

## GEORGE BEST AND THE NAMES OF THE FATHER<sup>1</sup>

Charles Melman

Excuse me for speaking in French, but I think it will be easier on your ears!

When I arrived at Dublin airport, in the taxi the driver asked me 'Did you know that George Best died?' As it happened I did, and during the journey I said to myself: here is a remarkable man who throughout his life tried to be *the best*. It can be said that for him - as I said to myself in the taxi - it was the name of the father that had determined his whole existence, that he had to go too quickly to the end of the journey to reach his home. I know that during his life he deviated from that path a little but finally it caught up with him. So we have every reason to think that our life is only a journeying towards that place where we are going to finally be at rest.

Life is simply a *semblance*, a preface, while we are waiting to finally rejoin the dwelling place of the father. From this point of view time is linear as Cormac was saying this morning, but we know from psychoanalytic experience that our journey is marked by a different rhythm, the rhythm of repetition.

What are we repeating? We regularly repeat the unique failure of our desire every time we are dupes of our desire - since repetition is going to show the failure of that desire. So we already see that time is not linear and that what is really guiding us is an object that is unnamed, that has no name and that we cannot connect up with. Namely, if I am engaged along

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered in French by Dr. Melman and translated phrase by phrase into English by Cormac Gallagher for the benefit of the audience present. We wish to express our gratitude to Denise Brett for working on the French version of this paper alongside her notes taken during the presentation from Cormac Gallagher's English translation, and notes taken by Tom Dalzell. We also thank Cormac Gallagher for his sensitive reading of the English version and for his revisions. Ed.

the path of these repetitions I am a dupe, and I no longer know the meaning or the direction of my life.

If you will allow me, we will approach together some of Lacan's aphorisms in order to try to understand why he invites us to be duped. In other words to accept to be mistaken, misled by this object without a name, this object that we don't know but which directs our desire. I would like to point out to you right away that if because of the mechanism of repetition time is no longer linear, we have an explanation of why Lacan thought the length of the session ought to be variable, because with repetition, subjective time is outstandingly variable. There are moments when one rushes, urgent moments, punctuating moments that introduce into the chain of time a discontinuity which is that of our subjective time.

What Cormac evoked this morning is that each one of us is a depository of knowledge, this unconscious knowledge which precisely organises our *jouissance* or enjoyment, and its repetitions. The question is whether when I teach, and in particular when I am teaching psychoanalysis, does what I am teaching link up with the unconscious knowledge of each individual? Because if what I am teaching does not link up with the unconscious of each individual, people will say that my knowledge and teaching is dogmatic speech from my own perspective, but not talking to those here present in the room.

How can we imagine a teaching that will speak to each one of us at the same time and is it possible? There is only one way to do it - it is to recognise a lack that belongs to each one of us. We must all lack in the same way.

Is that possible? Do women have the same lack as men? For example do people who have one sort of history have the same lack as those with another sort of history? If we direct our probings or our questions towards filiation: can a member of a great Anglo-Saxon nation like North America ask questions in the same way as we do?

I take this opportunity of telling you right away that the divergences that everywhere in the world have marked the history of the psychoanalytic movement ever since Freud are due to the following

premises. The fact is that psychoanalytic thinking does not recognise in itself a unique meaning of the type that the father puts in place or establishes. But it does recognise the singular lack in each individual. So that when Lacan talks to us he is recalling the lack that is common to each of us. We can't be sure of this because Lacan said that for him, the lack is that there is no sexual relationship. But this is not necessarily the lack that everyone experiences. So then it becomes rather difficult for everyone to sympathise with a teaching that is organised around such a lack.

What does he mean when he says there is no sexual relationship? He means that the sexual relationship cannot be written. And what does that mean? It means that the object cause of my desire always belongs to the Real, and in the Real I cannot symbolise it. I may marry a woman - I can, just the way Adam meets Eve - and what do you find in the Old Testament? There was another woman called Lilith, and it was to Lilith that there was attributed the support of desire. Because once the person I love is symbolised and whatever my love for her may be, desire will always and everywhere be brought to bear on an object that belongs to the Real, and that cannot be symbolised.

Why love? Why in the first place, the love of the father and moreover the revolt against the father?

My taxi man asked me if alcoholism was linked to a genetic factor, still *apropos* George Best, and I replied, 'No, it would be lovely or nice if it were a genetic factor'. He asked me if I could perform a surgical operation to cure alcoholism - you see he was very up-to-date - and I said 'no'. 'Were there drugs to treat alcoholism?' I replied - 'no'. So then he asked me 'what must we do, or what can you do?' And I really disappointed him by telling him: 'in that case the alcoholic should go and talk to other alcoholics'. So he immediately understood - Alcoholics Anonymous. And why? Because alcoholism is just one aspect of life and is precisely one of the ways of living the love of the father as unbearable, intolerable, and it is therefore an attempt to realise or produce the enjoyment that he as father has forbidden. Alcoholism is another way of loving the father, but an

intolerable love. Love is what makes the father exist; it is what makes him exist as one.

When Lacan talks about *lalangue* he means it is a literal continuous chain. It is in what he calls the big Other. What is it that cuts up this chain into units, and units that have always the same meaning, namely, that they always refer to the father? What is it that constitutes a family name or a proper name, the one that my father has transmitted to me? It is a sequence of letters that by itself has no meaning but it is a cutting up of letters that makes one, and as you know it is quite possible to write 'Mac' in front of my name or 'O' to recall that filiation by nothing more than a cutting up in a literal chain of a sequence whose principle value is that it makes one.<sup>2</sup>

But if I change a single letter in my name, even one, I would betray my filiation and my father. This to point out in passing the importance of the letter in the determination of meaning. In loving my father, I want him to exist, to be one, and for that reason I accept that my life is a journey that will bring me to him.

The love of, or for, a woman, is a little bit more complicated, because in the Other there is my existence as a subject that does not manage to make itself recognised. No one wants to recognise me as subject. People are interested in my ego, people imagine who I am, certain intentions are attributed to me, but no one will accept to listen to what I try to make understood as subject. It is only a psychoanalyst who listens to what I am trying to make understood as subject. If in the course of my life I meet by chance - Lacan's famous *tuché* - if I meet someone about whom I have the impression that the subject who inhabits this someone is like my own, I begin to give him or her what I do not have, namely, this object which is the cause of my desire, so that to this subject who seems to be like me, I give my love in order to make him or her exist.

Lacan reminds us of a logical formula which does not come from Aristotle and which says 'all men are mortal'. Namely, they know the

---

<sup>2</sup> In the Irish language, 'Mac' and 'Ó' are designators of male filiation. For example, Tomás Mac Eoghain translates as Tomás, the son of John. Ed.

journey, what we share together, what we all have here, is this mortal or fatal destiny and we are not dupes about our passage through life. Our truth is to be mortal. Lacan's formula, even though he never wrote it, is that all men are desiring, in other words that they are all dupes and this dupery is the condition for their lives not to be simply a journey but that allows what is living in them - namely, their unconscious subject - to be recognised.

Let us be modest... The great majority of us are content, happy, glad that this meaning should be shared. Namely, if we all know where we are going, there is nothing more to be said. Everything has already been said, and the polite thing is to say nothing. If I start to say or speak now about what comes from this unknown place, I upset this meaning - the common sense. In other words I upset everyone, and I would be better off getting out of here right away, and that is why Lacan can say that a saying - to say something - is a happening (as Patricia McCarthy was saying this morning). It upsets people, it upsets the commonly accepted meaning. In other words, it cuts up the chain in the big O in a different way, and that is why Lacan writes the names of the father with a different spelling - *les non-dupes errent* - which shows that the same phonematic material, in the same literal chain, can have a different type of arrangement which undoes the commonsense meaning and opens up to a new meaning, an unknown meaning, which is precisely that of desire.

I would like to point out to you again the one difference between Lacan's conception, the absolute difference between the one, the one that puts the *nom du père* in its place, this common sense, the sense of a *Jouissance*, and the letter, the *objet petit a* (the little o object).

When I am treating a patient who comes to see me, there is an immediate problem that emerges. Am I to reintroduce him into common sense or am I to try to get him to recognise what there is in him in terms of a subject animated by desire? Common sense does not give a damn about his desire, his desire becomes a simple duty. What choice should I make? And that is the difference between psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. If I work with my patient as a psychotherapist the only thing I can hope for is

that he will get back into the normality of married life, have a child, earn a living. Do you not agree that this is common sense, common sense at the cost of his desire? He must become a good civil servant. Or can I allow him through psychoanalysis to live as a dupe, a dupe of his desire but to gain access to existence? To no longer live as if he were dead. So you see these are problems that we are all involved in, concerning the choices we make - each can make his own choice.

I will tell you another typical difference between common sense and the *objet petit a*, but all the same I would like to show you today what is at stake in the new treatment and method which is called CBT.

I have colleagues who are respectable and intelligent and who are involved in this technique. What does this technique mean? Because it has a meaning.

These techniques are contemporary and in tune with our contemporary culture, and why is that? Because today we no longer want to understand or hear the unconscious, but we want to directly enjoy it. In our culture today everything that was hidden or repressed, everything that was associated with modesty, shame, or decency, today all of that, which is what makes up the unconscious, in other words everything we have put aside from our consciousness and which belongs to what could be called obscene - off the stage - today we all think we have a full right to a full enjoyment ... all of that.

I don't know how things are here today, but in France for example art has become trash. What has become the overruling philosophy is that each and every one has the right to fully enjoy all those objects that were formerly repressed and set aside. From that moment on my relationship to those objects is no longer organised in terms of conduct (*conduite*) but behaviour (*comportment*).

Conduct is always linked to a moral agency, and that is why certain forms of conduct are human. In other words I can judge behaviour but I can't evaluate it; a behaviour, a way of behaving yourself, is judged on the success or failure of its action without any relationship to any moral agency whatsoever, so a behaviour can be evaluated, you can say it

succeeds or it has not succeeded. Conduct cannot be evaluated in the same way, conduct is complex, but I would point out to you – so that we can become conscious of this fact - what is called cognitive behaviourism considers that a human being is evaluated by the success or failure of his behaviour without any reference to his conduct, namely, a relationship to a moral agency.

I think this is one of the reasons why cognitive behaviourism is so successful, because it frees us from any relationship to a moral agency, namely, a relationship to an agency that allows us to desire, because desire is above all a spiritual operation not an organic operation.

So then since I recalled just now the choices we have to make between psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, I would say in the same way that there is an option that presents itself to each one of us: can a person be reduced to his behaviour or should we consider him in terms of conduct?

And I will finish on this with a rapid remark. It is quite obvious that cognitive behaviourism is led to foreclose the problem of sexual life, namely, that it only treats the human being as cut off or withdrawn from sexual life, but not in terms of being repressed but rather in an operation of foreclosure, and as psychoanalysts we also have to appreciate the consequences of such progress.

I hope I haven't worn you out too much.

*C'est un plaisir de vous voir ici.*

*Address for Correspondence:*

*ALI  
25 rue de Lille  
Paris  
75007  
France*