
THE WORKS OF
JACQUES LACAN

An Introduction

by
BICE BENVENUTO
and
ROGER KENNEDY

*... an association in which the free development of each
is the condition of the free development of all'*

FA^B

Free Association Books/London/1986

CONTENTS

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| | Key to Abbreviations | 8 |
| | Introduction | 9 |
| I | 1 First Works (1926-33) | 31 |
| | 2 'The Mirror Stage' (1936) | 47 |
| | 3 'Beyond the Reality Principle' (1936) | 63 |
| II | 4 The Rome Discourse (1953) | 77 |
| | 5 'The Purloined Letter' (1956) | 91 |
| | 6 'The Instance of the Letter' (1957) | 103 |
| | 7 The Oedipus Complex | 126 |
| | 8 Psychosis | 142 |
| III | 9 'The Subversion of the Subject' (1960) | 165 |
| | 10 <i>Encore</i> (1972-3) | 183 |
| | 11 Summary and Recent Developments | 196 |
| | <i>Appendix 1</i> Relevant Linguistic Concepts | 217 |
| | <i>Appendix 2</i> Brief Biography of Jacques Lacan | 223 |
| | Bibliography | 225 |
| | Index | 231 |

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTE ON ECRITS

- SE Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, in 24 volumes, London, the Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74.
- E Quotations from English translations of Lacan's *Ecrits*, by Alan Sheridan, London, Tavistock Publications, 1977.
- E* Our modifications of Sheridan's translations, for which we alone are responsible.
- e Our translations direct from the French of Lacan's *Ecrits*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1966. No other English translation yet available.
- Ecrits (1966)** French edition of Lacan's essays.
- Ecrits (1977)** English translation of Lacan's essays by Alan Sheridan.

INTRODUCTION

THE AIM of this book is to give a clear introduction to the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. We present a historical exposition of his main ideas, following as far as possible their evolution and development. We think that this method of presentation will help the reader to follow Lacan's complex and elaborate thought more easily. We have begun with his doctoral thesis (1932) and have ended our exposition with one of his last major works, his seminar *Encore* (1972-3).

The task of writing an introduction to Lacan's work is far from easy. One should perhaps try to find a language and style that are both reasonably faithful to Lacan's thought, yet also English, and not some hybrid of French and English. We have not tried to imitate Lacan's unique French style, and although at times we have had to compromise on special terms and devise new, sometimes bizarre English equivalents, we do not offer these translations as final at all, and we are well aware of their limitations. Of course, we could also be criticized for castrating Lacan, and it may be said that the expression of his ideas without his style is like spaghetti without its sauce. There is obviously some truth in this assertion, and so in chapters 9 and 10 we have tried to use a rather more complex style, which attempts to capture some of the flavour of the original French. We have attempted this only after discussing Lacan's earlier ideas in ordinary English.

Where possible we have tried to put his ideas in a cultural and intellectual context. However, our main concern has been to present his ideas from a psychoanalytic perspective. We are aware of the limitations that this places on the book, but we think that a full consideration of the issues raised by Lacan's ideas for other disciplines is beyond our brief.

The first problem one encounters before making any assessment of Lacan as a psychoanalyst or as a general thinker is that of style. Lacan's work is divided into essays, most of which are in the collection *Ecrits* (1966), and seminars. The latter, which began in 1953 as a weekly meeting attended by, among others, analysts, linguists, philosophers and students, became the centre of his teaching after he broke with the French, and then later the international, psychoanalytic establishment. The style of the seminars is actually generally clear and fairly easy to follow, although it would be more true to describe them as lectures as there are only occasional interventions from the floor. The style of the essays, however, is far from easy to follow, and it is this fact that has invited considerable criticism both from within and from outside psychoanalytic circles. If one looks carefully, however, it can be seen that the prose style is not arbitrary. Whether or not one sympathizes with it, it has a purpose, which is intimately linked to Lacan's avowed intent – to re-interpret the work of Freud.

The so-called 'return to Freud' is at the heart of Lacan's work. Yet of course, most psychoanalysts consider that they are in some way or another returning to Freud, and it is uncommon to find a psychoanalytic paper without some reference to Freud. Each school of psychoanalysis considers that it has the correct interpretation of Freud's work. Indeed, for several years the British Institute of Psychoanalysis was deeply divided over Melanie Klein's re-interpretation of Freudian theory and practice, and it is only relatively recently that a truce has been called between Kleinians and Non-Kleinians. Thus the notion of a 'return' in

itself is merely a slogan, and its basis needs to be examined. In order to do this, it helps to look at the history of psychoanalysis.

In Lacan's view, the innovative core of Freud's work belongs to the period that led up to the writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and continued to the papers on metapsychology, around 1915. During this period Freud laid out the detailed workings of the unconscious, with an excitement and intensity that do indeed seem relatively lacking in the later work. One can see this especially in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which Freud considered the key to his discoveries, but also in the books that immediately followed – *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. It was in them that the basic terms of psychoanalytic experience – the unconscious and sexuality – were first evolved and elaborated. The unconscious had existed as an idea long before Freud, but it was through the basic discoveries of psychoanalysis that the unconscious was seen to employ a specialized kind of language. The unconscious could then be understood as having a structure, and Freud could begin the task of formalizing his discoveries. Thus Lacan's 'return' generally consisted of a re-examination of the Freud of this innovative period. Lacan discussed Freud's later work many times but on the basis that the core of psychoanalysis was to be found in the earlier writings, and that Freud had deviated to some extent from the spirit of his early work. This approach to Freud is rather different from that of other psychoanalytic schools, which, at least until recently, generally accepted the early Freud, but felt that his later revisions were great improvements, and that the 'true' Freud was to be found in the work that used the later concepts of ego, id and super-ego. We outline these in chapter 2.

It would be too simplistic, however, to describe Lacan's 'return' as merely an emphasis on the early Freud for what he proposed was a particular reading of Freud's text. In

Lacan's view, all of Freud's work had been watered down and tamed, made socially acceptable and comfortable, by the analytical 'second generation' that followed Freud. The great and subversive discoveries had become deadened by routine use, while the training of analysts had become rigidly institutionalized and authoritarian. In addition, Freud's concepts had become virtually meaningless by an over-systematized and reductive interpretation of his writings. To deal with this unfortunate state of affairs and to restore psychoanalysis to life was Lacan's main purpose. To accomplish this task, he proposed a reading of Freud's text which would grasp the conflicts and 'knots' of his thought at their point of origin. In addition, Lacan evolved a style of writing whose aim was to avoid being over-systematized and reductive, and to reflect the workings of the unconscious. Lacan's prose thus often obeys the laws of the unconscious as they were formalized by Freud – it is full of puns, jokes, metaphors, irony and contradictions, and there are many similarities in its form to that of psychotic writing.

This makes reading his essays an intellectual task of some magnitude, on a par with reading *Finnegan's Wake*. As in that formidable work, there are innumerable references to literature and other disciplines, and one may often wonder whether ploughing through the book is worth the effort. Lacan himself was infuriatingly indifferent to such questions, for he maintained that one had to make a choice about whether or not one wanted to enter into his work. Of course, this is not a 'respectable' way of presenting oneself to serious commentators, and it must be admitted that such irreverence was typical of the man. To be fair to him, such a committing choice is basic to psychoanalysis and to the undertaking of a personal analysis. Such an uncompromising attitude was also typical of Freud. Unlike Lacan, however, Freud always took great care to make his presentation intelligible. Lacan also refused to define all his terms, and their meaning and function evolved over the years with little

explanation. Indeed he was particularly interested in what cannot be limited to ordinary definitions: what comes out between the words for example; in speech, or between the lines, in the connections between words.

Such an approach is familiar to those who have experienced psychoanalysis, whether as analysts or analysands (patients), for the meaning in an analytic session tends to appear in these very roundabout ways, as slips of the tongue, dreams, jokes and puns. But what is unfamiliar is to use the very materials of the psychoanalytic session for so-called explanatory prose, and the result is often to produce a sense of bewilderment in the reader, for the ground seems to be taken from under his feet. Not unnaturally the reader then feels angry and resentful, and then that what he is reading is contemptible. It is perhaps partly for this reason that Lacan is often treated by readers, particularly in England and America, with a certain amount of contempt. One must say, however, that on the Continent Lacan continues to be a source of controversy but rarely an object of contempt, and he is taken seriously both as a psychoanalyst and as a major thinker. This difference in attitudes perhaps reflects some fundamental cultural difference between England and the Continent. First of all, the terms of thought are different – the philosophers Hegel, Heidegger and Husserl, for example, are considered on the Continent to be fundamentally important thinkers while here this is not so common, and they are sometimes attacked for unnecessary obscurity because of differences in presuppositions and preconceptions. Then the nature of the exchange of ideas is radically different – on the Continent there is much more cross-fertilization between different disciplines than here, where people tend to keep more to their own speciality. We are not necessarily saying that one culture is better than the other, but an appreciation of these differences may help to explain the apparent unacceptability of some of Lacan's ideas.

There are also major differences in the organization of

psychoanalysis, especially between France and England. The French situation could be described as chaotic, even more so since Lacan's death in 1981. There are several so-called 'official' psychoanalytic institutes, as well as various Lacanian organizations. At times, the organization of analytic practice seems as ordered as a heated conversation in a French café. In contrast, there is only one Institute of Psychoanalysis in London, which provides a professional, ordered, thorough but rather esoteric training, and which makes little contribution to cultural life. The British Society is also much more clinically oriented. Concepts are discussed, but mainly within a clinical context. This contrasts with Lacan's approach, and the French approach in general, in which clinical material only makes sense within a rigorous conceptual framework, or at least there is much more discussion of theoretical issues. One can detect this difference in Lacan's work, where there is hardly any reference to clinical material although, to be fair to the Lacanian school, followers such as Mannoni, Leclaire, and Safouan have attempted to make good this gap.

Through his uncompromising style, Lacan seemed in a very literal way to demonstrate how the traditional concept of reason was subverted by Freud, i.e., how Freud took the ground from under the concept of reason which had dominated western thought. He showed that the unconscious has its own laws, which are not those of conscious reason. The unconscious is, one might say, essentially subversive; it is organized in the form of a constant questioning of the human subject which cannot be limited and tamed by the laws of good common sense, however much people, including analysts and analytic institutions, may try.

Although one may quarrel with this literal attitude, as there is a danger that it may create a cult of the irrational, and it often seems doctrinaire, yet there are compensations. Through his rather 'Maoist' approach Lacan constantly challenged the terms and limits of psychoanalysis. For him

psychoanalysis involves a constant dealing with its own limits, which are never pre-established once and for all.

This constant questioning of psychoanalysis is intended to open up issues that are normally covered by disciplines such as philosophy, natural science and anthropology. Indeed, one of Lacan's main concerns was the nature of the relationship between psychoanalysis and other disciplines. This concern included consideration of the problem of how psychoanalysis may carve out its own realm, as well as consideration of the status of psychoanalytic knowledge in relation to knowledge derived from other disciplines. It would thus seem important in any introduction to Lacan's thought to attempt to tackle his conceptions of the relationship between psychoanalysis and other disciplines, and to try to put his thought in some general context. However, we are also aware that our main task is to elucidate Lacan's thought, and in an introductory text this entails a certain amount of simplification.

As we shall see in chapter 4, one of the most important aspects of Lacan's revision of Freudian theory was his emphasis on the study of language. Lacan pointed out how often Freud referred to language, the proportion of analyses of language increasing when the unconscious was tackled directly. From the birth of analysis, language has been its primary field of action and the privileged instrument of its efficacy. Whereas Lacan pointed out that Freud did not have available to him the discoveries of modern linguistics, from the work of Saussure onwards, he did not go on to explain why Freud was ignorant of Saussure's work, in spite of having opportunities to become familiar with it. Saussure's posthumous *Course in General Linguistics*, compiled by his students from their lecture notes, was published in 1916, and Freud would have had plenty of opportunity to study the book. In addition, Raymond de Saussure, the linguist's son, became a psychoanalyst, and indeed Freud (SE19, p. 283) wrote a preface to Raymond de Saussure's *La méthode*

psychanalytique, in 1922. Whatever the reason there was, Lacan claimed, a gap in Freud's linguistic formalizations, and he chose to remedy this gap by revising Freudian theory with the help of modern structural linguistics. But Lacan did not refer to the fact that there was considerable interest in linguistics and the concept of the unconscious, while Freud was making his early discoveries.

It is because of his debt to structural linguistics that Lacan has been loosely placed alongside those other French intellectuals such as Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, who have been categorized, rather inaccurately, as 'Structuralists'. It is probably inappropriate, for a variety of reasons, to lump all these thinkers together into one category. For example, each of them has original ideas, which one might lose sight of in such an arrangement. In addition, Foucault stated that he was not a Structuralist, while Derrida has consistently maintained a highly critical attitude to Structuralism. In addition, each thinker has resisted attempts to confine him within convenient cultural pigeon-holes. Yet in spite of these considerations, all these thinkers have shared a similar cultural background; each has to a greater or lesser extent had a dialogue with structural linguistics; and they do have in common certain preoccupations, though from different perspectives. Such preoccupations include a study of the human 'subject', the nature of the 'speaking subject' and of meaning, the role of the 'text', and the function of signs.

Structuralism and Since (1979), edited by John Sturrock, which we draw on here, is a useful guide to the work of these thinkers, and provides a limited amount of comparison between them. Lacan may be distinguished from the others in various ways. First of all, he stated many times that his main concern was to talk to psychoanalysts about psychoanalysis, although he did not object if others were interested in what he had to say. It is for this reason that we approach Lacan in this book from the standpoint of psychoanalysis. This may

create difficulties for readers who are not directly involved in psychoanalysis. We have tried to avoid being esoteric, without avoiding the fact that Lacan was first and foremost a psychoanalyst. Another feature which distinguished him from other thinkers was his approach to linguistics: he made a distinction between linguistics – the science concerned with the linguistic formalization of knowledge – and what he called *La Linguisterie*, which is concerned with the side of language that linguistics has left unformalized. *La Linguisterie* is the language with which the unconscious is concerned, and which psychoanalysis grasps at the moments of failure of language itself; when meaning fails, stumbles, or falls to pieces. *La Linguisterie* is, as it were, the science of the word that fails, and thus Lacan was concerned with what one could call the 'margins' of ordinary language.

Lacan's work seems to have a dual attraction – on the one hand it expresses, as a literary performance, the disintegration of language, while at the same time it offers the prospect of a solution to the 'lack' that it expresses. Solutions are very seductive, and at the same time dangerous. Anyone who says with enough conviction and charisma that he has *the* interpretation of Freud, or the right approach to questioning the human subject, could be expected to attract a following. It seems hard at times to sort out Lacan's original ideas from the polemics he used against those who disagreed with him; but then he shared this dilemma with Freud. Indeed, from its inception, psychoanalysis has been unable to free itself totally from the prejudices and illusions that belong to religion. The vigour and rancour with which Freud, Lacan, Klein and others have defended their positions merely reminds one that psychoanalysis deals with the human passions, and that analysts are no more free from passion than their patients.

The orthodox assumption is that at least the analyst is supposed to know what he is doing, when he analyses, yet Lacan pitched many of his interventions at precisely this

assumption about the analyst's knowledge. He was particularly concerned with the status of the knowledge with which the psychoanalyst deals, and for him, psychoanalysis is based on a fundamental split between the subject and the knowledge he has of himself. Psychoanalysis deals particularly with wishes and desires that are unknown to the subject, and appear only in the unconscious. As we will explain in more detail, this position implies a radical revision of the concept of the human subject. The subject is no longer, as in traditional psychology, a unified collection of thoughts and feelings, but is 'de-centred', marked by an essential split. Throughout Lacan's work there are innumerable references to this new concept of the subject, described as 'lacking', 'fading', 'alienated', marked by an essential 'lack of being', 'split', possessed of an 'empty centre' (*béance*), etc.

Lacan was insistent that this notion of the human subject was essentially that of Freud, who, in his view, did not agree to a notion of the 'unity' of the subject except as a phantasy, e.g., the infant's phantasy of being one with the mother. This is certainly not the opinion of other schools of psychoanalysis, most of whom make space for some unifying concept of 'self'. We incline to Lacan's view, but the issue would seem to be one of differing interpretations of Freud's text, which is far from clear on this point, perhaps because Freud was struggling with new concepts while still in debt to the older language of nineteenth century determination.

Whatever one's interpretation of the concept of the human subject, at least Lacan has opened up an important area for discussion, with relevance to disciplines other than psychoanalysis. In addition, it would seem to be more sensible to examine this view of the human subject in its own right – regardless of whether or not Freud thought that way – so long as one is very careful about terms, which can often be confusing.

We will now outline the plan of the book, and some of the main themes of each chapter. For convenience we have divided up Lacan's work into three periods, represented in the book by three sections, in each of which we have discussed a selection of his major works. Our choice of material for presentation and discussion is somewhat restricted, as we have attempted to consider Lacan's main texts, or ones representative of his main areas of achievement and interest, and where possible those that have been translated into English.

The first period extends from his early neurological papers and doctoral thesis (1932) to his break with the psychoanalytic establishment, and ends with the presentation in Rome of his address 'The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis' (1953), commonly known as the Rome Discourse.

In chapter 1 we give a detailed account of the major themes of his thesis, which was on the relation between paranoid psychosis and the personality. Although an academic work addressed to traditional psychiatry, the thesis also marked Lacan's break with it and his entry into psychoanalysis. We thought it worthwhile to present the thesis in some detail, as it was Lacan's only detailed case history. However, one must say that it is not the record of a psychoanalytic treatment. One can detect his dissatisfaction with the limits of traditional psychiatry, and see how he tried to fit Freud into the clinical picture, but he was still confined within psychiatric parameters. Thus one has no account of individual sessions, and little interpretation of detailed clinical material, such as one can readily see in Freud's case studies. On the other hand, the move from psychiatry to psychoanalysis is a common one for those who find psychiatry intellectually limiting and emotionally deadening, and one can see in the thesis an attempt to acknowledge the individuality and complexity of the human subject. It marks an important moment of transition in Lacan's intellectual biography.

In chapter 2 we present Lacan's first major psychoanalytic contribution – his formulation of the 'mirror stage' (1936), a theme running through all his work and drawn from the observation of infants perceiving their own reflection in a mirror. In Lacan's words, the 'helpless' infant, not yet objectively in control of his movements, jubilantly perceives in the mirror – in an imaginary plane – the mastery of his bodily unity, which objectively he still lacks. The infant becomes aware, through seeing his image in the mirror, of his own body as a totality, as a total form or *Gestalt*. Lacan pointed to the difference between the infant's objective state of fragmentation and insufficiency, and the illusory feeling of autonomy and unity experienced as a result of seeing his own image in the mirror. The concept of the mirror phase went beyond child psychology, and became the core of Lacan's theory of the human subject, in which all notions of unity and absolute autonomy were swept aside as mere illusions.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of Lacan's paper 'Beyond the reality principle' (1936). This paper, which seems fundamental to much of Lacan's later work, tackles the different issue of the relationship between science and psychoanalysis, and whether the latter can claim its own realm of knowledge independent of the positive sciences. This represents a particular interpretation of Freud. Lacan took the view that Freud was moving away from the methodology of the natural sciences; but it can be argued that Freud himself was uneasy about this move. Freud wanted to be scientific, yet he was also aware that his discoveries veered away from the assumptions of natural science. Lacan seems to be quite clear that Freud was moving into the area of what are now called the 'human sciences', those disciplines essentially concerned with human meaning. This is certainly a valid interpretation of Freud's position, and is shared by many analysts; it contrasts, however, with the view of the American ego psychology school, founded by Heinz Hartmann,

one of the many Central European analysts who emigrated to the USA before World War Two, who tried to incorporate traditional psychological thinking into psychoanalysis. The dialogue between those analysts who favour a natural science approach, and those who follow Lacan's line continues to this day. However, Lacan was clear where his allegiances lay, and his attack on traditional psychology remained the basis for his theory of the human subject.

The second period extends from 1953 to the late fifties, and involves a continuous development, both of the ideas put forward in the Rome Discourse and of earlier ones.

In chapter 4 we give a bare outline of the long Rome Discourse, a report given to the Congrès des psychanalystes de langue française in Rome, September 1953. With this address, and the beginning of his widely attended weekly seminar, Lacan introduced his study of language into his approach to psychoanalysis. As vice-president of the Paris psychoanalytic society, Lacan had been asked to deliver a theoretical report in Rome. At that time however there were serious disagreements within the Paris society which finally led to a split, just before the congress. Daniel Lagache, soon joined by Lacan, founded a new Société française de psychanalyse in June 1953, but it never acquired full recognition by the official International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA).

The secession was caused by a number of factors. Lacan and his followers felt that the Paris society had become impossibly rigid and authoritarian. They attacked its teaching methods, which took little account of the independence of the students. At the same time Lacan himself was attacked for both his uncompromising attitude and his analytic practice. The usual analytic session lasts 50 minutes, with only the very occasional deviation, and Lacan had introduced short sessions, the length of time being determined by the analyst. This clearly seemed a major breach of analytic practice, and one that could undermine the status of the discip-

line. In particular, it seemed to give the analyst an unprecedented omnipotence – he was the one who would somehow know what should be the right length of the session. The International Association debated Lacan's right to remain an officially recognized analyst for some years, and finally expelled him from the IPA in 1963, using his unorthodox analytic practice as the main reason.

In the debate, however, some of the valid points of Lacan's practice were missed. Experiments with the length of the session had often been carried out in the early days of psychoanalysis, particularly by Ferenczi, with some success. Also, Lacan was trying to point out that one has to question the meaning given to the termination of the session; a rigid insistence on maintaining a standard length in every session might interrupt the whole movement of the patient's discourse. His point has some validity; one must say, however, that the rigidity of the analytic session is an enormous protection for the patient.

The secession resulted in Lacan's becoming the centre of a new and influential psychoanalytic movement. Teaching was organized around the weekly seminar, which gradually became almost an institution, and thinkers from many fields attended it at one time or another. One may legitimately quarrel with the high-handed way Lacan often treated his opponents, but he was personally responsible for the revitalization of French psychoanalysis. However much they have tried, no analysts in France have been able to escape his influence, and his intellect and personality tower over them. Until 1966, Lacan was known to French intellectuals; but in that year, his *Ecrits* were published, and then began the explosion of his influence in French society. He became not only someone who questioned the meaning of culture, but also what one could call a 'cultural phenomenon'.

The Rome Discourse is, in a way, a blueprint for Lacan's whole future career. It was given in the context of great con-

troversy, it addressed itself to a radical re-examination of the status of psychoanalysis, and it was written in the dense, contorted and many-layered style that became his trademark. It also moves freely from one topic to another; using ideas and references from several other disciplines. This easy flowing from one thinker to another, from Freud to Aristotle, from Spinoza to Saussure, is intellectually exciting, as is the way Lacan restored Freud's insights to life by re-examining their foundations. He wanted, he said, to provide analysts with a 'solid support for their labours'. He wanted a 'proper return to a field in which the analyst ought to be past master: the study of the functions of speech'.

In chapter 5, we discuss Lacan's 1956 essay on Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Purloined Letter'. This essay was placed at the head of the *Ecrits* (1966), perhaps for several reasons. Lacan used the story to illustrate and develop several of his basic themes; but the story itself, when given a psychoanalytic reading, seems to become a fable of the analytic process. Of course, the use of literature both to illustrate psychoanalytic themes and as a source of insights that psychoanalysis can use was a technique Freud often employed. But there seems to be an additional message in the Lacan essay. It consists of a psychoanalytic reading of a text, yet it seems to be saying at the outset that Lacan's text too is to be read in a particular way. Thus the essay represents both what will follow it, and establishes the mode of reading it.

The subject of the story is a letter, and Lacan traced the effect on the characters as it changes hands and follows a complicated path, its route and displacements determining the action and destiny of the characters. Like a signifier (or sound-image, a term which we explain in Appendix 1 on Linguistics), the letter travels in a definite path, forming a symbolic circuit which cuts across the subjects of the story. In order to read Lacan, the story seems to be saying, one must follow the path of the signifier, and the remainder of

Ecrits is fundamentally concerned with the laws of the signifier.

Lacan's important 1957 paper, 'The instance of the letter, or reason since Freud', outlined in chapter 6, tackles many of the details of these laws as Lacan understood them. It is concerned particularly with his own interpretation of Saussure's concept of the sign. Saussure conceived of the sign as made up of two inextricably linked elements – the signified (concept) and the signifier (sound-image). But Lacan saw the signified and signifier as two distinct and separate elements in a radical opposition, and he gave a new emphasis to the bar between them. It became a formula of separateness, rather than of the reciprocity between signifier and signified.

If one agrees with this new interpretation, then a number of important consequences follow. Lacan placed the signified *under* the signifier, symbolically emphasizing the primacy of the signifier. In this scheme, it is vain to search for the signified, or the concept. The signified is always slipping out of reach, and resists attempts to keep it fixed. What is available, however, is the signifier. It is revealed in the signifying chain, which is made up of signifiers connected to one another, and it is the analyst's task to uncover the many and varied relationships between signifiers. Meaning is produced in the very connections; from this would follow a new way of interpreting clinical material, including dreams. More attention is given to the details of the dream, to the individual items recounted, to the details of the 'manifest' content, while less emphasis is given to the pursuit of a mysterious signified that lies hidden somewhere. Presumably this does not at all mean that one forgets the analysand's associations, but rather that they are given a different kind of interpretation.

The reversal of the Saussurian sign has more than simply clinical relevance. If it is right so to reverse it, then all our notions of knowledge are turned upside down. Gone is the never-ending quest for the concept as such. Instead one is

left with the available signifier, whose laws must be followed if one is to uncover knowledge about the subject. This new emphasis certainly makes sense in a psychoanalytic context, and one could interpret Freud's early work as a kind of quest for the rules of the signifier at play. But whether or not one could apply these ideas beyond psychoanalysis is more debatable.

Chapter 6 also deals with the concepts of metaphor and metonymy. We explain how reading Lacan's texts is like analytic work, where one has to follow the meaning as it gradually unfolds itself. That is, one is following not only the usual rules of grammar and writing, but in addition, or often instead, the way that one metaphor leads to another, or what takes place in the connections between words (metonymy).

Chapter 7 gives a relatively schematized account of the Oedipus complex through the Lacanian perspective. It seemed important to us to expound some direct clinical implications of Lacan's work, and we have included an account of Lacan's interpretation of Freud's case history 'Little Hans', which involves a study of the role of the signifier in clinical material. We describe how the resolution of Hans' phobia occurred by means of a transformation and permutation of signifiers. Although by no means the only way of interpreting this case history, Lacan's approach sheds new light on the concept of castration and the workings of the Oedipus complex.

In chapter 8 we discuss Lacan's ideas on psychosis, mainly from a clinical point of view. His first published papers concerned psychotic patients, and his thesis discussed paranoid psychosis, but comments on psychosis are also scattered throughout his works. We have tried to bring together the most significant of these ideas, based mainly on his essay on psychosis (1957-8).

Lacan's theories on psychosis are perhaps among the least controversial and the most easily acceptable of all his writ-

ings. They are based on a close reading of Freud, as well as the application of Saussurian linguistics, but within a very clear clinical context, which makes them particularly available to the English reader.

The third period extends from 1960 until Lacan's death in 1981. In 1964 Lacan reformed his analytic society, calling it L'Ecole Freudienne de Paris. But in 1980 he dissolved the school, and created a new society called La Cause Freudienne. Not surprisingly, this latter move created an enormous uproar, especially when Lacan proposed to make use of the money from the Ecole Freudienne. It is still difficult to sort out what happened, and to understand the motives. Lacan seemed to feel that the Ecole Freudienne was becoming too institutionalized, that it ought to be dissolved, and that several analysts ought to be refused admission to the new society. Lacan's authority to do this himself, without consultation, was questioned, and he was taken to court. His defenders claimed that *he* was the Ecole Freudienne, and so he could do what he liked, while his critics were incensed by his behaviour.

Rumours about Lacan's mental state abounded; but his seminar continued, and there is no evidence from the published text that he was in any way different then than before the crisis. The overturning of the Ecole Freudienne seems totally consistent with the unorthodox way he had treated all institutional questions. His death came before the legal battle was sorted out, and in the aftermath of both, the French psychoanalytic scene seemed as chaotic as ever, although there are some signs that analysts from various organizations are trying to come together now that Le Maître has gone, as we describe in the final chapter.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with some of the basic ideas of the third period of Lacan's work. Chapter 9 deals with Lacan's later theory of the human subject, which argued that the dominance of the signifier subverts traditional theories of the human subject. We also discuss the Lacanian concept of

lack, which is important for his account of the Oedipus complex and the nature of desire. The chapter enlarges on several themes from the previous chapters, but in a somewhat wider perspective, touching on philosophical issues raised by psychoanalysis.

Chapter 10 deals with feminine sexuality, the subject of his 1972-3 seminar *Encore*. We have ended our exposition with a discussion of this text because it was perhaps Lacan's last major work; it is currently, in France, one of the most widely debated of his works; and it deals with several issues, particularly the nature of the Oedipus complex, in a new perspective. Lacan himself felt that, with his consideration of feminine sexuality, he was coming up against the current limits and enigmas of psychoanalysis, which if successfully negotiated might open up new ground for investigation. Thus this work seemed, more than any other, to be definitely aimed at the future, and so it is suitable to end the exposition with it.

Chapter 11 is a summary of the main points of the book, including a short account of recent developments in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

It is the aim of the book not only to explain Lacan's major theories, but also to underline his main contributions to psychoanalysis: first and foremost his attempt to restore psychoanalysis to life by a radical return to the writings of Freud, and by putting psychoanalysis in touch with the latest developments in contemporary thought.