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The Purloined Poe

Lacan, Derrida
& Psychoanalytic
Reading

Edited by
*John P. Muller &
William J. Richardson*

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3. and structures our desire by articulating and thus fragmenting it.
- B. Because our message returns to us in inverted form,
 1. a letter always reaches its destination.

5 *Lacan's Seminar on "The Purloined Letter": Notes to the Text*

The first of each pair of page numbers below refers to the English translation of Lacan's seminar by Mehlman (Lacan 1972b) as it is reprinted in this book (chap. 2), and the second refers to the French version in *Ecrits* (Lacan 1966a). The letters designate the paragraph, beginning from the top of each page. For other references to *Ecrits*, the first page number refers to the English translation by Alan Sheridan (Lacan 1977) and the second to the French original (1966a).

28/11 The epigraph is from the "Witches' Kitchen" scene of Part One of Goethe's *Faust* (lines 2458–60), which Kaufmann translates:

And if we score hits
And everything fits,
It's thoughts that we feel.

(Goethe 1963, 245)

Why does Lacan begin with this quotation? He does not tell us. We can wonder, however, about the correlation in Freud and Lacan between "es" and the unconscious and take these lines to suggest that our views and behavior are governed by unconscious processes. (The source of the

quotation was identified by Don Eric Levine, Department of Comparative Literature, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.)

28a/11a Experience is inscribed semiotically on many levels, some of which, given repression, are not directly available to consciousness. Such unconscious inscription repeatedly insists on being recognized through dream images, fantasies, parapraxes, and so forth, but is experienced as foreign to and decentered from the conscious ego. The French text has "excentrique" for what the English translates as "eccentric" and indicates that the "subject of the unconscious" occupies a place whose center is other than that of the conscious ego. For further elaboration of the Lacanian subject, see Richardson (1983a).

28b/11b The seminar will show that whatever relations individuals maintain, however they represent themselves to one another, all of these are subordinate to the position and structure given them by the symbolic order.

28c/11c The word *Prägung* denotes the impression of an image stamped on a coin. The French text says the imaginary impregnations give the signifying (not "symbolic") chain its "allure," more than is given by the English translation's use of "appearance." This would refer to the attracting, captivating qualities of images.

These "psychoanalytic effects" are defined and clarified in Laplanche and Pontalis (1973). *Foreclosure* is the central mechanism in psychosis whereby a central signifier fails to be inscribed in the unconscious; *repression* itself is a failure in translation from one level of inscription to another; denial (better translated "denegation" for *la dénegation*) involves the use of the signifier "not" in order to maintain the mechanism of repression while allowing its content to enter consciousness. The word *Entstellung* more properly means "distortion" and is used by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. There he describes the process of dream formation, one of whose twin governing principles is that of displacement (*Verschiebung*). Lacan is emphasizing that these fundamental psychological processes are structured by the concatenation of signifiers (the chaining of linguistic elements) and not by the parade of images (with which they are conjoined), whose presence serves primarily to cast shadows or reflections rather than give direction or meaning to the process.

29e/12c In *Le séminaire: Livre II* (Lacan 1978b [1954–55]), when Lacan first presented his analysis of "The Purloined Letter" (225–40), he devoted several sessions to "the even and the odd" (207–24). We refer to this discussion in the Overview (chap. 3).

29h/12f The text here uses the rhetorical device of repetition: without narration, the action would be "invisible," the speech devoid of meaning; in other words, nothing of the drama would be comprehensible to sight or sound ("ne pourrait apparaître ni à la prise de vues, ni à la prise de sons"). Thus we prefer to translate the French *outré que* not as "aside from the fact that," but rather as "moreover, that the dialogue," thus setting up the meaning/sound pair to parallel the action/sight pairing.

Rather than "without, dare we say, the twilighting which the narration, in each scene, casts on the point of view," we prefer to translate as "without the twilighting, dare we say, which the narration of the point of view gives to each scene" ("sans l'éclairage à jour frisant, si l'on peut dire, que la narration donne à chaque scène du point de vue." The "twilighting" echoes Dupin's not lighting the lamp at the beginning of the story.

30a/12g The English "and by no means inadvertently" translates "et non pas par inattention." The same word (*l'inattention*) is repeated in the following paragraph as a feature of the King; Lacan here is (perhaps "inadvertently," shall we say?) tracing both a negation of and an identification with the position of the King. Lacan's knowing/not knowing will take on some importance in the critical pieces to follow.

The designation "primal scene" ("scène primitive") may be an allusion to what has been called a "classic essay" (Most and Stowe 1983, 13), namely, "Detective Stories and the Primal Scene," by Geraldine Pederson-Krag, first published in the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* in 1949 (reprinted in Most and Stowe 1983, 14–20).

30e/13d "The Purloined Letter" (1844) is the third and final detective story involving Dupin, following "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842). Therefore it is not the "second time" that Dupin's "specific genius for solving enigmas" is introduced by Poe, as Lacan says here and repeats later (33c/16g).

31b/14b The English word "gaudily" translates "retenant l'oeil de quelque clinquant." This lure of the eye proper to the imaginary order is, as it were, checked by Dupin, whose eyes are "protected" by green glasses, underlining his ability to correctly "read" the situation from another perspective (that of the symbolic order). The contrasts between light/darkness, deception/seeing occur throughout the Poe story. Dupin's first quoted words in the story are: "If it is any point requiring reflection . . . we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

31d/14d The phrase "quotient of the operation" repeats words used in an earlier paragraph, "an operation . . . whose quotient" (30c/13b).

That usage was followed (30d/13c) by the word "remainder" (*reste*; italicized in French). Here the use of "remainder" is absent in the English, but it appears in the French as a verb: "ce qui lui reste en main." Lacan considers the action of the thief (the Minister in scene 1, Dupin in scene 2) under the rubric of an arithmetic operation—namely division, from which there results a quotient in each case (the changed position of the former occupant of the letter) as well as a remainder (the substituted letters). Such "mathematization" of the action of the two scenes, giving them an identical structure, supports the thesis he next develops that the "similitude" between the two goes well beyond the collection of common "traits" and rests instead on what he calls "the intersubjective complex" (32f/15h).

Mehlman (Lacan 1972b, 43) notes: " 'So infamous a scheme, / If not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes.' The lines from Atreus's monologue in Act V, Scene V, of Crébillon's play refer to his plan to avenge himself by serving his brother the blood of the latter's own son to drink." 31e/14e The French text refers not to "two sequences" but rather to "deux actions," and it is *their* differences that would be deleted by a self-serving selection of common traits. Such post hoc listing of descriptive features, discredited in a structuralist framework, is no guarantee of any truth. Truth can emerge only from structural laws of transformation (see Piaget's *Structuralism* [1970]).

The English "through which it structures them" suffers from a chronic problem in translating Lacan, namely, the ambiguity of pronouns. Here the "it" refers to intersubjectivity, while "them" refers to the two actions. In the next paragraph the "it" refers to "the decision" that deals out the subjects to the three places ("sujets qu'elle départage," translated in the English by "the subjects among whom it constitutes a choice," which is somewhat confusing, since, as assigned, the subjects precisely have *no* choice).

32a/15c We prefer to read that the maneuvers following the decisive moment add nothing to the glance moment. For a useful summary of Lacan's earlier essay on time, see Wilden (1981, 105, n. 47).

32f/15h Mehlman (Lacan 1972b, 44) notes: "*La politique de l'autruiche* condenses ostrich (*autruche*), other people (*autrui*), and (the politics of) Austria (*Autriche*)."

32g/15i Although "modulus" (which correctly translates the French "module") denotes mathematical properties, it is perhaps more simply rendered as "module" (as in the French, "Le module intersubjectif"). This

would signify the interchangeability of the repeated actions, but at the cost of not emphasizing its mathematical properties ("modulus" being defined as "some constant multiplier, coefficient, or parameter involved in a given function of a variable quantity, by means of which the function is accommodated to a particular system or base" (Webster's unabridged dictionary, 1980 edition).

32h/16a For further elaboration of the phrase "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other," see Muller and Richardson (1982, 110–11, 116, 209, 368). Its laconic use here calls attention to the essentially intersubjective character of unconscious processes. The notion of the "immixture of subjects" was featured by Lacan in his essay "Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever" (1972a) and was introduced earlier in his discussion of the Irma dream in Seminar II (1978b, 192), where it is given the following sense: "An unconscious phenomenon that unfolds on a symbolic plane, as such decentered in relation to the ego, takes place always between two subjects." For an interpretation of Lacan's analysis of the Irma dream (in contrast to Erikson's analysis of the same dream) see Richardson (1983a).

32j/16c At the end of this paragraph the French text makes the first of its six breaks. Lacan returns to this theme (of the subjects' replacing each other) after the fourth break (44b/30c).

33e/17b One critic has remarked: "We ought to have been warned by the very name Dupin (which does not quite conceal the French verb meaning 'to dupe')" (Most 1983, 344).

33f/17c For the phrase "that everyone is being duped" the French text has "que tout le monde soit joué," calling attention to the "play" of language, whether as the "jeu des signifiants" (Lacan 1977, 196/551) in the history of a given subject or the "jeu combinatoire" (1973, 24) of the science of linguistics. The notion of our being "played with" or "played out" by language is a recurrent theme for Lacan. He repeats the verb "jouer" three times on the next page (1966a, 18).

34f/18d Here the "it" refers to "but a single meaning." The point seems to be that because the Prefect is literal minded and misses shades of ambiguity, the overall effect on the reader of his deafness to Dupin's remarks is to minimize the importance of the apparently incidental comments, for example, about the Minister being a poet and a fool, as context that provides meaning for the dialogue (see the Poe text earlier).

35c/19c Benveniste (1971, 54) describes the communication of bees as "not a language but a signal code," because the subject matter is fixed,

because the message is invariable and related to a single set of circumstances, because of its "unilateral transmission," and because it is impossible to separate the message's components.

Lacan later specified that a point-to-point visual correspondence is characteristic of functions in the imaginary order (1978a, 86). The communication of bees, Lacan wrote earlier, "is distinguished from language precisely by the fixed correlation of its signs to the reality that they signify" (1977, 84/297). He adds, furthermore, that the bee's message is never retransmitted. This much, at least, the Prefect is capable of doing, since he is a speaking human.

35e-f/19e-f Rather than translating as "by those traits in the individual each of the two resist," we can read "by those traits of being which each of the two shun" ("par les traits de l'être auquel l'une et l'autre se refusent"). The point here seems to be that there is a type of identification with a denied (hated) or idealized (loved) feature that binds individuals: such communion is governed primarily by the imaginary order and is not, as such, articulable.

There may be an allusion here to Gustave Le Bon, who wrote in 1895: "A crowd thinks in images, and the image itself immediately calls up a series of other images, having no logical connection with the first" (1960, 41). Le Bon described the individual in a crowd as follows: "We see, then, that the disappearance of the conscious personality, the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction, the tendency immediately to transform the suggested ideas into acts; these, we see, are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd" (32). In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) Freud reviewed Le Bon's work and specified the mechanism of identification with a common object or quality. Summarizing, and comparing group psychology with being in love and hypnosis, Freud writes: "*The group* multiplies this process; it agrees with hypnosis in the nature of the instincts which hold it together, and in the replacement of the ego ideal by the object; but to this it adds identification with other individuals, which was perhaps originally made possible by their having the same relation to the object" (1955b, 143).

35g/19g Speech repeats signifiers (not natural signs), and so do symptoms.

35h/19h The English "sifts out" translates the French "décante," meaning to pour off gently, separate, or simplify. The narrative act gives us,

Lacan says, a ready access to the linguistic dimension in part I of the story, but in contrast the second narration is full of verbal tricks.

35j/20b Lacan creates a parallel between first dialogue (Prefect and Dupin)—speech—exactitude and second dialogue (Dupin and friend)—word—truth. The relation of signifier to speech is one of impoverishment ("dépouillement," translated as "state of privation"), insofar as one cannot ascertain the truth simply in this relation; truth exists in between speaking subjects; it is dialogic and presupposes the Other, a structural perspective not reducible to an aspect of oneself or to a mirroring of oneself (and hence "absolute").

The initial dialogue between the Prefect and Dupin is marked by the pretension to "exactitude" (even down to the "fiftieth part of a line"), while the subsequent dialogue between Dupin and the narrator opens up the process of truth as concealment and unconcealment insofar as we are or are not duped by Dupin's words. (For they too might prompt us to ask, as in Freud's joke, "Why are you lying to me?")

Mehlman (Lacan 1972b, 49) notes: "Freud comments on this joke in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1960a, 115 [1905]): 'But the more serious substance of the joke is what determines the truth. . . . Is it the truth if we describe things as they are without troubling to consider how our hearer will understand what we say? . . . I think that jokes of that kind are sufficiently different from the rest to be given a special position: What they are attacking is not a person or an institution but the certainty of our knowledge itself, one of our speculative possessions.' Lacan's text may be regarded as a commentary on Freud's statement, an examination of the corrosive effect of the demands of an intersubjective communicative situation on any naive notion of 'truth.'"

36b/20c The word *éristiques* means disputatious or marked by spurious reasoning.

Lacan's discrediting of the witness (who presumably possesses a kind of one-to-one fidelity and exactitude that blinds us to the register of truth) whose testimony cannot be criticized may be a reference to Marie Bonaparte, who appears to be the subject of a derisory footnote later in the text (48/36). For a brief historical survey of her role in Lacan's "excommunication" from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1953, see Turkle (1978).

36d/20c An alternative reading is that by relying solely on visual identification "he cannot reach the first level of his mental elaboration." As in Freud's joke, you can't figure it out if you remain locked solely in a dual

relation, for you must invoke the symbolic dimension of the Other (in this case, to formulate rules of sequencing).

36e/20f François duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613–80) is the author of moral maxims and witty epigrams. Lacan refers to him with favor in earlier texts (1977, 54, 119/264, 407).

Jean de La Bruyère (1645–96) translated Theophrastus from the classical Greek, wrote character sketches and maxims as a social critic, defended the classics, and was a member of the French Academy.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) replaced mercenaries with a citizens' army in the Republic of Florence in 1506. He wrote *The Prince* in 1532. Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639) was a Dominican philosopher. His utopian *Civitas solis* (*The City of the Sun*) is modeled on Plato's *Republic*. His emphasis on perception and experimentation anticipated scientific empiricism.

Sebastien Roch Nicolas Chamfort (1740–94) is another French author of maxims and epigrams.

We are indebted for this and other information to *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, 1975 edition.

36f/21b Among other meanings, according to Lewis and Short (1955), *ambitus* can mean a going-around or periphery, *religio* is conscientiousness or exactness, and *honesti* means respectable or becoming. Clearly Lacan himself is having a good time here and is implicated in Dupin's charge that the mathematicians "have insinuated the term 'analysis' into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this particular deception," with Lacan taking the lead in using topology and set theory in conceptualizing psychoanalysis.

37b/21c The French text (1966a, at least in the later printings) has the following note regarding the "master words": "Regarding these three words, I had at first considered the meaning each would have as a commentary on the story, in case its structure was not enough. But I dropped these unfinished hints for this edition when I reread my essay; moreover, someone told me too late that someone else has done it in a more explicit way—he can have a place off this page."

37d/21e The French text has the Greek word *alēthēs*, literally, the "un-concealed." The phrase "the play of truth" translates "le jeu de la vérité." See M. Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth" (1977, 113–41).

37e/21–22a This paragraph abounds in alliteration in French (e.g., "la tentative contre la tentation contraire").

37h/22c The point is not of earthshaking importance, but the fact is that the Prefect does not suffer from a "false distribution of the middle

term," as far as we can see. His argument would seem to be: All poets are fools. But the Minister is a poet. Therefore, the Minister is ["one remove from"] a fool. The major premise may be untrue, but the middle term ("poets") is at least properly "distributed," that is, it covers all members of the class it denotes in at least one premise (here, the major). The conclusion may be false, but the reasoning is correct. Dupin's version ("All fools are [some] poets. . . . Therefore all poets are [some] fools") does indeed involve a sloppy "distribution," but since it is unduly attributed to the poor prefect, who already has quite enough troubles of his own, it may say more about the pretentiousness of Dupin than about the poor reasoning of the prefect.

38c/23c John Wilkins (1614–72) was an English mathematician and philosopher who wrote *Mathematical Magic* (1648) and probed the nature of language as the crucial epistemological issue for science. For an extensive review of his ideas, see Aarsleff (1982). *Roget's International Thesaurus* (1961 edition) includes "nullibicity, nullibiety, and nullibility" as synonyms for "nowhereness" under the heading "Absence." The "Roget" here also alludes to the second Dupin story.

38e/24a The signifier "materializes the agency of death" insofar as, according to Lacan following Hegel (see Kojève 1969, 140 ff.), the word is "the murder of the thing" (Lacan 1977, 104/319). The word negates the immediate physical presence of things by providing them with a symbolic presence that enables things to become articulable and subject to mediated relationships. Words enable things to be substitutes in desire; but words also thereby constitute a distance from things. For further elaboration see Paz (1981) and Muller and Richardson (1982, 120). Lacan quotes Saint Paul, "the letter killeth while the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6) in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1977, 158/509).

Instead of "The vitalism informing its notion of the whole," the translation should read "The vitalism inhabited by its notion of the whole" (i.e., "vitalisme larvé de sa notion du tout"). For an elaboration of the role of "the whole" in Gestalt theory, see Kanizsa (1979). Lacan appears to say that the letter's indivisibility is not due to the unifying dynamism forming wholes in Gestalt theory.

In his footnote to this paragraph, Lacan refers to philosophical arguments "à partir de l'un et du plusieurs," meaning the perennial problem of "the one and the many," beginning with Parmenides (see Kirk and Raven 1983) and crystallized in Plato's *Parmenides* (see Cornford 1957). The issues at stake are the relation of beings to Being, creatures to the

Creator, individuation, the changing world as illusory veil covering an unchanging reality, and so forth.

38c n.7/23n.1 Borges's interest in detective fiction is noted by Holquist (1983, 171–72). Borges has his detective Lönnrot compare himself to Dupin in the opening paragraph of "Death and the Compass" (1967, 1).

39d/24d Earlier in the *Discourse at Rome* Lacan described the word as "a presence made of absence" (1977, 65/276). This will have relevance for Derrida's critique of "phallogocentrism" and its presumed "metaphysics of presence."

39e/25a Space "sheds its leaves" (*s'effeuiller*) insofar as it is stripped by the police, like a tree losing its leaves or a book being stripped of its pages (also *feuilles* in French).

39f/25b Once again, the antecedents of the pronouns and possessives may be ambiguous. The way the police view the real tends to transform it (the real as space "shedding its leaves") into the object of their search, namely the letter. By thus objectifying the letter in their realist way, they hope to find it located among other objects and to differentiate it from them. The French text has "perhaps would be able to distinguish" ("peut-être ils pourraient"). Of course, it is their literalness that blinds them to the letter's presence once its appearance has been altered (or so we are led to believe).

40a/25c The key proposition should read: "For it can *literally* be said that something is missing from its place only of what can change its place, only of the symbolic" ("C'est qu'on ne peut dire *à la lettre* que ceci manque à sa place, que de ce qui peut en changer, c'est-à-dire du symbolique"). The real has no relations (for some elaboration of the Lacanian notion of the real see Richardson 1985, 1987; Muller 1987); the imaginary has point-to-point fixed relations; the symbolic has arbitrary, multi-level relations that allow what was formerly of the real to enter symbolic articulation.

40b/25d The French word *saisir* (translated by "seized") can be translated by "grasped" to connote the sense of "comprehended" as distinct from "took." The police picked up the letter in their physical search of the Minister's premises without grasping that it was what they were after.

• Lacan devoted attention to Joyce in his 1975–76 seminar titled "Le sinthome."

40d/26c "The signifier is not functional" with regard to simply com-

municating a message. Lacan had written, in the *Discourse at Rome*, "The function of language is not to inform but to evoke" (1977, 86/299).

41a/26e The letter would not be incomprehensible to the King, the Prefect insists, were he to read it. The reference to Ubu recalls the figure in the play *Ubu Roi* by Albert Jarry (1873–1907), first presented publicly in 1896 and judged to be the first play in the theatre of the absurd (other Ubu plays followed). The character of Ubu grew out of a student's spoof (Lycée de Rennes, 1888) and came to symbolize the quintessence of egotistical, and eminently stupid, power. Jarry influenced the dadaists and surrealists (see LaBelle 1980).

41c/26g The Latin phrase "Scripta manent sed verba volant" ("What is written remains but spoken words fly away") is a legal maxim with no author attribution (Mencken 1942, 1328).

41d/27b Mehlman (Lacan 1972b, 56–57) notes:

The original sentence presents an exemplary difficulty in translation: "Les écrits emportent au vent les traites en blanc d'une cavalerie folle." The blank (bank) drafts (or transfers) are not delivered to their rightful recipients (the sense of *de cavalerie*, *de complaisance*). That is: in analysis, one finds absurd symbolic debts being paid to the "wrong" persons. At the same time, the mad, driven quality of the payment is latent in *traite*, which might also refer to the day's trip of an insane cavalry. In our translation, we have displaced the "switch-word"—joining the financial and equestrian series—from *traite* to *charge*.

Flying leaves (also fly-sheets) and *purloined letters*—*feuilles volantes* and *lettres volées*—employ different meanings of the same word in French.

41e/27c The second break in the French text occurs just before this paragraph.

The Chevalier d'Eon was Charles de Beaumont (1728–1810), an officer and spy of Louis XV stationed at the courts of Russia and London. He first disguised himself as a woman in Russia in order to gain access to the empress and subsequently "disguised" himself as a man. Recalling him later from London, where his gallantries risked compromising the English court, the French government insisted that he maintain his female disguise and that he surrender certain compromising papers. He had maintained a confidential correspondence with Louis XV on political matters and left behind his thirteen-volume *Loisirs du Chevalier d'Eon* (1755). Lacan may also be referring to correspondence published in Paris in 1758 titled "Pièces relatives aux démêlés entre Mademoiselle d'Eon de Beaumont, chevalier de l'Ordre royal & militaire de Saint Louis & minis-

tre plénipotentiaire de France, &c. &c. &c. et le Sieur Caron, dit de Beaumarchais &c. &c. &c" (Pierre Augustin Caron de, 1732–99). After his death a physical examination proved he was in fact a man (see Cox 1961).

42c/28b Earlier Lacan wondered if the letter's addressee were not its true recipient (*le vrai destinataire*); here he appears to be saying that whoever the letter is addressed to is its recipient (*sa destinataire*). Are we to distinguish, then, apparent or temporary recipient from "final" or "true" recipient?

42e/28d For "compounded," the French has "doubled" (*doubler*). The theme of treason (*trahison*) is repeated on the next page when Lacan charges Baudelaire with having betrayed Poe (*a trahi Poe*).

43b/29b *The Oxford English Dictionary* indeed has the following in its entry for "purloin": "AF [Anglo-French] *purloigner* = OF [Old French] *porloigner* . . . , {formed on} *por-, pur-* : -L[atin] *pro* - + *loing, loin* : -L. *longe* far; hence, 'to put far off or far away, to put away, to do away with.' The sense 'make away with, steal' appears to be of English development."

43e/30a For the phrase "the subject must pass through the channels of the symbolic," the French text has "le sujet suit la filière du symbolique." The word "filière" means an implement with holes for making vermicelli and also a spinneret and, by extension, a channel, series, or ordeal. Lacan repeats the same verb (*suivra*) in the following paragraph when he says everything will follow the path of the signifier.

44b/30c We left "our drama and its round" on 32j/16c–d with the first break in the French text.

44d/30e The dual relation in which the Minister is captivated is with the Prefect: The Prefect's way is to search for what is presumably hidden in secret recesses, and this is mirrored by the Minister, who acts as if he has nothing to hide; that is, who finds a way to hide it without recourse to secret recesses—his best defense, as long as no one else comes along to question the initial premise. In the French text "And what does he fail to see?" continues the preceding paragraph and is not set off separately as in the English.

44g/31c Mehlman (Lacan 1972b, 61) notes: "*Autruicherie* condenses, in addition to the previous terms [see note 32f], deception (*tricherie*)."

44h/31d Here begins the most obscure part of Lacan's Seminar. What is at stake is his view of the relations between "woman" and language as well as between women and men. This vast topic can be further explored

in the following: Mitchell and Rose (1982), Gallop (1982), Irigaray (1985), Marks and Courtivron (1981), and de Lauretis (1984).

A broad paraphrase may orient the reader: what is concealed by veiling "woman" (a construct of our phallogocentric discourse and desire) is castration, taken as the condition of radical human finitude.

45c/31g In Poe's story the letter is a sign of the Queen's disloyalty to the King and thereby places her "outside the law." The position of woman as signifier recalls Lévi-Strauss's thesis (e.g., 1969, 496) regarding the prohibition of incest: that the origin of language and culture involved establishing pacts by means of the exchange of women between groups (for whom the women then symbolized the pacts). But this assumes that women occupied a distinct place before the establishment of such pacts, a place therefore prior to or "outside" the ensuing law.

Woman's "simulation of mastery in inactivity" ("simulation de la maîtrise du non-agir") places the issue of woman's "passivity" into an active, determining, tactical context; it thus is not to be taken as a "biological given."

45e/31i Mehlman (Lacan 1972b, 62) quotes from Plato's *Meno*:

[Socrates,] At this moment I feel you are exercising magic and witchcraft upon me and positively laying me under your spell until I am just a mass of helplessness. If I may be flippant, I think that not only in outward appearance but in other respects as well you are exactly like the flat sting ray that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes into contact with it, it numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now. (Plato 1963, 363)

45h/32d The biblical reference is presumably to Matt. 18:6–9.

46d/33c The "narcissistic relation" is enacted in the mirroring of consciousnesses as expressed in "The robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber," one of whose imaginary features is taken to be the attribution of absolute mastery supposedly leading to immediate action.

47a/33d For "in fact" the French reads *réellement*.

47d/34c By "return of the repressed" we understand the survival of a signifying system, that is (here), the dynamic power of the triadic module in which the Minister, having defeated the Queen's strategy, falls victim to the letter's influence.

1960.12/34n.1 Poe's story appeared in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* in November 1844 (not 1841, as Lacan notes) following its 1844 publica-

tion in the American annual *The Gift* (Mabbott 1978, 3:972).
 46d-e/36a Mehlman (Lacan 1972b, 67 n. 38) uses the metaphor of rape to interpret these two paragraphs. We suggest another reading: the Queen's letter, forgotten and repressed in its non-use by the Minister, occupies and transforms him so that he acts like the Queen. Just as a name stretches over an entire region on a map, signs of the Minister's transformation pervade his apartment like an immense female body, serving to camouflage the letter's presence.

48f/36b This paragraph receives further attention in later papers. At this point it may be argued that Lacan's dramatization presents a parody of Marie Bonaparte's approach that culminates in his footnote to this paragraph, a footnote that Lacan added to his text after the original publication in *La Psychanalyse* (1956), where it does not appear.

In her own book on Poe, Marie Bonaparte gives her résumé of "The Purloined Letter," quotes the Poe text in French, and corrects Baudelaire's translation by stating: "L'inexactitude de la traduction de Baudelaire, en ce qui concerne cette phrase, apparaît. En particulier, *beneath* (*au-dessous*), y est rendu par *au-dessus*, qu'il ne saurait en aucun cas signifier" (1933, 600). Her footnote is omitted from the English translation that appears later in this book (chap. 6).

A chimney and mantelpiece figure prominently in Marie Bonaparte's earliest reported dream (Bertin 1982, 28, 160).

The fifth break in the French text occurs here.

49a/36c In doubting that the effectiveness of symbols ends "there" where Marie Bonaparte left her psychoanalytic reading of Poe, Lacan is also, in his allusion to Lévi-Strauss (he made the same allusion elsewhere, e.g., 1977, 3/95), making his own this much of the structuralist position. He refers to the symbolic "debt" in the *Discourse at Rome* (1977, 67/278).

49b/36d The phrase "a closing *pirouette*" translates "un jeu de la fin."

50a/37d Mehlman (Lacan 1972b, 68) notes: "Cf. Corneille, *Le Cid* (2. 2): 'A vaincre sans péril, on triomphe sans gloire' (To vanquish without danger is to triumph without glory)."

50e/38b The French text has *devait rentrer* for "would reenter," and therefore includes the notion of "ought to."

50g/38d "Rex et augur" literally means "king and soothsayer." In ancient Rome the king had priestly duties and dignities. After the kings were expelled the title "rex" continued to be given in religious language to priests who performed these duties, of which soothsaying was one.

50h/38e The word "equivocation" translates *L'ambigüité*, meaning

"ambiguity." As a figure of speech, amphiboly means "Ambiguity arising from the uncertain construction of a sentence or clause, of which the individual words are unequivocal: Thus distinguished by logicians from equivocation, though in popular use the two are confused" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

50i/38f In the *Discourse at Rome* Lacan inquired about the origin of language and noted the function of "lances stuck into the ground" as signifiers of a pact (1977, 61-62/272).

There is an ellipsis here of the verb: the sense of the Latin quotation is that a cobbler should not *go* "beyond his sole." Don Eric Levine provides the following sources for the Latin quotation:

- 1) Pliny *Natural History* 35.85;
- 2) Erasmus *Adgia* 1.6.16, "Let not the shoemaker go beyond his shoe [or last]."
- 3) *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.2.39: "It is written that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil and the painter with his nets."
- 4) The entry in Larousse presents these as words spoken by a painter in response to a shoemaker's criticisms of how he painted a sandal.

51a/39a Rather than "to forge its proofs," the French text has *en forger . . . les preuves*, "to forge their proofs." The sense here seems to be that liberal humanism has quickly been followed by (and perhaps as a result) statist revisioning of history.

51e/39e The French word translated by "gambler" is *joueur*. For Lacan's discussion of automaton and *tychē*, see Lacan (1973, 51-54). The sixth and final break in the French text occurs at the start of this paragraph.

51g/40a The French text has *L'image de haute volée* for "The prestigious image."

52a/40b For "ladies" the French text has *les dames*.

52c/40e Rhyming with *destin* the French text has *festin* for "feast." In his analysis of the Don Juan legend, Otto Rank devotes a chapter to the motif of the Stone Guest (1975, 61-77). A French revision appeared that incorporated Rank's work on the theme of the double (Rank 1932).

53a/41b For "always arrives at its destination" the French text has "arrive toujours à destination." The English text omits "according to the very formula of intersubjective communication" ("selon la formule même de la communication intersubjective").

This formula is a favorite, for Lacan repeats it (1977, 85/298, 131-132, 305/877). Its sense appears to be that the good listener reso-

nates with what is unconscious in the speaker's conscious communication, and his or her response thus consists in returning to the speaker (by way of "inverting" and making the unconscious conscious) what was left unsaid in what the speaker said (see Muller and Richardson 1982, 83).

T W O

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