

Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar

I don't intend to engage in anything in the order of a theatrical ploy. I shall not wait until the end of this seminar to tell you that this will be the last that I shall conduct.

For some, apprised of things that have been occurring, that will not be a surprise. It is for the others, out of respect for their presence, that I am making this declaration.

I request that absolute silence be maintained during the session.

Up until sometime quite late last night, when a certain bit of news was delivered to me, it was my belief that I would be giving you this year what I have been dispensing for ten years now.¹ My seminar for today was prepared with the same care as I have always devoted to it, every week, for the last ten years. I don't think I can do any better than offer it to you as it is, with my apologies for the fact that it will have no sequel.

I

I announced that I would speak this year of the Names-of-the-Father. It will not be possible for me, in the course of this single presentation, to convey to you the reason for the plural. At the least, you will perceive the beginning of an advancement I intended to introduce on a notion already initiated in the third year of my seminar, when I dealt with the Schreber case.

I will perhaps be more careful than ever before—since today it has been decided that I shall stop here—in punctuating for you, in my past teaching, the coordinates which allow the lineaments of this year's seminar to find their grounding. I wanted to link together the seminars of January 15, 22, 29 and February 5, 1958, concerning what I have called the paternal metaphor, and

1. On the night of November 19, 1963, Serge Leclaire informed Lacan that the S.F.P. had voted, in a complicated procedure, to refuse not to ratify the motion striking Lacan's name from the list of training analysts.

those following it, the seminars of December 20, 1961 and those following it, concerning the function of the proper name, the seminars of May 1960 concerning everything bearing on the drama of the father in Claudel's trilogy, and finally the seminar of December 20, 1961, followed by the seminars of January 1962.

One finds there a direction which has already advanced quite far in its structuration, which would have allowed me this year to take the next step. That next step follows from my seminar of last year on anxiety, and that is why I intend to show you wherein the relief it brought was necessary.

In the course of that seminar on anxiety, I was able to accord their full weight to formulae such as the following: *anxiety is an affect of the subject*—a formula which I did not put forward without subordinating it to the functions that I have long established in the structure of the subject, defined as the subject that speaks and is determined through an effect of the signifier.

At what time—if I may say *time*, let us say that that infernal term, for the while, refers only to the synchronic level—at what time is the subject affected with anxiety? That is what the framed diagram I put on the blackboard is intended to recall for you. In anxiety, the subject is affected by the desire of the Other. He is affected by it in a nondialectizable manner, and it is for that reason that anxiety, within the affectivity of the subject, is what does not deceive. In that *what does not deceive* you can see in outline at just how radical a level—more radical than anything hitherto designated thereby in Freud's discourse—its function as a signal is inscribed. That characterization is in conformity with the first formulations Freud gave concerning anxiety as a direct transformation of the libido.

Moreover, I have opposed the psychologizing tradition that distinguishes fear from anxiety by virtue of its correlates in reality. In this I have changed things, maintaining of anxiety—*it is not without an object*.

What is that object?: the object *petit a*, whose fundamental forms you have perceived sketched out as far as I have been able to take them. The object *petit a* is what falls from the subject in anxiety. It is precisely the same object that I delineated as the cause of desire. For the subject, there is substituted, for anxiety which does not deceive, what is to function by way of the object *petit a*. Thereupon hinges the function of the act.

This development was reserved for the future. And yet, I give you my word, it will not be totally lost for you, since, as of this moment, I have introduced it into the—written—part of a book I have promised for six months from now.²

Last year, I restricted myself to the function of the *petit a* in fantasy. There it takes on its function as support of desire, in so far as desire is the most intense

2. This book was never published.

of what the subject can attain in his realization as subject at the level of consciousness. It is by way of that chain that, once again, the dependencies of desire in relation to the desire of the Other are affirmed. These conceptions of the subject and the object have a radical, restructuring character which, as I leave you, I am tempted to recall for you.

To be sure, we have long since taken our distance from any conception that would make of the subject a pure function of intelligence, correlative of the intelligible, such as the *νοῦς* of antiquity. At this juncture, anxiety is revealed as crucial. Not that *ἀγωνία* is not in Aristotle, but for ancient thought, it could only be a question of a local *πάθος* pacified within the passibility of the whole. Of that passibility or susceptibility to suffering of antiquity, there remains something even in what seems farthest from it — so-called psychological science or thought.

There is assuredly something well-founded in the correspondence between intelligence and the intelligible. Psychology shows us without doubt that human intelligence is none other in its foundation than animal intelligence, and this is not without reason. From that dimension of the intelligible, assumed to be a given and a fact, we can, using evolution as a guide, deduce the progress of intelligence, or its adaptation, indeed even imagine that such progress is reproduced in each individual. This is all fine — except that a hypothesis has gone unacknowledged, which is precisely that facts are intelligible.

From the positivist perspective, intelligence is no more than one affect among others, based on the hypothesis of intelligibility — and that justifies that psychology for fortune-tellers which is capable of developing in what are seemingly the most liberated spheres, from the height of academic chairs.³ Affect, inversely, is then no more than obscure intelligence. What nevertheless escapes whoever is receiving such teaching is the obscurantist effect to which he is being submitted. One knows, however, where it leads: to the increasingly intentional undertakings of a technocracy, the psychological standardization of unemployed subjects, the entering into the framework of existent society, head bowed beneath the psychologist's standard.

I say that the meaning of Freud's discovery is in radical opposition to all that. It was in order to make you feel this that the first steps of my teaching trod the paths of Hegelian dialectic. When pondered in its basis, that dialectic has logical roots, and may be reduced to the intrinsic deficit of the logic of predication. Namely that the universal, once examined — and this has not escaped the contemporary school of logic — may be grounded only by way of aggregation, and that the particular, alone in finding its existence therein, thereby appears

3. The attack on academic psychology seems aimed particularly at Lagache, who abandoned Lacan in 1963. In an unsent letter of June 27, 1963, Lacan wrote to Paula Heimann: "A society of neo-Lacanian beneath the banner of that stuffed dolly from the Sorbonne will live as a body of the IPA at the cost of my social and moral ruin." Quoted in Elisabeth Roudinesco, *La bataille de cent ans: Histoire de la psychanalyse en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, p. 724.

as contingent. The entirety of Hegelian dialectic is made to stop that gap and show, in a prestigious act of transmutation, how the universal, by way of the scansion of the *Aufhebung*, can come to be particularized.

Whatever the prestige of Hegelian dialectic, whatever the effects, seen by Marx, through which it entered into the world, thus completing that whose meaning Hegel *was*, namely: the subversion of a political order founded on the *Ecclesia*, the Church, and on that score, whatever its success, whatever the value of what it sustains in the political incidences of its actualization, Hegelian dialectic is false and contradicted as much by the testimony of the natural sciences as by the historical progress of the fundamental science, mathematics.

It is here that anxiety is for us a sign, as was immediately seen by the contemporary of the development of Hegel's system, which was at the time quite simply The System, as was seen, sung, and marked by Kierkegaard. Anxiety is for us witness to an essential breach, onto which I bring testimony that Freudian doctrine is that which illuminates.

The structure of the relation of anxiety to desire, the double breach of the subject in relation to the object fallen from itself, where, beyond anxiety, it must find its instrument, the initial function of that lost object—there is the fault which does not allow us to treat desire within the logically oriented immanence of violence alone, as the dimension forcing the impasses of logic. It is there that Freud brings us back to the very foundation of the illusion of what he called—in accordance with the world of his time, which is that of an alibi—religion, and that I, for my part, call the Church.

On that very ground, which is that through which the Church persists intact, and in all the splendor one sees in it, against the Hegelian revolution, Freud advances with the enlightenment of reason. It is there, at the foundation of the ecclesiastic tradition, that he allows us to trace the cleavage of a path going beyond—deeper and more structural than the milestone that he placed there in the form of the myth of the death of the father. It is there, on that shifting and oh so scabrous terrain—and not without flattering myself at having an audience worthy of understanding it—that this year I intended to advance.

In so far as the Father—their father, of the fathers of the Church—is concerned, may they permit me to tell them that I have not found them sufficient. Some may know that I have been reading Saint Augustine ever since the age of puberty. It was, nevertheless, rather late, about ten years ago, that I became acquainted with the *De Trinitate*. I have reopened it lately only to be astonished at the extent to which, in the final analysis, it says so little about the Father. To be sure it has enough to say to us about the Son, and how much about the Holy Ghost—but I won't say the illusion of I know not what evasion or flight occurs beneath the author's pen, through a kind of *automaton*, when it is a question of the father. And yet, his is a mind so lucid that I rediscovered with joy his radical protest of any attribution to God of the term *causa sui*, a concept which

is, in fact, totally absurd, but whose absurdity may be demonstrated only by way of the bringing into relief that I punctuated before you, namely that there are causes only after the emergence of desire, and that what is a cause, a cause of desire, can in no way be considered an equivalent of the antinomian conception of self-causation.

Augustine himself, who is able to formulate the thing in opposition to every form of intellectual piety, flinches nonetheless, to the point of translating *Ehieh asher ehieh* — which I have long since taught you to read — by an *Ego sum qui sum: I am the one who am*. Augustine was a very good writer, but in Latin as in French, that sounds false and awkward. That God affirms himself as identical to Being leads to a pure absurdity. I had intended, concerning this, to bring you all kinds of examples of other uses of analogous formulae in the Hebrew texts.

I am first going to recall briefly for you the meaning of that function of *petit a* in the various forms I recalled to you last year, and concerning which those who follow me were able to see where they stopped — in anxiety.

The *a*, the object, falls. That fall is primal. The diversity of forms taken by that object of the fall ought to be related to the manner in which the desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject.

That is what explains the function of the oral object. That function may be understood — as I have insisted at length — only if the object being detached from the subject is introduced into the Other's demand, into the call to the mother, and it delineates that space beyond in which, beneath a veil, lies the Mother's desire. That act, in which the child, in a sense astonished, throws his head back while removing himself from the breast, shows that it is only apparently that the breast belongs to the mother. The biological reference is in this case enlightening. The breast is indeed part of the feeding complex which is structured differently in different animal species. At this point it is a part stuck onto the mother's thorax.

The second form: the anal object. We know it by way of the phenomenology of the gift, the present offered in anxiety. The child releasing his feces yields them to what appears for the first time as dominating the demand of the Other, to wit: his desire. How is it that authors have not grasped better than they have that it is at the anal level that the support for what is called generosity is to be located? It is through a veritable sleight of hand, itself indicative of who knows what panic in the face of anxiety, that the posture of generosity has been situated at the level of the genital act.

It is, however, at that level that Freudian teaching, and the tradition that has maintained it, situates for us the gaping chasm of castration. Psycho-physiologists who were Freud's contemporaries reduced its obstacle to what they called the mechanism of false detumescence. Last year, I thought it my obligation to show that Freud, for his part, from the very beginning of his teaching,

articulates that aspect of orgasm which represents precisely the same function as anxiety in relation to the subject. Orgasm is in itself anxiety, to the extent that forever, by dint of a central fault, desire is separated from fulfillment.

Let no one offer as an objection those moments of peace, of fusion of the couple, in which each can view him or herself truly happy with the other. We analysts ought to look at matters more closely in order to see the extent to which those moments are marked by a fundamental alibi, a phallic alibi, in which form is sublimated to its function as a sheath, but in which something that goes beyond remains infinitely excluded. It was in order to demonstrate this to you that I commented at length on Ovid's fable based on the myth of Tiresias. Indication should also be given of what is perceptible as a trace of the unbroached realm of woman's bliss [*jouissance*] in the male myth of her alleged masochism. I have led you further.

Symmetrically, and as though on a line no longer descending but curved in relation to that peak occupied by the chasm desire/fulfillment at the genital level, I have gone so far as to punctuate the function of *petit a* at the level of the scopophilic drive. Its essence is realized in so far as, more than elsewhere, the subject is captive of the function of desire. It is here that the object is strange. In a first approximation, it is that eye which, in the myth of Oedipus, fulfills so well the role of equivalent for the organ to be castrated. But it is not quite that which is at stake in the scopophilic drive, in which the subject encounters the world as a spectacle that he possesses. He is thus victim of a lure, through which what issues forth from him and confronts him is not the true *petit a*, but its complement, the specular image: *i (a)*.

His image, that is, what appears to have fallen from him. He is taken, rejoices, vents his glee in what Saint Augustine, in so sublime a manner—I would have liked to go through the text with you—denounced and designated as a lust of the eyes. He believes he desires because he sees himself desired, and because he doesn't see that what the other wants to snatch from him is his gaze. The proof of this is what transpires in the phenomenon of the *Unheimlich*. That is what appears every time that, suddenly, through some accident more or less fomented by the Other, that image of himself within the Other appears to the subject as shorn of his recourse. Here the entire chain in which the subject is held captive by the scopophilic drive comes undone. The return to the most basal mode of anxiety is there, once again if it be needed, registered by the Aleph of anxiety, since it is today that I am introducing the sign in order to symbolize it, in accordance with our needs this year. Such is that to which, in its most fundamental structure, the relation of the subject to *petit a* bears a resemblance.

Without yet having gone beyond the scopophilic drive, I pause here to mark what in the order of clearing an obstacle will occur, for it is there that I am obliged to designate what will discomfit, precisely on time, the imposture in that fantasy which we analysts should know quite well in the form that I ar-

ticated for you, during the year of my seminar on the transference, by way of the term ἀγάλμα (*agalma*).

The peak of the obscurity into which the subject is plunged in relation to desire, *agalma* is that object which the subject believes that his desire tends toward, and through which he presses to an extreme the misperception of *petit a* as cause of his desire. Such is the frenzy of Alcibiades, and the dismissal Socrates subjects him to: *Concern yourself with your soul* means: *Acknowledge that what you are pursuing is nothing other than what Socrates will later turn into your soul, to wit: your image. See then that the function of that object is in the order not of a goal, but rather of a cause of death, and prepare your mourning as a function of it. Then will you know the paths of your desire. For I, Socrates, who know nothing, that is the only thing that I know — the function of Eros.*

Thus it was that I brought you last year to the gate where we now arrive — the fifth term of the function of *petit a*, through which will be revealed the gamut of the object in its—pregenital—relation to the demand of the—post-genital—Other, to that enigmatic desire in which the Other is the site of a decoy in the form of *petit a*. In the fifth term, we shall see the *petit a* of the Other, sole witness, in sum, that that site is not solely the site of a mirage.

I have not named that particular *petit a*, and yet, in other circumstances, I could have shown you its singular lighting. During a recent meeting of our Society, concerning paranoia, I abstained from speaking on what was at issue, to wit: voice. The voice of the Other should be considered an essential object. Every analyst is solicited to accord it its place. Its various incarnations should be followed, as much in the realm of psychosis as at that extremity of normal functioning in the formation of the superego. Through seeing the *petit a* source of the superego, it is possible that many things will become more clear.

The relation of voice to the Other is solely a phenomenological approach. If it is truly, as I say, *petit a* as fallen from the Other, we can exhaust its structural function only by bringing our inquiry to bear on what the Other is as a subject, for voice is the product and object fallen from the organ of speech, and the Other is the site where “it”—*ça*— speaks.

Here we can no longer elude the question: beyond he who speaks in the place of the Other, and who is the subject, what is it whose voice, each time he speaks, the subject takes?

II

If Freud places at the center of his teaching the myth of the Father, it is for reason of the inevitability of the question I have uttered.

The entirety of analytic theory and praxis appear to us at present to have come to a halt for not having dared, on the subject of that question, to go further than Freud. That is in fact why one of those whom I have trained as best I

could have spoken, in a work that is not without merit, of the *question of the father*.⁴ That formulation was bad. It was even a misinterpretation, without there being grounds for reproaching him for it. There can be no question of the question of the father, for the reason that there we are beyond what may be formulated as a question. I want merely to attempt to situate how today we might have delineated an approach to the problem that has been introduced at this juncture.

It is clear that the Other should not be confused with the subject who speaks from the place of the Other, even if through its voice. If the Other is as I say, the place where “it”—*ça*—speaks, it can pose only one kind of problem, that of the subject prior to the question. And Freud intuited this admirably.

Since as of today I am to return to a certain style, I shall not fail to indicate to you that someone who is not one of my students, Conrad Stein (to mention his name), has traced the path in this realm. Were I not obliged to cut things short, I would have requested that you consult his work, since it is sufficiently satisfying to spare me the task of showing you how, despite the error and confusion of the times, Freud put his finger on what deserves to remain in the work of Robertson Smith and Andrew Lang, after the critique—which is no doubt well founded from the specialist’s point of view—of the function of the totem conducted by my friend Claude Lévi-Strauss. Freud is the living demonstration of the extent to which whoever is functioning at the level of the pursuit of truth can completely make do without the advice of the specialist. For what would be left of it, should nothing else be left than *petit a*, since what is to be at stake is the subject prior to the question? Mythically, the father—and that is what *mythically* means—can only be an animal.

The primordial father is the father from before the incest taboo, before the appearance of law, of the structures of marriage and kinship, in a word, of culture. The father is the head of that hoard whose satisfaction, in accordance with the animal myth, knows no bounds. That Freud should call him a *totem* takes on its full meaning in the light of the progress brought to the question by the structuralist critique of Lévi-Strauss, which, as you know, brings into relief the classificatory essence of the totem.

We thus see that as a second term what is needed at the level of the father is that function whose definition I believe I developed further in one of my seminars than had ever been done until now—the function of the proper name.

The name, I demonstrated to you, is a mark already open to reading—for which reason it will be read identically in all languages—imprinted on something that may be, but not at all necessarily, a speaking subject. The proof

4. See Jean Laplanche, *Hölderlin et la question du père* (Paris, P.U.F., 1961), an analysis of Hölderlin’s psychosis in terms of the Lacanian category of foreclosure. Laplanche had cut short his analysis with Lacan on November 1, 1963, and declared his solidarity with the majority position asking that Lacan’s name be struck from the list of training analysts.

is that Bertrand Russell can make a mistake and say that one could name a geometrical point on the blackboard John. Now, we know Bertrand Russell to have indulged in many a strange caper, which are not without their merit, moreover, but surely, at no moment, has he questioned a point marked in chalk on a blackboard in the hope that said point would answer back.

I had also observed, as a reference, the variously Phoenecian (or other) characters that Flinders Petrie discovered in Upper Egypt on pottery dating from a few centuries prior to the use of those characters as an alphabet in the Semitic region. Which illustrates the fact that the pottery never had the occasion, subsequently, to speak up and say that that was its trademark. The name is situated at that level. Pardon me for moving a bit more rapidly than I would have wanted to under other circumstances.

Can we ourselves not move beyond the name and the voice? — and take our bearing from what the myth implies in that register accorded us by our progress, that is: on the three themes of erotic bliss [*jouissance*], desire, and the object? It is clear that, in his myth, Freud finds a singular balance, a kind of co-conformity — if I may be allowed to thus double my prefixes — of Law and desire, stemming from the fact that both are born together, joined and necessitated by each other in the law of incest and what? — the supposition of the pure erotic bliss of the father viewed as primordial.

Except, if that is alleged to give us the formation of desire in the child, ought we not — I have insisted on this at length for years — to pose the question of knowing why all this yields neuroses?

It is here that the accent I allowed to be put on the function of perversion in its relation to the desire of the Other as such takes on value. To wit: that it represents a backing up against the wall, a strictly literal interpretation of the function of the father, of the Supreme Being, of Eternal God. He is taken in a strictly literal interpretation of the letter, not of his bliss, which is always veiled and inscrutable, but of his desire, as interested in the order of the world — and that is the principle through which the pervert, moulding his own anxiety, installs himself as such.

Thus are posited two of the prime blind arcades through which may be seen contrasting and fusing the foundation of normal desire and that of perverse desire, which is located at the same level. One must take possession of that gnarled axis in order to understand that what is at stake is a totality, a gamut of phenomena that go from neurosis to perversion.

Neurosis is inseparable in our eyes from a flight from the term of the father's desire. That is what mysticism replaces with the term of demand. Mysticism, throughout every tradition, except the one that I am about to introduce, which is quite vexing, is a construction, search, *askesis*, assumption — anything you like — plunged toward the bliss of God. That is what leaves a trace in mysticism — and even, and more still, in Christian mysticism. As in the case of neurosis, the insistence of God's desire functions as a pivot.

I apologize for not being able to pursue that indication any further. But I don't want to leave you without having at least pronounced the name, the first name through which I wanted to introduce you to the specific incidence of the Judeo-Christian tradition. That tradition, in fact, is one not of erotic bliss, but of the desire of a God who is the God of Moses.

III

It was before the God of Moses, in the last analysis, that Freud's pen stopped writing. But Freud is surely beyond what his pen transmits to us.

The name of that God is the name *Shem*, which, for reasons I explained to you, I would never have pronounced, although some do know its pronunciation. We have a number of others, for example those given us by the *Ma'asot*, and which have varied over the centuries. In Chapter 6 of *Exodus*, *Elohim*, who speaks from the burning bush—which should be conceived of as his body, *kavod*, which is translated as *glory*, and concerning which I would have liked to show you that it is a matter of something quite different—says to Moses: *You will go unto them and say unto them that my name is Ehieh asher ehieh*. Which means nothing other than *I am what I am*. The property of the term, moreover, is designated by nothing other than the letters composing the Name, always a few letters chosen from the consonants.

Last year, I worked up a bit of Hebrew on your behalf. The vacation I am about to give you will spare you a similar effort. *Je suis*: I am [or, I follow] the procession. There is no other meaning to be given that *I am* other than its being the name *I am*. *But it is not by that name*, says Elohim to Moses, *that I revealed myself to your ancestors*, and that is what brought us to the point at which I proposed that we meet.

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not of the philosophers and the scientists, writes Pascal at the head of the manuscript of his *Pensées*. Concerning which may be said what I have gradually accustomed you to understand: that a God is something one encounters in the real, inaccessible. It is indicated by what doesn't deceive—*anxiety*. The God who manifested himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but first of all to Abraham, manifested himself by a name by which the *Elohim* of the burning bush calls him, and that I have written here. It is read: *El Shadday*.

The Greeks who did the translation of the Septuagint were much better informed than we are. They didn't translate *Ehieh asher* as *I am the one who am*, as did Saint Augustine, but as *I am the one who is*. That's not quite it, but at least it has a meaning. They thought like the Greeks that God is the supreme Being. *I equals Being*.

People are not freed like that from their mental habits from one day to the next, but one thing is sure: they did not translate *El Shadday* as the Allmighty, but, prudently, as *Theos*, which is the name they give to everything that they don't translate as (. . .), which is reserved for the *Shem*, that is, the name I do

not pronounce. What is *El Shadday*? Well, even if I were to see you again next week, it was not on the schedule for me to tell you today, and I shall not be breaking down any doors, be they even those of Hell, in order to tell you.

I was intending to introduce what I would manage to tell you by means of something essential, whereby we meet up again with our Kierkegaard of a while ago—to wit, what is called in the Jewish tradition the *Akedah*, or in other words: the sacrifice of Abraham.

I would have presented to you Abraham's sacrifice in the form in which painterly tradition has figured it in a culture in which images are not forbidden. It was, moreover, rather interesting to know why they are so for the Jews and why, from time to time, Christianity has been taken with a fever to rid itself of them. Were they even reduced to cut-out figures, I am giving them to you, in order to show you what may be seen in images, which is necessary, ultimately, not in order to make up for this year's seminar, for assuredly, the names, in so far as they are concerned, are not there, but the images, in so far as *they* are, are there in full array, so that you may rediscover in them all that I have announced since the paternal metaphor.

There is a boy, his head blocked out against a small stone altar. Take one of the two paintings of the scene by Caravaggio. The child is suffering, he grimaces, and Abraham's knife is raised above him. The angel, the angel is there, the presence of him whose name is not pronounced.

What is an angel? That is another question that we will not have to deal with together. It would, however, have rather amused me to have you laugh at my last dialogue with Father Teilhard de Chardin. *Father, concerning those angels, how do you arrange to remove them from the Bible, what with your ascent of consciousness, and all that follows from it?* I thought it would make him cry. *But come now, are you really speaking seriously to me? I take account of the texts, especially when it is a question of the Scriptures on which, in theory, your faith is based.* As for that angel, here he is



Caravaggio. The Sacrifice of Isaac. c. 1595–1600, (Detail.)

now, accompanied or not by Father Teilhard's consent, restraining Abraham's arm. Whatever be the case with that angel, it is indeed in the name of *El Shadday* that he is there. It is in that name that he has been seen traditionally. And it is in that name that the pathos of the drama into which Kierkegaard draws us ensues. For consider that prior to that restraining gesture, Abraham has brought a boy to the site of a mysterious encounter, and once there, he has bound his hand to his feet like a ram for the sacrifice.

Before waxing emotional, as is customary on such occasions, we might remember that sacrificing one's little boy to the local *Elohim* was quite common at the time — and not only at the time, for it continued so late that it was constantly necessary for the Angel of the Name, or the prophet speaking in the name of the Name to stop the Israelites, who were about to start it up again.

Let us look at things further on. The son, we are told, is his only son. It's not true. There is Ishmael, who is already fourteen at the time. But it is a fact that Sarah, until she reached age 90, revealed herself to be infertile, and that was the reason that Ishmael was born from the patriarch's cohabitation with a slave. *El Shadday's* power is proven by the fact that he was the one who drew Abraham out of the world of his brothers and his peers — it's quite amusing upon reading to realize, once one calculates the years, that many were still alive. Since Sem had had his children at the age of thirty and lived five hundred years, and since in his lineage, children were had at age thirty, they had just reached no more than the four-hundredth birthday of Sem at the time that Abraham had Isaac. Well, not everyone likes reading the way I do.

Whatever the case, *El Shadday* has indeed also had something to do with this child of a miracle, for, after all, Sarah has said as much: *I am withered*. It is clear that menopause exists, Isaac is thus the child of the miracle, of the promise. It's thus easy to imagine that Abraham holds him dearly. Sarah dies a short while afterwards. At that time, there are a lot of people surrounding Abraham, in particular Ishmael, who happens to be there for reasons which are unexplained. The patriarch shows himself to be a formidable progenitor. He marries another woman, Ketorah. If my memory serves me well, he has six children with her; he doesn't lose any time. Only those children have not received the *brachah*, like the child of she who carried him in the name of *El Shadday*.

El Shadday is not almighty; I could show you a thousand demonstrations of it in the Bible. At the borders of the territory of his people, should a different *Elohim* from Moab come up with the right trick allowing his subjects to repel their assailants, it works, and *El Shadday* decamps with the tribes that brought him along for the attack. *El Shadday* is he who chooses, he who promises, who causes a certain covenant — which is transmissible in only one way, through the paternal *barachah* — to pass through his name. He is also he who makes one wait, who makes a son be awaited for up to ninety years, who makes one wait for many another thing more. I would have shown you.

Don't reproach me for having made too short shrift a while ago of Abraham's feelings, for, upon opening a little book that dates from the end of the eleventh century by one Rashi, otherwise known as Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, an Ashkenaze of France, you would be able to read some strange commentaries. You know that this Rashi doesn't read a text line by line, but rather point by point. You would be quite astonished to hear him give voice to a latent dialogue sung between Abraham and God, who is what is at stake in the angel. When Abraham learns from the angel that he is not there in order to immolate Isaac, Rashi has him say: *What then? If that is what is going on, have I thus come here for nothing? I am at least going to give him a slight wound to make him shed a little blood. Would you like that?* This is not my invention. It comes rather from an extremely pious Jew, whose commentaries, in the tradition of the Mishnah, are held in high regard. So there we are with one son and then two fathers.

Is that all there is? Fortunately our cutout figure is there in order to remind us — in the more sumptuous form of the Caravaggio painting — that that is not all there is. There is one such painting in which he is to the right, and in



Caravaggio. The Sacrifice of Isaac.

which you will find that head that I introduced here last year, invisibly, in the form of the *Shofar*, the ram's horn, which has been undeniably torn from him.

I won't have the opportunity to examine symbolic values in any depth for you, but I would like to conclude with what that ram is. It is not true that it figures as a metaphor of the father at the level of phobia. Phobia is no more than its return, which is what Freud said referring to the totem. Man has not all that much reason to be proud at being the last to appear in creation, the one who was made out of mud, something no other being was worthy of, and so he searches for honorable ancestors, and that is where we still are—as evolutionists, we need an animal ancestor.

I won't tell you the passages I have consulted, be it in the *Mishna*, specifically the Guirgueavotchi—I mention it for those whom it may interest, since it is not as big as the *Talmud*, and you can consult it, it's been translated into French—then in Rashi. Those are the only two references I wanted to give today. Rashi is briefest in explaining that according to Rabbinic tradition, the ram in question is the primeval ram. It was there, he writes, as early as the seven days of creation, which designates it as what it is, that is, an *Elohim*—for it is not only he whose name is unpronounceable who was there, but in the clearest fashion, all the *Elohim*. The latter is traditionally recognized as the ancestor of the race of Sem, he who links Abraham, through a rather short path, to origins. That ram with tangled horns rushes into a thicket—I would have liked to show you in that site of the thicket something which is the object of extensive commentary elsewhere—, it rushes onto the site of the sacrifice, and it is worth noting what it comes to graze on when he whose name is unpronounceable designates it for the sacrifice that Abraham is to perform in place of his son. It is his eponymous ancestor, the God of his race.

Here may be marked the knife blade separating God's bliss from what in that tradition is presented as his desire. The thing whose downfall it is a matter of provoking is biological origin. That is the key to the mystery, in which may be read the aversion of the Jewish tradition concerning what exists everywhere else. The Hebrew hates the metaphysico-sexual rites which unite in celebration the community to God's erotic bliss. He accords special value to the gap separating desire and fulfillment. The symbol of that gap we find in the same context of *El Shadday's* relation to Abraham, in which, primordially, is born the law of circumcision, which gives as a sign of the covenant between the people and the desire of he who has chosen them what?—that little piece of flesh sliced off.

It is with that *petit a*, to whose introduction I had led you last year, along with a few hieroglyphics bearing witness to the customs of the Egyptian people, that I shall leave you.

In closing, I shall say to you only that if I interrupt this seminar, I don't do so without apologizing to those who, for many years, have been my faithful audience here. And yet it is certain individuals from among its ranks who are now

turning that impress against me, fed on the words and concepts I have taught them, learned on the paths and ways on which I have led them.

In one of those occasionally confused discussions in the course of which a group, our own, found itself tossed this way and that midst its eddies, an individual, one of my students, felt himself obliged—I apologize to him for having to deprecate his effort, which assuredly could have had echoes, and bring the discussion back to an analytic level—felt himself obliged to say that the meaning of my teaching would be that the veritable import of the truth is that one can never get hold of it.

What an incredible misinterpretation! What childish impatience! Must I indeed have people who are designated—one can only wonder why—as cultured among those most immediately within reach of following me! Where can you find a science—and even mathematics—in which each chapter does not lead on to the next one! But is that the same thing as justifying a metonymic function of truth? Could you not see that as I advanced, I was perpetually approaching a specific point of density to which, without the preceding steps, you could not arrive? At hearing such a rejoinder, are there not grounds for invoking the attributes of infatuation and stupidity, the kind of mind composed of the litter that one picks up working in editorial committees?

Concerning the praxis which is analysis, I have sought to articulate how I seek it, and how I lay hold on it. Its truth is mobile, disappointing, slippery. Are you not up to understanding that this is because the praxis of analysis is obliged to advance toward a conquest of the truth *via* the paths of deception? For the transference is nothing else—the transference into what has no name in the place of the Other.

For a long time now, the name of Freud has not stopped becoming increasingly nonfunctional. So that, if my itinerary is progressive, and even if it is prudent, is it not because that which I have to encourage you against is that toward which analysis constantly risks sliding—namely, imposture.

I am not here in a plea for myself. I should, however, say, that—having, for two years, entirely confided to others the execution, within a group, of a policy, in order to leave to what I had to tell you its space and its purity—I have never, at any moment, given any pretext for believing that there was not, for me, any difference between yes and no.⁵

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Text established by Jacques-Alain Miller

5. The failed policy of seeking integration into the IPA had been implemented by three analysts—Serge Leclaire, Wladimir Granoff, and François Perrier—known as the “troika.” It was Granoff himself who ultimately penned the motion to deny Lacan his status as “titular” member. The affirmation of the difference between yes and no is intended to underscore the absurdity of Lacanian analysts joining to eliminate Lacan from their ranks.