972-1973*. Unpublished translation by C. Gallagher.

Finnegans Wake – mainly, one feels, by people who have read neither work. Despite its Joycean taste for neologisms and portmanteau words, *L'étourdit* is in fact written in readable French and a better analogy for its disruptive style might be the tortured syntax and the delight in the archaic – “*sheer plod makes plough down sillion shine*” – of Hopkins. What it does demand is a thorough knowledge of Lacan’s work from its beginnings to the early 1970s as well as a sensitivity to the way in which his ongoing dialogue with Freud has evolved. He himself makes this clear:

It is well known that for ten years I had taken the trouble to make a French garden of these tracks Freud was able to stick to in his design, the first, even though it could always be spotted how twisted they were by whoever wanted to get to the bottom of what supplies for the sexual relationship.

It was still necessary that the distinction of the symbolic the imaginary and the real should come to light: this so that the identification to the man moiety and to the woman moiety, where as I have just called to mind the business of the ego dominates, should not be confused with their relationship.

It is enough for the business of the ego like the business of the phallus where you were kind enough to follow me just now, to be articulated in language to become the business of the subject and to no longer fall under the jurisdiction of the imaginary. Just fancy that since the year '56 all of this could have been taken as acquired, if there had been some consent about the analytic discourse (14, 458).

No short-cuts here. We are expected to have thoroughly read “The Family”, published in *L'Encyclopédie française* in 1938, in which Lacan, as Freud’s life came to a close laid out, as carefully as Louis XIV’s gardener at Versailles, the Cartesian co-ordinates within which the psychoanalysis of that time could be condensed; then to have followed the subversion of the imaginary dominance of the mirror phase, first by the symbolic of Saussure and Levi-Strauss and, from the early sixties, by the real of the *o*-object; and finally to have read the recent seminars detailing the progression from the primacy of the phallus to that of the phallic function. The ten years at three hours of every day clocked up by Malcolm Gladwell’s outliers would be a good start!

In this daunting forty-year panorama there is one specific date that Lacan comes back to again and again and which shows the centrality of psychosis in his thinking. This is 11 April 1956. He picks it out in ...*ou pire* as a seminar that it would “amuse me to republish” and refers to it here again in his discussion of the first two formulae of sexuation:

...what concerns the analytic discourse is the subject, which, as effect of meaning, is response to the real. This I articulated, from 11 April 1956, having recovered a text from a quotation about the non-semantic signifier, this for people who might have taken an interest in it for feeling themselves called by it to a function of waste product (*déjet*) (15, 459).

This to remind us of another massive swathe of Lacan's work from his 1932 thesis on self-punishing paranoia through his years of commentary on Schreber's *Memoirs* to the current formulations of psychosis discussed at our last conference.¹³

Discourses and formulae: As regards the recent Lacan, a grasp of the Four Discourses and the Formulae of Sexuation are essential prerequisites for an intelligent reading of our text.

Starting with the first session of *L'Envers de la psychanalyse* at Paris-I, Lacan had written out a set of formulae which seem, at least in part, to have been stimulated by the revolutionary ambitions of the Maoists of 1968. As I have described elsewhere¹⁴ it was to the angry students at Vincennes that he explained that they were elements in a discourse and that a revolution would be precisely that – a re-turn to the status quo ante of dominance by a new master. From the beginning of *L'étourdit* we are, on the contrary, being inserted into the psychoanalytic discourse which “touches on the real by encountering it as impossible”.

The loci, the places, around which the elements S₁, S₂, S and o are rotated are: semblance, Other, product and truth. The modal relations between them are impossibility, contingency, possibility and necessity. This

¹³ See *The Letter* 40 (2009).

¹⁴ C. Gallagher, “The New Tyranny of Knowledge: Seminar XVII (1969-70)”, *The Letter* 24 (2002) pp. 1-22.

is part of the basic vocabulary that any prospective reader must learn to make sense of the opening page and a prime value of Christian Fierens' commentary is that he situates the logical origins of these categories and lightens the vast amount of work that would otherwise be necessary by clarifying their relation to philosophy, mathematics and psychoanalysis.

It is worth recalling here the crucial role of the semblance in defining the nature of a discourse: "Now it is...from the place...that I designate as semblance, that a saying takes its sense" (7, 451). Thus the master signifier S_1 at the place of the semblance defines a master discourse: S_2 , the academic discourse; the divided subject \mathcal{S} , the hysterical discourse, and finally the analytic discourse is made possible by the willingness of someone to speak from the place of the rejected o -object.

The second minimal requirement for the prospective reader is an intimate familiarity with the Formulae of Sexuation. In a recent issue of the *The Letter* recording the study day on Guy Le Gaufey's critical reading of the formulae, we read in an Addendum omitted from his book on Lacan's *Pastout*:

The text you have just read takes up again, from the seminars, the elements that Lacan gathered together in his ultra-cryptic *écrit* published in No. 4 of his review *Scilicet* under the title of *L'étourdit*. This is to say that the reader is invited to read and re-read these extremely dense lines with the tone of a last will and testament.

But where? Today two publications are offered in the French tongue...the original in *Scilicet*, faulty at least in quantifiers since, instead of $\forall x$ and $\exists x$ we find, for some mentions of the formulae, A and E, which makes reading it awkward; or the more recent, published in 2000 by *Seuil* under the general title of *Autres écrits*.¹⁵

This latter, states Le Gaufey, is even less reliable and adds more mistakes to those already found in *Scilicet*. I will come back to these mistakes in the next section, but here I want to make the point that even though *L'étourdit*

¹⁵ G. Le Gaufey, "Towards a Critical Reading of the Formulae of Sexuation", *The Letter* 39 (2008) pp. 19-69 at pp. 66-69.

takes the formulae to a stage beyond his time-frame, Le Gaufey's article is a quasi-indispensable preparation to make sense of these further elaborations.

It is he who emphasises that the crucial moment in Lacan's way of writing ("*l'écriture*") the formulae occurs in *The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst* – delivered, as we have earlier noted, in the chapel, now laundry, of Sainte-Anne. On 3 March 1972 Lacan produced them in their final form. This is the culmination of his attempt to *write* the sexual non-relationship which had begun a year before, even though it had been hinted at in earlier seminars:

Here (writes Le Gaufey) I am not going to carry out the scrupulous textual tracking that would lead us from a first (and very risky) "there is no sexual act" (*The Logic of Phantasy*) to "there is no sexual relationship" which runs through *Of a Discourse that might not be a Semblance* and ...*ou pire*. I will content myself with marking some key moments in this progress that will culminate in the formulae called "of sexualisation" because they try to write what is involved in the sexual non-relationship. The affair begins with *Of a Discourse that might not be a Semblance*, particularly in the session of 17 February 1971.¹⁶

Thus in *L'étourdit* of 14 July 1972, when Lacan writes the first two of these formulae in the sub-section described by Christian Fierens as "From Freud to the phallic function", he is following on from what had gone before. Now he applies to the formulae his logical thesis that there is no universal that is not denied by an existence. It is worthwhile trying to follow his difficult prose:

It is simply by way of complement that I contribute above to every position of the universal as such that it would be necessary at a point of the discourse for an existence, as they say, to oppose the phallic function, so that to pose it may be 'possible', which is the little by which it can lay claim to existence.

It is indeed in this logic that there can be summarised everything (*tout*) involved in the Oedipus complex.

¹⁶ G. Le Gaufey, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

All of it can be maintained by being developed around what I advance about the logical correlation of two formulae which are inscribed mathematically $\forall x. \Phi x$ et $\exists x. \overline{\Phi x}$... (14, 458).

In this way the left hand deixis, with the “masculine” formulae, is introduced, and Lacan goes on to explain how their “prejudice” contributes to Freud’s misunderstanding of psychosis and to the growth of racism.

Then, after a long discussion of the debate on feminine sexuality which in the 1930s had opposed Jones, Horney and Deutsch to Freud and which he had treated at length in *The Formations of the Unconscious*¹⁷ he presents the right hand, feminine, deixis of the formulae:

That the subject here proposes itself to be called woman depends on two modes. Here they are:

$$\overline{\exists x. \overline{\Phi x}} \text{ and } \overline{\forall x. \Phi x} \text{ (22, 466)}$$

This leads on to his considerations on the logic of the not-all and the *Heteros* which is the high point of the first “turn”. Antigone, the ancient model for the speaking being who refuses to be nor-male, takes the place of the Sphinx and threatens to tear apart whoever cannot answer her riddle. “I want a man who knows – how to make love” is Lacan’s latest formulation for the desire of the hysteric. Thus using his lifelong preoccupation with the desire of women and linking it to his logical formulae he gives his reply to Freud’s life-long bafflement about what a woman wants.

L'étourdit

Articulations: Let me now add a few more paragraphs aimed at further facilitating the reading of *L'étourdit*. Once again I pay tribute to Christian Fierens for his work in demonstrating that even this most opaque of Lacan’s texts can fulfill his desire “to be read” and that the effort involved is worthwhile at every level of the practical or theoretical activity of the analyst. While the programme for the study days held in Paris in 2003 emphasised that his was just one reading among many – and also

¹⁷ Seminars of 5 February to 26 March 1958. Unpublished translation by C. Gallagher.

misleadingly claims that *L'étourdit* is the written version of *Encore*, before the event – Charles Melman said on the day itself that it was an unrivalled demonstration of his “mastery” of the subject, “the model of what could be demanded of our colleagues”.¹⁸

The text can be given some initial articulation by using the chapter and section headings of the *Lecture*. The punctuation of the four chapter headings:

1. The relationship of meaning to sense;
2. Freud's saying;
3. There is no sexual relationship; and
4. The phallic function and the formulae of sexualisation

gives a clear notion of the topics Lacan is tackling and the order in which he approaches them. The sub-headings are also helpful in marking distinct steps of the argument.

Another way to illuminate the text, even though it is not for the fainthearted, is to investigate the thirty or so references Lacan makes to his own and Freud's work as well as to that of Cantor, Frege, Russell, Fernel, etc. The general effect of these references is to make us realise that our incomprehension of Lacan is often due to an incomprehension of, for example, Platonic dialogues or contemporary mathematics. From this point of view, the analogy to *Finnegans Wake* may not be too wide of the mark: for example, without a detailed acquaintance with the physiology of hearing a whole raft of Joycean allusions passes us by. Reading *L'étourdit* properly demands long years of effort. “Know!” Lacan says to his readers, stressing once again the degree of literary and scientific culture that is indispensable for the working analyst. In this he is taking up Freud's refrain in the *Question of Lay Analysis* where he emphasises that their medical training alone does not equip doctors to understand the range of historical, religious, philosophical and contemporary cultural references that pepper the speech of the analysand.

¹⁸ See his article in this issue.

Translations: Now for the difficulties of translating and the choices it involved. The Hebrew translator of Shakespeare may, as President Peres joked, have introduced the *oeuvre* as “translated and improved” but here the saying “*traduttore-traditore*” still holds good.

Much has been made of Lacan’s neologisms, and indeed the text is full of them. But my greatest difficulty in translation came from two very ordinary French words: “*dire*” and “*dit*”. *Dire* as every schoolgirl knows means *to say*. But what happens when *dire*, as in almost every case in this text, is a noun rather than a verb: “*un dire*”. If we translate this as “a saying”, most readers will agree with the Concise Oxford Dictionary and conclude that we mean “A sententious remark, maxim, adage, etc.”, as in the paragraph above. So if we translate “*Le dire de Freud*” as “Freud’s saying” the question might be “To which of his many sayings, about what, do you refer?”.

In the second paragraph Lacan talks about “*mon dire*” at Sainte-Anne. To avoid the everyday meaning of “saying” I first tried to translate this as “the fact of my saying” or “my act of saying” in order to get across its performative aspect. But the comparison to Gerard Manley Hopkins’s style helps us to see how deliberately poetic Lacan’s use of language is, so I decided to defy common sense and appeal to the poetic sensibility of the reader by translating *dire* as “saying”: “Beyond saying sweet, past telling of tongue”, wrote Hopkins in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. “Poetry... survives in the valley of its saying” wrote W. H. Auden in his *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*. In fact, the Heaney of our exergue has quoted this as illustrating his own view of poetic writing. So rather than “my act of saying”, “Freud’s act of saying”, “the mathematical act of saying” and so on, I have gone with the simple “saying”. *Dit*, which is often linked to *dire*, is easier and can be satisfactorily translated as “what is said”. The “saying” and “what is said” sounds less abrupt – to me in any case – than “the saying” and “the said”.

The neologisms pose a different problem. The frequently used *dit-mension* obviously condenses *dimension* and *dit*, “the dimension of what is said”. But it would be cumbersome and inaccurate to write that so, although tempted by Joyce’s “dimmansions”, for the moment it stays in French. For other reasons I was also going to leave “*homme-volte*” untranslated until I recently found that “*volte*” despite its similarity to the electrical “volt”,

refers in French and English to the circular tread of a horse during an exercise of dressage. And this translation allows Lacan's argument against the assimilation of psychoanalysis to psychology to become clearer:

The trouble is that the psychologist, since he can only support his sector by theology wants the psychical to be normal, and as a result he elaborates what would suppress it.

Especially the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*, when he would do better to pay attention to the volte-man (*homme-volte*) who makes up the labyrinth from which man does not get out (11, 455).

Which leads him on to the primacy of analytic repetition over the psychological stimulus-response couple.

Neologisms: For other neologisms I have made up corresponding English neologisms for example "allmanity" will not be found in an English dictionary but then neither will *touthommie* be found in *Le Petit Robert*.

Even though it clutters the text I have often given the original French in brackets when its richness is not caught by the translation: thus "One looks on at the marvel" scarcely catches the poetic "*On veille à la merveille*" and "misdeal" omits the allusion to maleness in "*maldonne*", etc.

We come at last to the title: *L'étourdit*. As will be seen from the *Lecture*, it too is a neologism – but only when it is written. In spoken French it is pronounced in exactly the same as the commonly used *l'étourdi*, without the 't', which means someone thoughtless, inattentive, distracted, etc. It is the title of a play by Molière, translated as *The Blunderer*, and it even made its way briefly into English according to a remark by David Hume in 1763, during his stay at the British embassy in Paris: "By this étourderie, to give it the lightest name, you were capable of making a quarrel between me and that irascible little man".

To discover what Lacan meant by it is another story and the only help I can give at present – we too have only got halfway – is to hear it as *les-tours-dits*, literally, "the-turns-said". In the seminar on *Identification* he had imaged the way that the symbolic turns around the real, the **o**-object, by the

way wires wind around the outside tube of a torus. As they complete their circuit they also complete a circuit around the centre of the torus.

But these endlessly repeated “saids” forget the saying that underlies them. Those pseudo-Freudians who are so hung-up on what the Master said miss out on his saying. They are the *étourdis*, the blunderers, inattentive to his focus on the saying of their patients, where alone the truth can be half-heard in fleeting slips of the tongue or in the condensed and displaced fragments of dreams.

The “saying” is also the key to grasping Lacan’s preferred road to the unconscious, the *Witz* that Freud revealed as having the power to get beyond our defenses and to directly release our repressed desires. The unconscious is never going to be a tourist attraction – no sooner has it opened to produce one of its formations than it closes tightly again. The truth cannot be said. It can only be surprised, glimpsed in a flash, in the saying of the elliptically half-said.

While castigating the neo-Freudians of the IPA Lacan also confesses that his own work has been turning, circling, around this obscure object of desire, and accepts that writing, no matter how closely it strives to adhere to *lalangue*, is incapable of circumscribing it. Because of that, he too is condemned to being an *étourdi*.

In the paragraph in quotes at the end of the first “turn”, the Sphinx – note the spelling – declares herself satisfied with what he has done so far but urges him to press on to solve the new riddle posed by Antigone. Lacan, who in these years often mentions his advanced age, is still buoyed up by the hope that as he reaches the evening of his life, he will, like Tiresias, be able to divine the mystery of the relationship of each speaking being, no matter what identity they assume, to the Otherness of sex.

And our own *étourderie*? This may well be the fundamental barrier to our taking up the position of analyst. Overcoming this barrier is, as Freud and Lacan never ceased to insist, an ethical question. Perhaps Auden described it best as deriving from “our dishonest mood of denial” against which we must continually strive if we are to be worthy of accompanying those who entrust themselves to our care to the threshold of their own moral choice.

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