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Lacan and Derrida in the History of Psychoanalysis(*)

In March 1985, while writing my history of psychoanalysis, I visited Jacques Derrida to discuss his itinerary. After welcoming me warmly, he asked: “How will you discuss the events in which you have participated? Will you use the first person?” Derrida’s question was not easy to answer. I had been involved since 1970 in the structuralist controversy, and therefore knew that as soon as I began to tell the story of that historic period I would be obliged to confront the difficult issue of the first person narration. Until then, I had managed to avoid the first person by restricting myself to the generalized use of the historical present for narration. In advancing a hypothesis, I used the traditional academic we, and I said that I would continue in this way, so as to avoid confusing my personal “ego” with my position as a historian. He then pointed out that for my purposes the use of the first person was necessary. He was right. I realized later that I could not skirt the question of my own participation, and that my much-dreaded use of the first person in no way prevented me from narrating the events as history.

I clearly saw that Derrida wanted to remind me my personal position with respect to his work. At the time of that discussion, it was not easy for me to have a conversation with him. Fifteen years earlier, at a colloquium organized by La Nouvelle Critique that had assembled representatives from several avant-garde periodicals (Tel Quel, Change, Action Poétique), I had severely criticized the Derridian concept of writing. Using vocabulary that was both Marxist and Lacanian, I criticized Derrida’s negation of history, his conception of the unconscious in terms of an archaic myth, and his adherence to a position closer to Jung than to Freud(1). In response to those who sought to integrate the Lacanian reading of Freud with Derrida’s, I asserted that the two were perfectly incompatible. At that time, Derrida had not yet confronted the texts of Lacan, but he responded to my critique stating that I had understood nothing of his thought.

Fifteen years later, I thus found myself in discussion with him, in an attempt to situate his place in the history of psychoanalysis. This implied defining the importance of his reading of Freud, differentiating it from that of Lacan, relating the controversies of the seventies, and, finally, describing how Derrida had actually initiated a current of thought in psychoanalysis. Additionally, there was the question of his personal relationship to Lacan.

In those fifteen years, I had given up “pure” theory and switched to history. Realizing that the controversies of the seventies, as interesting as they were, led inevitably to sterility and dogmatism, I had moved on to history, side-stepping dogmatism, breaking with its impasses, so as to finally understand something of the theoretical events that had led to that dogmatism. Instead of opposing a good reading of Freud (that of Lacan) to a bad one (that of Derrida), as I did in 1970, it was necessary to demonstrate that there is no such thing as a good reading of a text, since every commentary on a text is the history of a deformation. To say that the introduction of Freudianism in France by both medical and intellectual means constitutes a committed historiography does not obviate the need for reflection on the contradiction whereby certain readings of Freud produce truth while others do not. For example, the pioneers of the French psychoanalytic movement, René Laforgue, Marie Bonaparte and Edouard Pichon, played major roles in the introduction of

Freudianism and a certain image of it in France(2), yet none of them managed to become a founder, that is, to initiate a theoretical renewal of Freudianism and to produce a true recasting of doctrine, that, in turn, could yield the foundation of a true theory. Lacan alone occupied this position in France, beginning with the period between the two World Wars. The contemporary history of French Freudianism is initially the history of the evaluation of the Lacanian reading of Freud, even if, within this history, other readings of Freud exist. Lacan's reading produce an effect of truth that every interpreter of Freudian thought in France must take into account. Accounting for Lacan means to be either with him, against him, or without him. Post-war history demonstrates the accuracy of this thesis. From Sartre to Lévi-Strauss, from Foucault to Deleuze, or from Merleau-Ponty to Ricoeur, every examination of Freud includes an implicit or explicit explanation of Lacan's position, be it in the form of an agreement, an incomprehension, a rejection, or even silence. Daniel Lagache, for example, proposed an honest reading of Freud (contemporary to that of Lacan,) but this never produced this truth-effect.

When I discussed Derrida's position in psychoanalysis with him, I realized that he was perfectly conscious of this fact. Even though he considered his examination of Freudian texts has arising from his long-standing concern with Husserl and Heidegger (and not with Jung,) he emphasized that his encounter with a few of Lacan's texts had played an essential role. That concern led him inevitably to an examination of Lacan's work and to an inevitable encounter with Lacan himself. Although Derrida situated himself critically within the history of French structuralism, he nonetheless assumed within the history of Lacanianism the role of the great deconstructor: of dogmatism, of institutions and even of deconstruction.

In 1965, when he published *Of Grammatology*(3), Derrida had only a cursory familiarity with Lacan's texts. He had read the famous "Seminar on the Purloined Letter" and "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" several times. However, Lacan's articles had not yet been compiled as a book, and Derrida had not yet engaged himself in dispute with regard to Lacan's position. He developed a personal reading of Freud that might be summarized as follows:

Derrida employs the term *grammatology* (borrowed from Littré and designating a treatise that deals with letters, the alphabet, syllabication, reading, and writing) to define a possible development of a "science of the letter," about which Western logos, since Plato, had repressed the truth by according primacy to a mysticism of the full word [la parole pleine] and to phonetic writing. There exists a logocentrism in the form of the "debasement" of writing, which, until Saussurian linguistics, served to mask the presence of the letter. As a result, Derrida proposes the substitution of semiology with *grammatology* in Saussure's *Course on General Linguistics*, thus liberating of the semiological project from the realm of a linguistics grounded in the logos or phonologism.

In the history of French structuralism this constituted the first philosophical challenge to the use of linguistics in the so-called (in France) "human sciences": "When I discussed Saussure or Lacan," Derrida emphasized, "my criticism was aimed less at their texts themselves than at the role their texts played on the French intellectual scene." His criticisms took linguistics as its point of departure because he had made Saussure's discovery the starting point for his rejection of phonologism. There was therefore no true discontinuity between his statements and a discourse based on the reference to Saussure. Nonetheless, the lack of discontinuity did not prevent a reversal of the issues within the heart of a consensus, namely that the subject is governed by the laws of a structure, whether of signifier, letter or symbol. The Derridian project attacked Lévi-Straussian ethnology because of its attachment to a Rousseauian conception of the origins of language. According to Rousseau, language derives from the cry or the spoken word. But Derrida also implicitly criticizes—in a note—the Lacanian reading of Freud and its adhesion to a primacy of the signifier, which is experienced as the "telos of the full word," thereby implicitly challenging Lacan's reading of Saussurian linguistics. In the second section of his book, he discusses at length the work of Lévi-Strauss (whom he criticizes for his ethnocentrism, which he assimilates with phonocentrism), as he had done two years earlier with Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*(4) (whom he criticizes for a too restrictive—or

even too rationalist—interpretation of the Cartesian cogito.) With regard to Lacan, Derrida is silent.

A year after the publication of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida presented a paper, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” to the Psychoanalytical Society of Paris.⁽⁵⁾ Instead of interpreting the unconscious in terms of the category of the signifier, Derrida here relied on the notion of clearing [frayage] to conceptualize the conscious/ unconscious opposition in terms of *différance* and of the erased *architrace*. In 1895, in his “Project for a Scientific Psychology”⁽⁶⁾ Freud employs the word clearing to designate the place of passage between one neuron and another when excitation succeeds in diminishing resistance—clearing to the extent that excitation prefers the cleared path to a different one. Thirty years later, in an amusing article, Freud becomes interested in a little invention that anticipates the computer era—the magic slate [Wunderblock], consisting of a thin wax-covered board bound on one edge to, and covered by, a sheet of celluloid, on whose surface one can inscribe and later erase signs. The slate preserves an invisible trace, while also maintaining the pristine virginity of the writing surface. Freud compares this magic slate with the psychic apparatus, which both receives traces without saving them and saves them while at the same time erasing them. The sheet of celluloid represents the preconscious system and the wax-covered board, the unconscious system.

Starting from the notions of clearing and the Wunderblock, Derrida demonstrated that the structure of the psychic apparatus could be represented as a writing machine, a metaphor which might explain the general notion of the trace. Consequently, the unconscious is a matter of hieroglyphic (nonverbal and nonlinguistic) writing that, through the concept of difference (or *différence*,) restores an *architrace* anterior to the spoken word but whose historical origin has been erased. “Psychoanalysis sees itself called to collaborate not with a linguistics dominated by the phonologism of the past but rather with a graphematics [graphématique] of the future.” Here Derrida’s thought radically differs from Lacan’s, who recognizes no difference between a “phonological” signifier and an “archaic” letter. For Lacan, the trace is always already linguistic: the distinction between language and speech [langue/ parole] is grounded in the notion of the division of the subject.

Compared to the orthodox renewal inaugurated by Lacan, and to Althusser’s “symptomatic reading”, Derrida’s thought is defined as a discourse of deconstruction—of philosophy in general and of Freudian theory in particular—wherein to discover the traces of, as well as the dangers created by, a supposed phonologism or logocentrism. The deconstructive reading seeks to displace the philosophical discourse towards the literary text, even if this implies obliterating the boundary between them. It pleads for a recognition of the duplicity, ambiguity and dissemination of meaning, in order to counter the imperialism of the “supreme” commentary. It takes shape as part of an examination of the thought of Husserl and Heidegger, posing for philosophy the question of literature and, more generally, of writing. Consequently, to conceive of the Freudian unconscious in terms of a mythography makes it possible to acknowledge a philosophy of the trace without a subject, or of writing without consciousness.

The first encounter between Lacan and Derrida took place not in France but in the United States, at a famous symposium held in Baltimore in October 1966, which, under the auspices of the Center for the Humanities at Johns Hopkins University, assembled some of the most prestigious French and American academics in the fields of the human sciences and of the interpretation of literary texts⁽⁷⁾.

Derrida’s America was not Lacan’s imagined one. The young philosopher had neither to revenge the past, nor reconquest a hostile continent. As he boarded the airplane with Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, and Nicolas Ruwet, he felt a reaction to the vaccines but neither solitude, nor rejection. He understood English and was not afraid to travel. For him, the invitation was a tribute to his thought, in full flower at the time. Upon his arrival, he was very surprised to learn from René Girard that Lacan had requested a deluxe hotel room for him. Exhausted from jet lag, he set down his bags and heard the old master say: “So, I had to come all the way here to finally meet you!” At dinner the next day, Derrida raised questions close to his heart, about the Cartesian subject, substance, and the signifier. While eating coleslaw, Lacan replied that his subject was the same as the one proposed by his interlocutor as an alternative to the theory of the subject. In itself, the remark was not false, but Lacan hastened to add: “You can’t bear the fact that I have already said

what you want to say.” Derrida responded without missing a beat: “That is not my problem.” So Lacan got nowhere. Later that evening, he approached the philosopher, putting a friendly hand on his shoulder: “Ah! Derrida, we have to talk, we have to talk!” But they were never to talk...(8)

A year later, at a dinner in Paris at Jean Piel’s home, Lacan took warmly Derrida’s hand in his smooth palms and asked what he was working on. Plato, Socrates, the pharmakon, the letter, the concepts of origin, logos, mythos: the philosopher was preparing a text for the journal *Tel Quel*. Under the talented leadership of Philippe Sollers, this journal had begun to include important topics of the older structuralism together with revisions in the light of “textuality.” When *Of Grammatology* was being published, Derrida had joined the editorial board of the journal *Critique*. And since the publication of his *Ecrits*, Lacan has become director of a collection at the publisher Seuil. Once again, he mentioned how strange it was that he had already discussed the same topics as those preoccupying Derrida. One need only ask his students. To avoid a debate, Derrida told the psychoanalyst the following anecdote. One evening, as his son Pierre was falling asleep in the presence of his mother, he asked his father why he was looking at him:

“Because you are handsome.”

The child reacted immediately by saying that the compliment made him want to die. A little uneasy, Derrida tried to find out what he meant:

“I don’t like myself,” the child said.

“Since when?”

“Since I learned to talk.”

Marguerite took him in her arms:

“Don’t worry. We love you.”

At which point Pierre burst out laughing:

“No, it’s not true at all. I am a born cheater for life.”(9)

Lacan said nothing. Sometime later, Derrida was stupefied to find the anecdote penned by his interlocutor in a lecture given at the French Institute in Naples in December 1967.(10) Lacan told the story like this: “‘I am a born cheater for life,’ said a four-year old boy while curling up in the arms of his genitrix in the presence of his father, who had just answered ‘You are handsome’ to his question ‘Why are you looking at me?’ And the father didn’t recognize (even when the child in the interim pretended to have lost all taste for himself the day he learned to speak) the obstacle that he himself was foisting on the Other by playing dead. It’s up to the father, who told it to me, to hear me from where I speak or not.”

After this second meeting, relations between Derrida and Lacan were never cordial. To say the least. Lacan always tended to believe that Derrida was “conspiring” against him, or was stealing his ideas. Nonetheless, in March 1969, when he was undeservedly expelled from the *Ecole Normale supérieure* where he had held his seminar for five years, Derrida, along with Althusser, intervened on his behalf. But even that did not prevent Lacan from being suspicious of him.

A year later, the colloquium mentioned earlier took place at the Cluny abbey, where, under the aegis of the journal *La Nouvelle Critique*, representatives from the principal avant-garde literary reviews were present. As a result of this colloquium Derrida, in a long interview published by the review *Promesse*(11), expressed himself publicly concerning Lacan’s texts. His criticisms of Lacan’s reading of Freud resembled his previous critiques of Foucault and Lévi-Strauss. Notably, he criticized the adhesion to a telos of the full word identified with the truth, as well as the massive recourse to Hegelian concepts and an overly heavy reliance on the authority of Saussure. In passing, he confirmed that he had done everything in his power to prevent the cancellation of Lacan’s seminars at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*.

Six months after this interview, during a lecture at Johns Hopkins, Jacques Derrida again took on the work of Lacan, this time focusing on the “Seminar on the Purloined Letter.” He published his presentation in France, in 1975, under the title “Le facteur de la vérité” (“The Purveyor of Truth”).(12) Faced with this

important seminar that introduces Lacan's *Ecrits* and characterizes the very essence of his mature thought, Derrida assumed the role of a virtuoso Benedictine: his textual analysis of Lacanian writing and subsequent criticism were a tribute, not to the doctrine of a master (which was the object of severe philosophical critique,) but rather to his particular way of interpreting the story in order to situate himself in history. Derrida notes that Lacan uses literature to illustrate the truth of his doctrine, that is, a truth outside of the literary text and, in so doing, he engages in applied psychoanalysis, although he had always condemned this practice. Derrida also emphasizes Lacan's familiarity with Marie Bonaparte's commentary on Poe's short story and, although appearing to break with her by calling her a "cook"[une cuisinière], and not naming her, he in fact relies on her reading.

Bonaparte was the first to note that the letter stolen by the Minister was slipped into a card-rack which hung dangling "from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantel-piece." The princess' reading rectifies Baudelaire's text that translates "beneath" as "above" and suggests that the letter be seen as a symbol of the maternal penis suspended above a cesspool represented by the hearth of the fireplace. "There," says Lacan, "where the signifier of the signifiers is lacking at its place." Derrida's comparison of the two commentaries situates the position Lacan wants to occupy in relation to Freud, as opposed to Marie Bonaparte's. For Lacan–Derrida says–the princess resembles the Minister in Poe's story: she was the French legatee of Freudian authority, and thus she distorted his teachings and concealed his letter, whereas Lacan considers himself the representative of the true or "orthodox doctrine." He identifies with Dupin: "With the explosion of passion of which we have noticed the signs," Derrida writes, "he wants to recoup the direction, rectify, redress, replace in the correct path, all pending matters," that is, the analytic community insofar as it is organized like a "general delivery, maintaining the seals on the menacing power of an inheritance." (13)

Derrida might have added, though he did not, that Lacan had the illusion, ten years after the publication of this famous seminar, that he could prevent his own doctrine from becoming subject to deviations. The master might consider himself the sole keeper of the "good" Freudian truth, but his writings could not be safeguarded from deforming alterations. At the end of the short story, the chevalier Auguste Dupin tells the narrator how he played an evil trick on the Minister. In the place of the letter that had been recovered and returned to the Queen, he substituted one on which he had copied in his own hand a tirade taken from *Atrée* by Crébillon père: "(...) a plan [dessein] so deadly, even if not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes." The Minister, knowing Dupin's handwriting, will recognize the author of the changeling letter. The chevalier thus signs his act, adding his mark to his "dessein." In short, he traces a name on the resolution of the enigma. Derrida notices that two out of the three times Lacan uses the word, he writes "destiny" [destin] rather than "plan" [dessein]. It is probably only a misprint: in the first version published in the journal *La Psychanalyse*, there is one *dessein* and one *destin*. This error then passed into the *Ecrits*. But in the version given orally by Lacan and transcribed two years after the publication of "Le facteur de la vérité", Jacques-Alain Miller writes *dessein* and not *destin*. In that lecture, Lacan evoked the quotation from Crébillon only once. In his argument that Lacan "forces *dessein* into *destin* two out of the three times," Derrida relies on the preface to the pocketbook edition of the *Ecrits*, in which the author refers to the purloined letter and speaks of "such a disastrous destiny [destin]," thus effecting a change that cannot be seen as a misprint. Derrida deduces that Lacan transforms Poe's short story in order to attribute to it a truth that is, in fact, external to it: that a letter always reaches its destination. In other words, he demonstrates that within the very writing of Lacan a fictional operation is carried out by which the author refers the indivisibility of the letter to himself, that is, to the "whole" or the "one" of his doctrine.

One sees here how the procedure of deconstruction works. Derrida reveals rifts and displacements within the text itself, and, above all, accents the essential point of Lacan's thought that would become decisive for the continuation of Lacan's own story, and concerns the destiny of the totality of the seminar: is it a question of a "whole", a "not-whole," an inheritance, a letter that has already reached its destination, a "fleeting" word, or an integral transmission? In 1975, Derrida's article was not commented on by any Lacanians. However, two years later the debate was revived, within the framework of the journal *Confrontation*, following the publication of Fran?is Roustang's *Un destin si funeste* (14). In the same year, it was the reference point for a discussion concerning psychoanalysis and literature at Yale University.

In this period then, Derrida participated in the history of psychoanalysis no longer as a simple reader of Freud or Lacan, but with a critical position that demonstrated the impasses of a certain way of thinking. He played the role of the great deconstructor in his critique of Lacanian dogmatism, although he has demonstrated this dogmatism with reference to a not dogmatic text of Lacan (“The Seminar on the Purloined Letter”); this does not mean that in 1975 there was no blossoming of a Lacanian dogmatism. With the logicist turn of 1970, when he introduced the mathème—that actualized the idea of the possibility of the integral transmission of knowledge—Lacan, in fact, wanted to affirm that his reading of Freud alone possessed the whole Freudian truth. I have discussed this dogmatism more fully in another work.(15)

Having deconstructed the Lacanian text and demonstrated its possible dogmatism, Derrida could not avoid the role of leader of a school within the history of psychoanalysis. Although a somewhat odd leader, since he had neither troops nor a school in the institutional sense of the term. In fact, his role in philosophy as the great deconstructor of structuralism (and thus of the Lacanian reading of Freud) led him to occupy a political position as midwife of dissidence, around 1975, when a generalized explosion occurred in all the French psychoanalytic groups (Lacanian and non-Lacanian.) This explosion was provoked by the events of May 1968, which induced large protest movements within a psychoanalytic community either frozen in rigid bureaucracy (as was the case of the IPA) or permeated by dogmatism (in the case of EFP(16)). By becoming a midwife of dissidence, Derrida introduced his theses about deconstruction into the psychoanalytic politics. He criticized the notion of a whole not in order to offer another whole to oppose it, but to activate the margins, the borders, the unspoken, or even the unspeakable. He proposed, in short, a sort of culturalism of minorities (women, the insane, the excluded, dissidents) in opposition to a universalism that had become “totalitarian.” There was a logic in this position, since Derrida (like Deleuze or Foucault, but using other means) attacked first and foremost the primacy and imperialism of the signifier, and thus the very idea of a universal symbolic register.

But if the philosophical deconstruction was to give birth to a political discourse, a specific historical context was also necessary, a context not present within the Lacanian community, but on its “margins”. In effect, the breakdown of the Psychoanalytical Society of Paris (SPP), the most bureaucratic of IPA groups, allowed the development of a Derridian current within psychoanalysis. This development occurred because Derrida’s thought encountered that of a philosopher and psychoanalyst, who initiated a reading of Freud that had nothing to do with Lacan’s.

In 1959, at a *Décade de Cerisy*, Derrida encountered Nicolas Abraham, philosopher of Hungarian descent, a member of the SPP (Psychoanalytic Society of Paris), with whom he was to become the greatest of friends. The two shared an interest in Husserlian philosophy, literature, and a certain critical assessment of structuralism, but were also united by their marginal position with respect to the dominant philosophical discourse, and an almost identical syntax. Both conceived a reading of texts from the point of view of the production of a signifier viewed as exploded, polymorphous, and composed of equivocation and ambiguities. While Derrida took on the structuralist renewal and the work of Lacan, Abraham elaborated a distinctive reading of the Freudian discovery formulated in terms of a few key concepts:

transphenomenology, the symbol, anasemy, incorporation, the peel, the pit, and the ghost. Beginning with the notions of traumatism, borrowed from Ferenczi, and introjection, Abraham deduced a typology of original symbols that he called a transphenomenology. He reactualized from a language perspective what Ferenczi isolates from a biological one. Traumatism is pre-verbal, and the scene of this traumatism is “encrypted” as a symbolic signification which psychoanalysis must “decipher” without reducing it to a simple meaning. It must therefore undertake a traversing of appearances in order to reach the “antisemanticism” of the unconscious pit.

In 1968, in an article on *The Language of Psychoanalysis*(17), Abraham clarified his thought(18). By wrenching words from their usual meaning, Freud was engaged in a return to the source of a de-nomination.

According to Abraham, this exegetic enterprise should be read as the production of an “anasemic” discourse in which meaning disappears in the course of being reduced to the pit of its contradictions and lacunae. In this perspective, no renewal of Freudianism is possible, because any recasting confronts the ascension towards original anasemy from which the discovery of the unconscious proceeds. In *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word* [Le verbiere de l’ homme aux loups](19), Abraham and his partner Maria Torok defined the idea of anasemy more precisely by adding a new topography to the Freudian corpus. Abraham gives the name of peel [écorce] to the agency defined by Freud in the second topographical model as the ego. This agency must battle on two fronts: with the external world and with the internal drives. But the topography of the subject also contains the crypt, which functions within the divided ego like the eruption of a false unconscious filled with ghosts, fossilized words, the living dead, and foreign bodies. The introduction of this new topography allowed Abraham and Torok to engage in a fabulous exercise of cryptonymy with regard to the case of the Wolf Man.

In 1971, a marvelous book published in New York under the charge of Muriel Gardiner, *The Wolf Man by the Wolf Man*(20), describes the psychoanalytic itinerary of Sergei Constantinovitch Pankejeff, the Wolf Man, analyzed by Freud and subsequently by Ruth Mack-Brunswick, and followed up by Muriel Gardiner. This story is unique in the annals of psychoanalytic literature, since Pankejeff is the only one of Freud’s five famous patients to have written his memoirs and discussed his analysis after the fact. In this sense he fully assumed the role that the Freudian saga had attributed to him. His story is so fascinating that it has always been discussed with passion in psychoanalytic literature. In France, Lacan advanced his concept of foreclusion [forclusion] in the context of his discussion of Freud’s commentary to Pankejeff’s treatment; with reference to the same case, Deleuze and Guattari contrast the multiplicity of desire/ desiring to the univocity of the Oedipus complex.

But Abraham and Torok were the first in France to study Wolf Man’s complete story: from Freud’s couch to Muriel Gardiner’s record of her continuous contact with him over thirty years. They highlight the inherent polyglottism in the patient’s itinerary: Russian as his native language, German as the language of treatment, and English as the language of the nursemaid who raised the patient, to which they add a fourth language, French, which allows for the translation of the labyrinthine communications between the three preceding languages. By means of this fourth language, they construct the crypt of the Wolf-Man through a return to anasemy: the crypt is buried in the divided ego and encoded like a network of signifiers intertwined with each other in a series of delirious incorporations. *The Wolf-Man’s Magic Word* was published a year after the premature Abraham’s death, with a long foreword by Derrida. The semi-posthumous character of the work adds a kind of strangeness to the theory of the crypt, as if the book had exhumed a secret mythology of the psychoanalytic community, and of which the Wolf-Man had been the living symbol and the first ghost. Derrida’s foreword heightens yet further the mystery, since it was written with a syntax almost identical to that of the text it comments: a fifth language in osmosis with the others.

The work was extraordinarily successful, particularly among certain Lacanians fascinated by this baroque crypt so close and yet so far from their daily verbarium. Lacan himself was astonished. He felt attacked, as if others were entering a territory that he had appropriated for himself, and therefore proceeded to misinterpret the thought of the authors of the book and the foreword. In his seminar he discussed the work, but, forgetting that Abraham had died a year earlier, suggested that Derrida should be in analysis with the two authors since he brings them together. A few idiots in the audience exploded in laughter. Lacan’s comment increased the book’s sales but it was withdrawn from publication in the Lacanian journal *Ornicar*, where Lacan once again presented himself as the owner of public ideas: “One thing surprises me even more than the diffusion (...) of what are called my teachings or my ideas, in this thing that goes under the name of the Institute for Psychoanalysis and which represents the other extreme among analytic groups. What surprises me even more is that the man called Jacques Derrida wrote a fervent and enthusiastic preface to the book (...). Despite the fact that I started things in this direction, I do not, I must say, find either the book or the preface to be of a very high tone. As delirium, it goes a long way. And I am frightened to think that I am more or less responsible for having opened the locks.”(21) Lacan might well be terrified: Abraham and Torok’s text is delusional, and instead of producing an understanding of the Wolf Man case it functions as theater,

miming the madness of the Wolf Man. This, in turn, produces an ambiguity as to who is doing the talking.

So Abraham was posthumously accused of being delusional by Lacan, but while alive he was similarly accused by members of SPP to which he belonged, and whose Educational Commission had refused him the title of adherent member. Following conflicts of extreme virulence, which were partially related to the Abraham affair, a dissident movement Confrontation(s) (initially in the plural, then in the singular) was created within the SPP. Founded by a friend of Abraham, René Major, its goal was to open the doors of the IPA fortress to theoreticians of all persuasions, psychoanalysts and others. But Confrontation rapidly became a forum for Lacan's colleagues who had been separated by scission and who, in 1975, were suffocating in their respective split-off associations. Confrontation was thus neither a group, nor an association or a school, but an open forum where representatives of various "Freudianisms" could speak of their dramas, conflicts, and work without worry scissions. This free-breathing space functioned at first inside the SPP and was frequented by members of the AFP (Association Française de Psychanalyse); but, starting in 1976, it received a flood of Lacanians disconcerted by the *mathème* and disappointed by the new Lacanian-Millerian orientation. There they became acquainted with their past and learned not to consider as "traitors" the generations who had previously left the master. Feeling the new breeze, they discovered the saga of the golden age, Atlantis arisen from the bureaucratic sands and the heroes of the past were relieved of the rags of official history. My project to revive this past took shape in Confrontation. For the members of the SPP, the itinerary was the same: they too learned to stop misjudging their Lacanian neighbor. There, through the encounter between SPP dissidents and the thesis of deconstruction, a true Derridian school of psychoanalysis was created in France, as if the path opened up ten years earlier by Of Grammatology could be continued in a space conformed to its doctrine of margins, borders, contours, and dissemination. The creation of this movement did not take place in the abstract realm of theory alone, but in affective relations, whereby individuals of skin and bone met and wove bonds of friendship. That is how the idea of deconstruction came to be anchored in a dissident political field called Confrontation, thanks to the friendly complicity between two people: René Major and Jacques Derrida. If Derrida was the "midwife of dissidence" in the contemporary history of Freudianism, René Major was the messenger. Evidence of this is the symposium that, from 1977 to 1982, assembled participants in the experience of Confrontation.

It is impossible to forget that strange two-voiced monologue in which a philosopher exchanged imaginary letters between France and America, by means of an interposed go-between, and in the ever more secret language of that famous "Seminar on the Purloined Letter" that was at the origin of his love for a master of the word named Lacan! As concerns the messenger, many of us still remember how magnificently he played his role. Every experience in Confrontation turned into an infinite exploration of the constantly recurring and unfinished saga of the purloined letter in quest of an addressee. It is in the language of the purloined letter that the double deconstruction of Lacan's dogmatism and IPA bureaucracy was slowly effectuated there, a deconstruction which led to the current decomposition of the French psychoanalytic movement. Lacan was not mistaken when he raged against his forum, and neither was Jacques-Alain Miller when he thanked Major for his participation in the collapse of the Freudian School of Paris (EFP).

The language of the purloined letter served on several occasions to retell the secret history of the psychoanalytic movement(22). With this language Major, after the death of Abraham, wrote a coded text, "La lettre sous le manteau"(23), which recounts the principal conflict within the SPP, borrowing the styles of Poe, the Wolf Man, Lacan's seminar, and "The Purveyor of Truth." With this language Derrida, in 1977, defined Confrontation's effect as a lifting of prohibitions; and finally, in this language he entered into battle with an emissary of Lacan who had criticized Roustang's book, *Un destin si funeste*(24). The emissary (Charles Melman), following a homophony with his name, is put in the role of a mailman [facteur], who does not acknowledge Lacan's slip about *dessein* and *destin* in the seminar, but considers it a simple misprint. The emissary is accused of being a mailman, a purveyor, etc... And Derrida concludes by discussing an American rumor according to which he, Derrida, had become the analyst of Rudolph Loewenstein. Thus, after having been sent by Lacan to Abraham's couch, rumor puts him in a curious armchair: that of the analyst of Lacan's analyst, a legendary "architracé" of the French psychoanalytic movement. Seen from America, the structuralism of the sixties had foundered into delirium. Seen from

France, it had become the disastrous destiny of a Lacanianism reduced to wordplay and a secret language.

Returning now to the first person, I would like to say how important were Derrida's role as deconstructor and René Major's role as founder of Confrontation for the genesis of the history of French psychoanalysis. It is no coincidence that I conceived the idea to write the history in that forum of dissidence and madness, where, in the language of the purloined letter, the history of the end of French Freudianism and of the slow decomposition of its institutions, a history that was still secret at the time, began to be expressed. If the adventure of this deconstruction is today at an end, and if the respective roles of Lacan and Derrida are now part of a history that is no longer secret but written, there is, nonetheless, an epilogue to this history that I may one day have the occasion to write. This epilogue was inscribed in the history of psychoanalysis during the colloquium organized by René Major in May 1990 on the topic "Lacan with the Philosophers"(25), and within the framework of the International College of Philosophy, an institution which resembles Confrontation, since it was created in the same spirit of dissidence with traditional university institutions.

At this colloquium, for the first time in twenty years, a theoretical discourse emerged with regard to Lacan that side-stepped the dogma of the psychoanalytic societies, indicating the possibility of a philosophical approach to Lacanianism outside of official Freudianism. At this colloquium the grand scene of the Confrontation symposium was replayed nostalgically. In a dazzling presentation Derrida told the story of his love for Lacan and added an unpublished commentary(26). He thus commented on the story that he had transmitted to me five years earlier in the form of a subjective testimony without ever having recourse to the famous secret language of the purloined letter. Because the story was now finished, it was no longer necessary to inscribe it, as it once had been, in the context of an exchange, or to use a messenger. The letter was intended for a master who was still disappointing and tortured by demons and the threat of the theft of his ideas. And suddenly the Derrida's commentary concerning the relations between him and Lacan was no longer made in the spirit of deconstruction but rather in the more simple and direct style of a reconstruction of an event for memory.

So not only has the history of the purloined letter and of its undiscoverable addressee ended definitively, but also any possibility of replaying the scene of that history as anything other than mime.

Translation from the French by Richard Hyland. Reviewed by *Amy Cohen*.

Notes:

* Lecture held October 15, 1990, at Columbia University in New York. Copyright 1990 by Elisabeth Roudinesco. All rights reserved.

- 1) Elisabeth Roudinesco, "Inconscient et archaïcité" in *Un discours au réel* (Paris: Mame, 1973.)
- 2) Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ramsay 1982; and Paris: Seuil, 1986;) Eng.trans. Jacques Lacan and Co., translated by Jeffrey Mehlman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.)
- 3) Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976.)
- 4) Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Plume, 1971.)
- 5) Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.)
- 6) S.E., vol. 1, p. 295ff.
- 7) Cf. R. Macksey and E. Donato ed., *The Structuralist Controversy: The Language of Criticism and the*

Sciences of Man (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970.)

8) Cf. Elisabeth Roudinesco, Jacques Lacan and Co., cit. supra n.2, p. 410.

9) Ibid., p. 411.

10) Jacques Lacan, "La méprise du sujet supposé savoir," *Scilicet* 1, 1968, p. 35.

11) Reprinted in Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.)

12) Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth" in *Yale French Studies*, n. 52, 1975; reprinted in *The Post-Card, from Socrates to Freud and beyond*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago, London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 411-496.

13) See Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on The Purloined Letter," translated by Jeffrey Mehlman, in *The Purloined Poe*, John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.)

14) Roustang,

15) Elisabeth Roudinesco, Jacques Lacan. *Esquisse d' une vie, histoire d' un système de pensée* (Paris: Fayard, 1993.) See also: Elisabeth Roudinesco, Jacques Lacan & Co., cit. supra n. 2.

16) Ecole Freudienne de Paris.

17) Jean Laplanche, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, translated by D. Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973.)

18) Cf. Nicolas Abraham, *L' Ecorce et le Noyau* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1978.)

19) Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, with foreword by Jacques Derrida (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.)

20) (Basic Books, 1971.)

21) Jacques Lacan, *Ornicar*, n. 14, 1978, pp. 8-9.

22) See my Jacques Lacan and Co., cit. supra n. 2, for a complete account of this "secret history."

23) René Major, *L' agonie du jour* (Paris: Aubier, 1979.)

24) Cit. supra n. 14.

25) *Lacan avec les philosophes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991.) See also René Major, *Lacan avec Derrida* (Paris: Mentha, 1991.)

26) See "For the Love of Lacan", published here, pp.