



THE ETHICS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

1959–1960

THE SEMINAR OF
JACQUES LACAN
BOOK VII

Edited by
Jacques-Alain Miller

Translated with Notes by
Dennis Porter

By Jacques Lacan

TELEVISION

THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK I

THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK II

THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK III

THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK VII

ECRITS: A SELECTION

FEMININE SEXUALITY

THE FOUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS
OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Some of the problems of translating Jacques Lacan's *Seminars* into English have already been pointed out by the translators of *Seminars I* and *II*, John Forester and Sylvana Tomaselli, and there is no point in repeating their helpful comments here. It is, however, important to recall that the *Seminars* now in the process of being translated were delivered from notes to an audience that for the most part had been following the progress of Lacan's thought over many years and was composed to a great extent of psychoanalysts or psychoanalysts in training. These circumstances account in part for his non-academic mode of exposition and the frequent complexity of the syntax. They also explain the closeness Lacan apparently felt to his audience, the assumptions he was able to make about the knowledge his listeners possessed, the frequent references to previous *Seminars* or to other activities of the *Société Française de Psychanalyse*, and the apparent allusiveness of some of his remarks. The latter in particular seems to derive both from what he felt he could take for granted among those who knew his work well and from a pedagogical style that made great demands on a listener.

Jacques-Alain Miller's French edition of the *Ethique de la Psychanalyse* is without a critical apparatus, like the other Lacan *Seminars* that have so far been published. Miller reproduces Lacan's lectures virtually unmediated, and it seemed proper to model the English edition of the work on the French. As a consequence, footnotes have been kept to a minimum; they are chiefly limited to linguistic difficulties where for one reason or another English is unable to render fully the significance of the French—the most obvious of such cases is Lacan's not infrequent plays on words. However, a bibliography of authors and works cited by Lacan in the course of the *Seminar* is included. I have also followed the French edition in leaving German and Greek words in the original where Lacan did so in the context of analyzing German or Greek texts; in most cases, he gave at the same time a French equivalent or a para-

phrase of a concept's meaning. Only in the case of titles have I given the English translation in brackets after the first occurrence.

The task of the translator is, I take it, a critically self-effacing one that insofar as possible avoids the temptation to play editor by reducing ambiguities or by "naturalizing" the strangeness of an original in its passage into the native idiom. Thus, the goals I gave myself were accuracy rather than elegance and a flexibility of tone that matches the different registers of Lacan's expository style. The excitement for those who encounter his *Seminars* in the original French is in the experience of a thought in the making. And it is important to render in the English this liveliness of a distinguished mind at work before an audience, even at the occasional cost of some awkwardnesses. The difficulty was in trying to render in a different linguistic code a captivating spoken word that sometimes meanders, throws out asides, refers backwards or anticipates future problems, moves through passages dense with difficult ideas, narrates an illustrative comic anecdote, draws out the forgotten etymological significance of a word or resorts suddenly to popular speech. The pleasure for the translator is in discovering equivalents for such movements within the very different resources of his own language.

It is for the most part not Lacan's psychoanalytic or philosophical discourse that causes difficulties, but his syntax and, given that the Norton edition of the *Seminars* has as its potential audience the English-speaking world as a whole, his use of familiar language and colloquialisms. As far as the former is concerned, Lacan frequently uses French prepositions and prepositional phrases in startlingly new ways; thus one of the most difficult words to translate turned out to be "de." As for Lacan's colloquialisms, it seemed to me important wherever possible to find equivalents that were not too obviously recognizable as "Americanisms" or as "Britishisms," but have a more general currency. Finally, a few minor errors in the French have been corrected in the translation.

I would like to thank my colleague Edward S. Phinney for help with the Greek and Susan Barrows both for her editorial support and for a careful reading of the manuscript.

DENNIS PORTER

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