

# FROM AN OTHER TO THE OTHER: AN OVERVIEW

Cormac Gallagher

## Introduction

### *Contemporary discourses on the subject*

Despite its 700 pages of typescript and the fact that it was delivered at yet another major turning point in Lacan's teaching career, *From an Other to the other*<sup>1</sup> remains unpublished and is rarely referred to in the Lacanian literature. Coming between the intriguing *Psychoanalytic Act* and the landmark presentation of the four discourses, it was the last of the seminars to be delivered at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, and also the last to be held on a weekly basis. In terms of the sheer physical effort involved, the twenty-five sessions may well have been designed to demonstrate to the young Maoists - including his son-in-law - circling round him, as well as to his traditional opponents, that the old man was not finished yet.

Lacan seems to feel that he has to engage with an array of contemporary discourses that relate to his own central concern regarding the structure of the subject. But he opens up so many different fronts that it is often hard to know where the key battles are being fought or where the important advances are being made.

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<sup>1</sup> All references to the year's seminar of this title given in this paper are to Cormac Gallagher's unpublished translation of: J. Lacan. *Le Séminaire. Livre XVI. D'un Autre à Vautre, 1968-69*, unpublished. The date of the quoted text and the page of the unpublished draft are given.

## *A heady brew*

The first session opens with the claim that the 'The essence of psychoanalytic theory is a discourse without words'. This might seem a strange proposition coming from the author of *The Rome Discourse* but in 'an epoch dominated by the genius of Samuel Beckett', as he puts it, he too seems to be inclining to the Irishman's radical suspicion of language, especially when dealing with the basic problems of existence. But here rather than Beckettian minimalism we are treated to a flood of words on a host of different topics. There is the exploration of the homology between Marx's surplus value and his own surplus enjoying and praise for Louis Althusser's revelation of the structuralism in his work. There is a long complex exploration of Pascal's wager intertwined with a bewildering discussion of the relevance of contemporary set theory to both the notion of the Other and the o-object. The graph of desire which had lain dormant for many years is revived in order to articulate the distinction between the O and the S(0) and to show how the latter can be clarified by reference to the key notion of the empty set. Many of his recent investigations on power, knowledge and *puissance* are stirred in to add to the headiness of the brew. And finally all of this is claimed to have a fundamental place in the work of the psychoanalyst, with special reference to the understanding of sublimation and the treatment of perversion, phobia, hysteria and obsessional neurosis.

Taking all this into account is there any possible way to present some sort of overview of the year? I propose to take just three topics which do, I think, give some idea of what the seminar is about and, more importantly, indicate how it relates to our concerns here in Ireland at the particular juncture we have got to with psychoanalysis.

I will talk first about what could be called the political background, in terms of the turmoil surrounding the reform of university education and the serious rifts in the *Ecole Freudienne* about the validation of psychoanalytic formation - how does one become an analyst. Then, I will attempt to explain why Pascal's wager is made into the centrepiece of the

seminar, the extraordinary value Lacan accords to it for psychoanalysts and what its relevance might be for an understanding of Irish subjectivity. Finally, I will try to see what practical clinical consequences can be drawn from what Lacan describes in the concluding sessions as the best final formulations he has been able to come up with on the fundamental structures of hysteria and obsessional neurosis.

## **Political background**

### *Implementing the Proposition*

The interest of this is not simply historical. It is of considerable relevance to past, present and hopefully future efforts that we will make to consolidate psychoanalysis in Ireland. Since our work is so clinically based we have to take seriously Lacan's warnings that the clinic often serves to reinforce 'the blackest prejudices'<sup>2</sup> and fails to advance our knowledge of the patients who present themselves to us.

For me, one thing that shows the close link between Lacan's public teaching and his concern for the formation of psychoanalysts within his School, is that there are some accounts of the proceedings of the *Ecole Freudienne* whose significance I cannot grasp until I have worked through the seminar that is contemporaneous with them. Without *The Psychoanalytic Act* I found the *Proposition of October 1967* completely opaque - even though I remember being advised to read it almost thirty years ago.

Running parallel to much of the current seminar are the ongoing disputes in the School, debated with considerable violence of language, around the procedures proposed for the promotion of individuals to one or other of the two analytic titles that Lacan had put forward in the *Proposition* - 'analyst of the school' and 'analyst member of the school'. Roudinesco, who is not always a sympathetic witness, says that the school

<sup>2</sup> 23.4.69, p. 2.

was 'at boiling point' in December 1968, following the publication of a set of principles that were being put forward for approval at a general meeting to be held in the following January.<sup>2</sup>

These principles proposed that there should be two selection committees - the word 'jury' is not really appropriate in English - one called the reception committee and the other the committee for approbation. Very briefly, the reception committee would decide on whether the School could stand over the work of a member as a psychoanalyst - even though that work always remained his own responsibility. The committee for approbation, on the other hand, would decide whether an applicant was committed to playing a serious role in the 'doctrinal' development of psychoanalysis.

One fundamental point of disagreement between members was that it did not matter whether an applicant for either title had been in analysis with a senior training analyst or not. This undermined the power of the old guard who were generally speaking clinically experienced psychiatrists. Another bone of contention was the novel process an applicant had to go through to be approved as an analyst of the School. Rather than representing himself directly to the selection committee through an interview or a clinical paper he was asked to speak to two guides or ferrymen or mediums (this is how the French '*passeeuf*' is usually translated) who in turn would represent his case to the committee.

In the voting at the general assembly this way of assenting to someone as a psychoanalyst was approved by a substantial majority and became the practice of the *Ecole Freudienne* until its dissolution a decade later. In the event, a number of Lacan's most senior colleagues - Piera Aulagnier and Francois Perrier would be best known to us - felt obliged to resign on ethical grounds and to set up their own separate group with more democratic and transparent criteria for the selection of analysts.

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<sup>2</sup> Scilicet, 2/3, pp. 30-52.

### *The new discordance between knowledge and power*

It is very probable that the majority favoured the proposals because of their faith in Lacan, without really understanding what was behind them. The current seminar allows us to grasp more clearly that the procedures he wanted to establish in the School were an application of the general theoretical position that he had been elaborating about how the relations between knowledge and power had radically altered in our day.

Ancient science ... is based, in short, on something that was accepted for a long time: that knowledge and power are the same thing.<sup>3</sup>

This was the basis of the power of empires. The British empire, no less than the French, was founded not primarily on military might but on the knowledge that allowed the development of the economic and scientific conditions for the production of that might. To know is to rule. Alexander had at his service the genius of Aristotle, and the Roman world was at peace for so many centuries because the wisdom of its institutions commanded universal respect.

All empires are just. If some doubt has been cast on this recently, there must be a reason for it.<sup>4</sup>

The most fundamental reason is one that the times bear witness to: the fact that...

... a discordance has exploded between knowledge and power.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 7.5.69, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

The events of May 1968 in Paris brought students and workers together in a massive violent protest because they were no longer able to tolerate living under a regime that treated both human labour and knowledge as commodities. These recent events were not fully understood by the participants. For most of them it was simply a question of displacing the powers that be and installing another more enlightened form of government.

This indeed was the traditional meaning of revolution. Those who had been at the bottom of the wheel now took over the reins of power and imposed their philosophy of life. But for Lacan to aspire to this in the current situation would be to continue to live in the old dispensation that saw knowledge as power, and to ignore the radical disjunction that has taken place between them in our day.

### *Psychoanalysts and the reform of the university*

Although inspired to some extent by the writings of Michel de Certeau, a prominent Jesuit historian who was a disciple of Lacan<sup>1</sup> and incarnated his idea that psychoanalysts had a key social role to play in the administration of knowledge,<sup>7</sup> the university reforms that were being introduced as he spoke in 1968/69 profoundly missed the point. Students had occupied the universities not simply because the subjects being taught were neither interesting nor relevant. What was at stake was the whole structure that saw knowledge as something in the possession of the professors that was to be transmitted to the students who wanted to acquire it with a view to obtaining positions of power in society. The introduction in the reforms of the notion of *credits (unites de valeur)* only served to highlight the persistence of the notion of knowledge as a commodity to be traded.

Lacan gives few hints about how he would set about reorganising the system of higher education but his practice gives us some clues. He

<sup>7</sup> cf 12.2.69, p. 5.

had entered into the university system when he began to teach in the *Ecole Normale*. But he refused to package his teaching in a way that would allow his knowledge to be mastered and used by his listeners. Hence the despair and anger of so many of them. Despite this he drew the crowds in increasing numbers and though he regularly professed not to know why, he clearly suspected that it was because he was speaking not from the position of one who knows but from that of a psychoanalyst. In fact he harbours a delusional belief that the future of teaching lies with psychoanalysts:

I went as far as this delusional exorbitance ... that it is no longer possible to play the role that is necessary for the transmission of knowledge if it does not involve the transmission of value. ... That is why in the future, precisely because something has happened to this value of knowledge, anyone who wants to occupy a place that contributes in any way to this place of formation, even if it is in mathematics, biochemistry or anything else, would do well to be a psychoanalyst, if this is how there must be defined someone for whom there exists this question of the dependence of the subject on the discourse that holds him, and not that he holds.<sup>8</sup>

### *Thinking: Psychoanalysis vs Philosophy*

What this involves in the concrete is difficult to specify. But in April 1969 he set about trying to spell out for his listeners some primary truths about psychoanalysis and how teachers imbued with them would differ from followers of a philosophy based on Descartes' *cogito* and Hegel's ideal of rational self-consciousness:

The step that Freud makes us take about the function of thinking as compared to *Selbstbewusstsein*, is that the essence of the 'I know that I am thinking' ... amounts to putting an excessive accent on what I know while forgetting the 'I do not know' which is its real origin ... This 'I do not know' is what the 'I know that I am thinking' is designed to screen in a definitive fashion. This 'I am thinking'<sup>1</sup> in Hegel is no longer the place where the truth is to be found ...

I do not know for how many of you this recalling of these primary truths may be of use ... What is important is to pose some questions here. This truth that we question in the unconscious as creative failure of knowledge, as the original point of the desire to know, is the schema that comes from a knowledge condemned never to be in a way anything but the correlate of this failure. Is this not for us, in questioning things further, [to ask] whether all thinking ... should not be defined as being essentially censorship, because this is what the Freudian articulation means, it is that this 'I do not know'<sup>1</sup>, can no longer find its place because it is radically forgotten ... Do we not sense here at least one of the essential correlates of what is put forward in our epoch about a so-called end of philosophy?<sup>9</sup>

We can do no more here than give a sample of Lacan's style. He is, in a sense, trying to speak in a way that allows the 'failure of knowledge' to appear and in that way to hint at the presence of a truth, at the revelation of an o-object, in a way that conventional academic teaching is unable to do. In doing this he touches on the source of the desire to know, but not in the way that this phrase has been understood since Aristotle. In a certain way you could say that he makes people want to do an analysis.

<sup>9</sup> 23.4.69, pp. 12-14.



In this they will discover that the rule of free association 'incites' them to search for the truth in a way that is not dominated by the need to be able to justify everything they say. In analysis you speak. But you are freed from the rules of the game that require that what you say should be rational. You speak, but not in the sense of saying: 'I affirm, and if you insist I can give reasons for everything I have said'. It is a commonplace in psychoanalytic experience that the most important truths are spoken without any conscious realisation that they have been and that when on the contrary a patient remains at the level of rational discussion little or no progress is made.

### *The new split*

This link between the change needed in university discourse and the experience of psychoanalysis brings us back to the crisis within the School. In spite of their impeccable Lacanian credentials - remember, '*What will we not build on this PieraV*' - his latest twist in wanting to base the formation of analysts on the discordance between knowledge and power proved to be a bridge too far. To them it seemed that nothing in the proposed procedures would prevent a madman from becoming a psychoanalyst but, as Jean Oury who had lived with the mad for most of his professional life pointed out, not even the most transparently democratic methods of selection could prevent that!

Addressing the assembly before the vote Lacan recalled that psychoanalysis dealt with subjects not persons, and the idea that psychoanalysts should be recruited by a process of weighing peoples' merits (*peser les personnes*)<sup>6</sup> was a completely inappropriate one. Once again the seminar throws light on the Freudian experience on which he was taking his stand. The power of Freud's work lies not in the construction of a system that would allow the myth of the conjunction of knowledge and power to endure but in the fact that he presented himself,

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<sup>6</sup> Scilicet 2/3, p. 49.

and his patients, as suffering from the effects of this disjunction which he reads 'in the symptoms that are produced at a certain level of the subjective'.<sup>11</sup> And in psychoanalytic treatment it is with these effects that he is trying to deal.

This re-presentation of the Freudian discovery owes more than a little to other contemporary discourses - Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze - which have tended to make psychoanalysts look like carthorses dragging behind them the weight of their out-of-date theory which 'clinical' experience has done nothing to advance. Lacan feels that even his discourse is trailing behind but that of the so-called clinicians is doomed to stagnation. The repeated presentation of case histories was of course necessary at an earlier stage of psychoanalysis. But today the case history has a different sense. If it is to do more than reinforce 'the blackest prejudices' it must be focussed not on the banality of childhood experiences that are supposed to explain the subject's current behaviour but on the structure of the subject itself.

And it is here that Lacan introduces a most unusual source to throw new light on this subjective structure and the way it can help psychoanalysts to make real progress in their clinical work.

### **Pascal and the structure of the subject**

#### *Nature, grace and psychoanalysis*

In the Rome discourse in 1953 Lacan had already hinted at his interest in Pascal:

The poverty of the terms in which we try to frame subjective problems might well leave a rigorous mind quite unsatisfied particularly if he compares them to those that structured the old quarrels about Nature and Grace however confused they might have been. And it might well make him fearful about

<sup>11</sup>19.4.69.

the quality of the psychological and sociological effects to be expected from their use.<sup>7</sup>

And a 1966 footnote makes this interest explicit:

This reference to the aporia of Christianity, introduced a more precise one at the highpoint of Jansenism. I mean Pascal whose still untouched wager forced me to take the whole thing up again in order to reveal the inestimable value it conceals for the analyst'.<sup>8</sup>

It is this 'inestimable value' that he will explore at this juncture when his whole notion of the validation of the title of psychoanalyst is being called into question.

Pascal is much more of a household name in France than he is in the English-speaking world. But Lacan makes the point - taken up again by Jacques Attali in his new biography of the seventeenth century genius - that his philosophical ideas, and in particular his famous wager, have been little discussed even in his native country. The wager is '*encore vierge* - still untouched'. Lacan's main commentary on it occurs in the current seminar but had been anticipated three years earlier in *The Object of Psychoanalysis*.<sup>9</sup>

### *The wager*

For Lacan, Pascal's Jansenism is epitomised in the wager. Its presentation in the *Pensées* can be summarised as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> J. Lacan. *Ecrits*. Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 54 (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 108 (my translation).

<sup>9</sup> As with Lacan's 1968-69 Seminar, in what follows the references given here refer to Cormac Gallagher's unpublished translation of J. Lacan. *Le Séminaire. Livre XIII. L'objet de la psychanalyse, 1965-66*, unpublished. Again, references contain date of quoted text and page number of unpublished translation.

There are no rational grounds for either belief or disbelief in the existence of God. You are incapable of knowing by-reason either what he is or even whether he is. So you have to bet. And the only reasonable bet is on the side of God's existence. If it comes off then you stand to win an infinity of infinitely happy lives. If it turns out that he does not exist you have lost little or nothing since in any case your life is not worth much.

As for the urbane people who consider that they are above such vulgar speculation on the existence of God, they simply fail to realise that they are already engaged with existence. They have adopted a position of accepting Predestination. They are what they are and there is nothing to be hoped from the side of Grace and love. For them Pascal's wager is an attempt to waken them to the reality of their existence. You have an existence! You have to bet!

This is not simply an intellectual exercise. If you wager that he exists you have to obey his word as transmitted by the Church and in particular you must renounce the pleasures of the flesh. This renunciation of the pleasures of this life in favour of those of the world to come is basic to Christian - and certainly Irish Catholic - morality but it reached a high point in the teaching of Bishop Jansenius whose book on St Augustine in the early seventeenth century is generally seen as being at the origin of Jansenism. Once again this is not simply of historical interest. Like it or not, we in the Western world still live under its shadow. Lacan explains:

In general, you have heard tell of something that sounds like 'to renounce pleasures' ... everyone knows that this act is supposed to be at the source of something that might be called the Christian life. It is the background noise. Through everything that Pascal and others around him tell us in terms of an ethics, this can be heard in the distance like

the sound of a bell ... I would like to make you sense that it is the very principle on which there is based a certain morality that one can qualify as modern morality.<sup>10</sup>

Pascal's role in this promotion of renunciation is not simply that of a Jansenist. For Lacan the principal forces that have shaped ethics in our era are science and capitalism. What they both have in common is the setting up of a discourse that organises the lives of men in an entirely new way and an abandonment of the notion of hedonism that had been at the centre of traditional philosophy and morality. In the Western tradition, the moral man was one who lived his life in accordance with the laws of nature and if he did so he ensured his happiness in this life and the next. In the new dispensation human pleasure is not factored into the equation.

### *Science, capitalism and the modern subject*

As a scientist and a forerunner of capitalism - his achievements in mathematics and science are well documented but he also invented the first computer and had plans for a bus company in Paris - Pascal was one of the first to articulate the change in structure of the human subject created by these radical new developments in the symbolic order. However, he did not opt for the unified thinking subject of Descartes' *cogito*, nor for his all-knowing God who guaranteed the fundamental truths. Pascal's God is not an object of knowledge - we can have no certainty about what he is or whether he is. As for the subject, he is not seen as an integrated unit but rather as someone who loses an essential part of himself from the moment he enters the game of existence. The distinction between Descartes and Pascal is concretised in the wager and this is why Lacan considers it to be one of the most 'exceptional enterprises'<sup>11</sup> of human thought. His elucidation of the factors involved leave much to be desired however.

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<sup>10</sup>15.1.69, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> 2.2.66, p. 4.

The first point is that the only thing you have to put into the pot is your own life. And one of the first principles of the rules for gaming - produced by Pascal to help some gamblers out of a fix - is that what is bet is lost at the start. The bet incarnates what I called the object lost for the subject in every engagement with the signifier'.<sup>12</sup> This of course recalls the old choice between your money or your life. You have no option but to engage with the signifier, but once you do so, part of your being is irretrievably lost. In Freud's terms it is the *Urverdrängung*, the primal repression that anticipates all others. So in this way Pascal's wager anticipates the structure of the divided subject in a way that Descartes' subject of the *cogito* does not.

The field with respect to which there is established the claim of **(o)**, the object of desire, is the field of the Other qua divided with respect to being itself. It is what appears in my graph as S, signifier of 0.<sup>13</sup>

The second point concerns the symbolic order with which the subject is confronted. In Descartes it is the all-knowing God required to ground truth - the O at the lower level of Lacan's graph, the God of predestination. This is still the God of Newton and Einstein whose plan for the world it is the task of science to uncover and who does not play at dice, the God of the philosophers. It is not clear whether Pascal's God might not play at dice but, what appears certain is that it is not so much his plan that must be discovered as his will. God's will for us is what Pascal understands by Grace and what Lacan presents on his graph as d(O) - the desire of the Other. What Pascal requires of his subject is an act of humility that will allow him to accept a subjection to 'the God of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac' - and of Jesus Christ say the *Pensées*, - and to say 'Thy will be done'.

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<sup>12</sup> 2.2.66, pp. 10-11.  
w 2.2.66, p. 12.

This centrality of the desire of the Other as opposed to his all-knowing plan is another sense in which Lacan highlights the interest of the old theological quarrels about Grace and Nature for psychoanalysts.

### *Beyond personality*

Pascal's wager has not engaged the interest of many philosophers and the subtlety of his position has been missed by most of those who have tackled it. Lacan quotes at length from a 1900 article by Dugas and Riquier and I will include an extract partly because until recently I mistakenly thought that these lines expressed Lacan's own position and also because at first sight they seem to make very good sense.

Pascal says you have to make a call; heads God exists, tails he does not. They respond:

... if we put ourselves before the real conditions of the wager, we have to say it would be madness to take heads, because faith is not the way Pascal sometimes presents it. It is not simply superimposed on reason; it does not have as an effect to push back the limits of our mind without hampering its natural development and thus give it access to a world that would be closed to it from the natural point of view. In reality it requires the abdication of our reason, the immolation of our feelings. Is not this annihilating of our personality the greatest danger that we can run as human beings. Pascal nevertheless looks on this danger with an indifferent eye. What do you have to lose, he asks us. Full of his theological ideas ... he does not enter into the mind of man as purely man and his discourse is exclusively addressed to someone who already admits original sin and the fall of man and the whole of this pessimistic philosophy that he has drawn from Christian dogma. But any mind which has only reason as a guide and which believes in the

natural dignity of man and the possibility of happiness cannot fail to consider the argumentation of the wager at once as a logical monstrosity and a moral outrage.<sup>14</sup>

For Lacan this critique misses the point because what is involved for Pascal are not just the narcissistic trappings of human personality that these psychologists think is the essence of man. He reveals a subjective structure that goes well beyond the self or the ego. What Pascal wants us to renounce is our very life. This renunciation is what constitutes our stake in the wager, it involves the core of our being, the o-object which sustains our fundamental phantasy and is the cause of our desire.

### *Irish Catholic subjectivity*

In fact Pascal's wager is of relevance not just to religious people but to others who stake their lives on the uncertain promise of a future that could be.

Should one wager? Pascal's articulation seems to be entirely directed to demonstrate to us that we should wager the good of our life conceived at its most ordinary level, for the uncertainty of a promise, incommensurable to what we might be abandoning. This vague anxiety about a beyond, which is not necessarily a beyond of death is not so far from common consciousness ... In a short and substantial chapter, the author of *Le Dieu Cache*, Monsieur Goldman, does not seem, for his part, to be at all reluctant to make of Pascal's Wager the prelude to the faith in the advent of the proletariat that the Marxist commits himself to.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 2.2.66, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> 2.2.66, p. 4.



This provides an interesting link with the question of Irish Catholic subjectivity raised above. Pascal's wager is of interest to us not just because of the use Lacan or the Marxists make of it but because it could be said to capture what was for many centuries the essence of Irish Catholic subjectivity.

A friend once told me of finding himself sitting next to Jacques Maritain at a meal and he took the opportunity of asking the great philosopher what he thought of the Catholic Church in Ireland: 'Monsieur', he replied, 'it is pure Jansenism'. One of the few virtues of the recently published biography of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid is that it reminds one of just how pervasive the Jansenist spirit was here in the quite recent past. And we have to deal with its consequences with surprising frequency both on the social and the individual level. Sometimes when I try to outline to French colleagues the features of a particular case on which I want some advice I am told 'We just don't have cases like that in France anymore - it sounds like something that could only happen in a country like Ireland.'

The notion that Pascal's wager articulates something about Irish Catholic subjectivity could be tackled from a multitude of angles - including a study of that biography - but let us choose a particularly dramatic illustration. One of Patrick Pearse's best-known poems is called precisely '*Renunciation*' and if it has not been expunged from the curriculum in the name of political correctness it is still known to most Irish children, in its Irish and English forms:

*Fornocht do conach thu,  
O aille na h-aille  
Is do dhallas mo shuil  
Ar eagla go stanfhainn ...*

Naked I saw thee  
O beauty of beauty,  
And I blinded my eyes

For fear I should stare .

Pearse does not talk about an infinity of infinitely happy lives as a reward for this austerity but in another poem he goes close:

O wise men riddle me this: what if the dream come true?  
What if the dream come true? and if millions unborn shall dwell  
In the house I shaped in my heart, the noble house of my thought  
Lord, I have staked my soul, I have staked the lives of my kin  
On the truth of Thy dreadful word. Do not remember my failures,  
But remember this my faith.

Pearse called this poem *The Fool* - echoing Pascal's theme of the *stultitia*, the foolishness of the believer and Lacan's proposition on the wisdom attributed to empires 'The wise men have sat in council and have said this man is a fool'. In politics, too, whether they be Marxist or Irish republicanism, you have to wager. Your knowledge is radically limited and all the most important decisions in life require a leap of faith - modified of course by the rules of gaming and modern games' theory for which Pascal laid the foundations. The code of the gentleman who prefers to opt out of all such vulgar betting on what might be and who relies on his good taste and honesty is not enough: You have to wager. There is no choice. You are already committed.

And this brings us back to the leap of faith that Lacan is calling for from the members of his School. To those of little faith who think it is foolishness to abandon the security of their clinical experience and painfully acquired knowledge in favour of the crazy experiment of the Pass he replies that they are choosing the path of Predestination and good works over that of Grace. Furthermore, if they do accept the way he is opening up there is a new dimension of clinical experience to be discovered that is properly psychoanalytic rather than psychological or psychiatric.

## Clinical implications

### *Critique of the Oedipal clinic*

This notion of a psychoanalytic clinic is one that Lacan has been wrestling with for many years and more particularly in the recent seminars. It involves on the one hand a rejection of ideas that are commonly thought to be fundamental to psychoanalysis and on the other a mobilisation of new categories, some of which appear to be borrowed from contemporary, non-analytic discourses on the human subject.

Briefly, what Lacan offers in the final sessions of this seminar is a restatement and a refocusing of his arguments against an Oedipal clinic and a clearer formulation of how the categories of knowledge, truth and enjoyment can be applied, especially to hysteria and obsessional neurosis. I say 'clearer' but this is a very relative term. If, however, Lacan is much more elusive and enigmatic than some of his popularisers, there must be a reason for that - the logical contradictions and impasses that are warp and woof of the stories our patients bring us and indeed that we experience in our own lives.

The statement of his anti-oedipal position is clear enough. While the early history of the subject remains central in any analytic investigation it is not for the same reasons that are traditionally put forward:

It is not enough to match the interpersonal relations of an adult with the second biography that we take to be original, that of his infantile relations. In it, we take as given the relations of tension established around a certain number of terms that we consider as primal, the father, the mother, the birth of a brother or a little sister. But that, of course, only takes on this sense, only takes on this weight by reason of the place that they hold in my articulation. Like the one I am

articulating for you about knowledge, enjoyment and a certain object in so far as primordially it is around them that there are going to be situated all these primordial relations. In these it is not enough to discover a simple homology by going into the past with someone who comes to tell us about his present day relations. ... This quite often only conceals the question from us, the one we analysts should really question ourselves about. Namely, what determines the infantile biography in this way because its mainspring is quite obviously the way in which there are presented what we call desires in the father, in the mother. These consequently stimulate us to explore not simply the history but the style of presence in which each of these three terms, knowledge, enjoyment and o-object were effectively presented to the subject.<sup>21</sup>

*'These admirable theoreticians...'*

Already in *The Psychoanalytic Act* Lacan had tried to explain that the significance of the Oedipus complex lay in what he called a 'knot of enjoyment' at the origin of all knowledge. At this point issues become complicated and we have to carry along several lines of argumentation at the same time. Perhaps it is best to begin at the beginning, with Freud and his *Project for a Scientific Psychology*:

Freud introduced himself into this field through neurotic patients, subject to all sorts of disturbances who, through their stories, led him into the field of what first appeared to him to be a traumatic experience. But then the question of phantasy was introduced and the problem of what, in a way, welcomed this experience in the apparently traumatised subject. This is the kernel of everything that is at stake in an

<sup>21</sup> 21.5.69, pp. 7-8.

economy for which Freud produced the word libido.<sup>16</sup> ... correlatively to the discovery he was making - guided by these admirable theoreticians that hysterics were, that hysterics are, guided by them he had his experience of what is involved in the unconscious economy - correlatively he wrote this *Entwurf to Fliess*.<sup>17</sup>

What these unlikely theoreticians taught him was that the starting point of the unconscious concatenation was a *proton pseudos*, an absolute lie. In the most classical theory the memory, the knowledge of sexual seduction is repressed because it had been traumatic. What Lacan appears to be saying here is that it is repressed in part because it had been welcomed at the level of phantasy. In the case of the hysteric, this phantasy develops into her desire to take the place of the man. Not just any man but the symbolic father because it is through him that she hopes to reach this point of absolute enjoyment which she situates at infinity. How often in the clinic do we hear hysterical patients who have had a series of disastrous relations with men, beginning with their fathers, nevertheless insist that they cannot live without a man in their lives. In Lacan's cryptic formulation:

What the hysteric, they say, represses, but what in reality she promotes, is this point at infinity of enjoyment as absolute. She promotes castration at the level of the name of the symbolic father in the place of whom she posits herself, or as wanting to be, in the final moment, his enjoyment.<sup>18</sup>

What the hysteric thus taught Freud was the place of enjoyment in the unconscious economy. For her it is an absolute that she will not, cannot compromise on. The appeals and arguments of her entourage for her to

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<sup>16</sup> 26.3.69, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> 26.2.69, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> 21.5.69, pp. 11-12.

be reasonable in her demands fall on deaf ears because, Freud discovered, she is a logician and her interlocutors are trying to get her to abandon what she considers to be a fundamental axiom of her existence. This primacy accorded to enjoyment is what lies behind the earlier formula that the hysteric's desire is to have an unsatisfied desire. She refuses to take herself for a woman. Since she cannot have the absolute she rejects all other modes of enjoyment, and makes of her body an instrument that asks the question why she should be deprived of it. What analytic practice applies itself to unmasking, in the symptom, is this relation to enjoyment, not in so far as it appears at the surface, but in so far as it is excluded.

But if this absolute enjoyment is her goal the person through whom she hopes to obtain the knowledge to reach it is not the man but the woman who knows what is required for the satisfaction of the man's enjoyment. Think of Dora and her passionate desire to learn from her father's mistress. In other words the hysteric does not take herself for a woman but she sets up the woman as the Other, the subject supposed to know something from which she herself is forever excluded. And Lacan offers this challenge:

Read and re-read the observations of hysterics in the light of these terms, and you will see in a completely different way from that of anecdote, the source of what comes to us as an opening, as a gap. It is essential to spot this source from which it arises and which is nothing other than the way in which the neurotic questions again this frontier that nothing can in fact suture, the one that is opened up between knowledge and enjoyment.<sup>19</sup>

### *The obsessional and the master*

The hysteric's model is central to psychoanalytic experience. But so is that of the obsessional. Just as one can say that the hysteric does not

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p. 12.

take herself for a woman but supposes that the woman knows what she wants, in the same way we can say that the obsessional does not take himself for a master but supposes that the master knows what he wants. The constant reference here is to the master/slave dialectic in which the slave chooses life and pleasure over against the master's willingness to risk life and all that goes with it in the fight to the death for pure prestige:

Nothing can be conceived of about the obsessional except by referring to a structure in which, for the master, there is the bringing into play of his own life. The act of mastery consists in this, the risk of life. Somewhere in the first number of *Scilicet*, I highlighted in the miraculous remarks of a child, what I gathered from the mouth of his father, because he had told him that he was someone who tricked life, *un tricheur de vie*. An extraordinary formula, like those that undoubtedly one can only see flowering in the mouths of those for whom no one has yet confused matters. The risk of life is the essential of what one can call the act of mastery.<sup>26</sup>

The father in question, we learn from the omnivorous Roudinesco, is Jacques Derrida, and Lacan's use in public of what Derrida had considered to be a private remark, she holds to be one of the reasons for the distance between the two men. The point in introducing the story here again in this context may well be to indicate that the child was well on the way to becoming an obsessional and that in any case he would rather find a devious way though life than risk it in order to become a master.

The obsessional refuses to take himself as master because, what is important for him, is the relationship of knowledge to enjoyment. And what he knows of this knowledge, is that it contains nothing of the *o*-object. The Other knows but it is a joyless knowledge and the obsessional

<sup>26</sup>18.6.69, pp. 11-12.

gains his enjoyment by an always renewed payment of a debt that can never be absolved. The obsessional pays his debt above all by thinking:

... everyone knows that a whole sector depends on the productivity of the obsessional; even those most blind, most closed to historical reality have glimpsed his contribution to what is called thinking. Is this not also here what expresses its limit, what means it must be thoroughly exorcised? This is the point to which Freud takes the question when he speaks about the relationships of obsessional ritual to religion. Assuredly all religion is not exhausted in these practices. And this indeed is what is anxiety provoking in Pascal's wager. It makes us see that by taking things even at the level of the promise, by proving yourself to be a partisan of the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, and by rejecting the Other, by rejecting him to the point of saying that you do not know whether he is, nor of course much more what he is. It is nevertheless him, at the level of whether he is or not, of odds or evens, that he questions in the wager, because he is caught up, given his epoch, in this questioning of knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Pascal in his wager rejects the Other in favour of the S(0). In this way he is a model for what the obsessional must achieve. He must be freed from the notion that there is a master who knows and finally accept that the master is a fool who knows nothing and that he is left with his own desire as guide in this life and in the next. There is no reason to suppose that we will be any clearer about our reasons for living if and when we reach this state.

<sup>27</sup> 21.5.69, pp. 10-12.



*'After having sifted as much as I could...'*

This brings Lacan to a more general consideration of the relationship of neurotics to knowledge and the way in which they can find a way out of the blind alleys in which they find themselves. The way he puts it is extremely unusual:

I would say that in the final analysis, after having sifted as much as I could the angle from which the obsessional and the hysteric are distinguished, the best formula that I could give is offered in nature, naturally, to resolve the impasse of this law of the Other.<sup>28</sup>

For the man, what is offered at the level of the natural is knowing how to be a master. By this, I presume he means putting one's life on the line and not adopting the obsessional position of paying tribute to an omniscient subject who is supposed to know. This appears to be relatively straightforward at first sight but since it also involves an acceptance of castration there are certainly depths here that remain to be explored.

For the hysteric it is to claim one's position as a woman-subject who is also prepared to risk something essential. See what joy you can extract from the way Lacan formulates this:

Where the master-subject takes on the risk of life, in the inaugural wager of this dialectic, the woman - not the hysteric - risks, wagers this enjoyment that for her is inaugural and existing, and is such that without any of these efforts, of these detours that characterise autoerotism in the man. Not only does she achieve it but it always subsists distinct from and parallel to the enjoyment she gets from

<sup>28</sup> 21.5.69, pp. 10-11.

being the wife of a man, someone satisfied by the enjoyment of the man.<sup>29</sup>

Is the sense that in accepting her destiny as the sexual partner of a man that she risks this 'inaugural' enjoyment that she could preserve by remaining outside the game? Perhaps students of Antoinette Fouque and Julia Kristeva who were in the audience at the time, and were among those who occupied the director's office to protest against Lacan's expulsion from the *Ecole Normale*, may eventually enlighten us on how they understand these mysterious words.

## Conclusion

In the eighteen months or so since we have been engaged with this seminar in our weekly meetings I have often had the impression that we were trying to deal with a sprawling octopus that was in danger of overwhelming us. I have tried to introduce some clarity by separating out the three most coherent tentacles. The struggle has been worth while for me in that it has helped me to see the extraordinary convolutions that preceded the production of one of the cornerstones of the Lacanian edifice - the four discourses, which will be the subject of next year's seminar. But I would caution readers against assuming that this paper is an accurate reflection of this often fascinating but always obscure seminar. In particular the final clinical section attempts to summarise something that remains tantalisingly unclear - but then this is perhaps the sort of teaching that best mobilises the kind of desire to know that should animate an analyst.

Finally, what of the uninspiring title: *From an Other to the other*, which Lacan insists on a number of occasions was chosen with great care. I hope that the clinical considerations with which the seminar concluded have given some hint about what he meant by it. If we wish to live our

<sup>29</sup>18.8.69, pp. 14-15.

lives as they should be lived we should not rely on the foreknowledge supposedly possessed by the God of the philosophers or any other subject of our imagination. Our duty is to seize the day and to wake up to the truth of the poet's:

Earth's the best place for loving  
I don't know where we're likely to do better.

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