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Melancholia, the Pain of Existence and Moral Cowardice

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THE current state of the clinic is entirely given over to dismantling the categories of neurosis, psychosis and perversion and promoting new syndromic continuums reorganised around prescribed medication. In so far as it is still structured by Freud's texts, the psychoanalytic clinic presupposes that these categories are taken into account. So, in psychoanalysis, debates about clinical issues are split between diverging positions that revolve around the question of whether to conserve, abandon, or modify the Freudian categories. The pressure towards prescribed medication varies according to the clinical area in question, and solutions can differ.

I would like to examine the clinical question of melancholia within the framework of these more general concerns. From the psychiatric point of view, the question is under constant review. Not a term goes by without a major conference on the theme of depression, whether chronic or non-chronic, resistant or non-resistant. The sense of novelty is beginning to fade, but these



constant meetings consolidate the new paradigm and seek to extend the new perspective by analogy into neighbouring clinical areas.

At the clinical interface between psychiatry and psychoanalysis, we are no longer at the time of shifting reference points and approaches in relation to the Freudian perspective. We are currently at a new consensus that has been the object of synoptic publications. I will thus begin by putting in place the various factors of displacement that have produced the new homeostasis. We can then read Lacan in order to find the thread of the Freudian aporias once more. After having reread Freud, we will finally sketch out a programme of work that will allow us to reorganise the clinical perspectives of our time in a Freudian way.

The New Consensus

THE time for disagreement is over, and a series of publications on melancholia and depression puts the emphasis on a rediscovered clinical consensus. We can consider D. Widlocher's book, *Logiques de la Depression*,¹ as the example of a presentation that assumes that the debate is essentially closed and the time for synthesis has arrived. It is also an attempt to produce a new construction that overcomes the Freudian aporias by putting different "logics" into play, operating in parallel.

In fact, two logics prevail. One comes from the clinic of prescribed medication, the other stems from the psychoanalytic movement itself. First, we have the steady advance of the partisan movement of American biochemical university psychiatry, the so-called St Louis School. On the basis of the 1962 publication of the seminal article by Donald Klein on *patterns* of reaction to imipramine,² this School has constantly sought to prove that the barrier between neurosis and psychosis, which the efficacy of medication supposedly invalidates, is unfounded. According to the authors, imipramine shows its efficacy, not only in the depressive continuum, focused on an increase in psychomotor retardation, but also in the case of acute anxiety, qualified as episodic. Donald Klein himself notes the way it cuts through the entire nosology.

The descriptive conception of the DSM III draws all its polemical force from this logic. We can read, at one conference or another, the avowed aim of such an approach. For example, in the account of a conference held in 1987 on "New Approaches to Mood Disorders", we read that:

It is certainly one of the fundamental contributions of psychopharmacology to have been able to show the efficacy of treatment

¹ Cf. Widlocher, D., *Logiques de la depression*, Fayard, Paris, 1983.

² Klein, D., "Psychiatric Reaction Patterns to Imipramine", *American Journal of Psychiatry*, No. 119, 1962, pp. 432-38.



previously reserved for classic manic-depressive states for other pathologies, such as dysthymic schizophrenias, but also for behavioural disorders in relation to eating, and putatively neurotic pathologies, as semiologically well-defined as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).³

Establishing the unity of a pathological field on the basis of a trait of repetition is truly ironic. Where Freud saw the death drive at play in the repetition of the game with the bobbin and the *fort/da*, contemporary psychiatry finds the minimal cell of a pure movement of life.

Within the psychoanalytic movement itself, the twist of perspective that privileges the examination of affective deficiencies, which became more and more clearly asserted from the end of the 1950s, has brought about the harmful consequences that Lacan warned us about as early as 1960.⁴

In these years, significant debates took place around early childhood depression. Opinion was divided between the Anna Freudian model of anaclitic depression and the Kleinian model of disorders arising from the depressive position. These two approaches pushed the Freudian reference, centred around the notion of fault and the Other, further and further away.

In the United States, the debate was taken up with a variation. The Anna Freudians would find an *alter ego* in Edith Jacobson, who developed an original position in the line of Karl Abraham and the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute, while avoiding any reference to Melanie Klein. Her theory sought to eliminate questions of fault and guilt, referring instead to an impoverishment of the ego: "I realized as early as 1943 that the emphasis laid upon the guilt problem as the core of the conflict did not do justice to all the cases".⁵ For her, it is a question of distinguishing guilt, a productive element, from an underlying mechanism that is deficient. She distinguished symptoms arising from properly depressive-psychotic processes from those that represent secondary attempts at defence and reparation.

Widlocher is thus correct in underlining that "In the final analysis, the diversity of opinions is not so great as the abundance of publications would have us believe, the same fundamental mechanisms are always under consideration, the differences arise from the way their articulation is envisaged and through the emphasis given to each".⁶ He retains the idea of a basic deficient mechanism from which all eventual constructions founded on guilt secondarily derive. In

3 International Colloquium on "Les Nouvelles orientations dans les troubles de l'humeur", 5-9 April 1987; summary in the review, *Psychiatrie*.

4 Cf. Lacan, J., "Position of the Unconscious", *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. B. Fink, Norton, New York/London, 2006, pp. 703-25.

5 Jacobson, E., *Depression*, International Universities Press, 1976, p. 171.

6 Widlocher, D., *Logiques de la depression*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.



common with the cognitivists, from whom he wishes to distinguish himself, it seems that he sees the experience of depression as fundamentally based on error. His model is thus revealed as a type of “organodynamism” (a term introduced into French Psychiatry by Henry Ey).

Lacan was already isolating the central place assigned to error in Henri Ey’s constructions as early as 1946: “Where would error, and delusion too, lie if patients did not make mistakes! Everything in their assertions and their judgment reveals their errors (interpretations, illusions, etc.) to us”.⁷ Yet, Ey fought against all attempts to reduce hallucination, to an error of perception and sought to displace it by establishing it as an error of belief. Lacan notes: “although he is rightly loath to make of hallucination qua abnormal sensation, ‘an object situated in the sulci of the brain’, he does not hesitate to locate the phenomenon of delusional belief, considered as a deficit phenomenon, in the brain”.⁸

In a similar way, Widlocher goes on to locate the catastrophic experience of the melancholic in the ‘folds of the brain’. For him, the isolation of the experience of stupor engendered by loss fits the animal model of *learned helplessness*. The mechanism can be summed up as follows: a dog can learn to avoid unpleasant excitations; but if, from the start, it is rendered incapable of getting away from them (*helpless*), he cannot then learn to avoid them. Something in him has been broken.

In this way, the Freudian mechanism is rejected for being too complicated: “One cannot say that the child perceives absence, that he reacts with sadness and that this sadness inclines him to become disinterested in what is around him. It must be acknowledged, from the outset, that the confused experience of a lack brings about the response of apathy and disinterest”.⁹ The absence of any development of the ego makes it possible to argue that there cannot be any experience of the subject distinct from that of the organism: “From this we can deduce that the kernel of depression is not the complex mental construction observable in adults, but the elementary response for which anaclitic depression would constitute the infantile prototype”.¹⁰ It is against such organodynamism, whether updated or not, that Lacan sought to uphold the “psychical causality” of the subject as distinct from that of the organism. It is now towards this causality that we must turn, breaking with the consensus and rediscovering the thread of Lacan’s teachings on the Freudian problem of guilt.

⁷ Cf. Ey, H., *Hallucination et Délire*, Alcan, Paris, 1934, cited in “Presentation on Psychical Causality”, *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English, op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁸ Lacan, J., “Presentation on Psychical Causality”, *ibid.*

⁹ Widlocher, D., *Logiques de la dépression, op. cit.*, p. 232.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 233.





The Subject and Its Cause in Melancholia

In fact, there is such a thing as a theory of melancholia in Lacan's teaching. It was established in 1938 and then developed in line with the overall development of his teaching. There are those who have expressed regret at what they see as the brevity of Lacan's comments on mood disorders, forgetting no doubt that such brevity is matched only by that of Freud. In fact, the founder of psychoanalysis only approached the problem explicitly in a few texts: "Mourning and Melancholia" and "The Ego and the Id". The publication in the 1950s of "Manuscript G" and the recent discovery of an unpublished manuscript from his papers on Metapsychology are texts that can be added to the Freudian corpus without their modifying this essential observation.

Manic-depressive psychosis was situated in the differential clinic of psychoses as early as 1938, in *Family Complexes*. Here, Lacan approaches it in a very classical way, as a problem of narcissism, in so far as it comes to make up for what he calls a "specific insufficiency in human vitality".¹¹ At this time, jubilation before the mirror appeared to him to compensate for the prematurity of the organism. When he declares that "certain affective disorders said to be cyclothymic are doubtless governed by a biological rhythm, without their manifestation being separable from an inherent expression of triumph and defeat",¹² his words still bear the mark of Jaspers' influence, distinguishing between the biological rhythm, which refers to the process, and its meaning, stemming from subjective experience.

Almost ten years later, in 1946, this emphasis was radically transformed by a direct reference to the Freudian death drive, which finally puts paid to the Jaspersian references. Lacan, in "Presentation on Psychological Causality", thus considers affective disorder in relation to paranoid knowledge [*connaissance paranoïaque*]: "we see the primordial ego, as essentially alienated, linked to the first sacrifice as essentially suicidal".¹³ Here, the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions of Melanie Klein are presented in a single sentence. Lacan grasps the form of the primitive sacrifice in the *fort/da* and in games of concealment, which are the first games the child plays. "Everyone can see them and yet no one before him had grasped in their iterative character the liberating repetition of all separation and weaning as such that the child assumes in these games. Thanks to Freud we can think of them as expressing the first vibration of the stationary wave of renunciations that scand the history of psychological development".¹⁴ He reminds a psychoanalytic movement fascinated by the

11 Lacan, J., "Les Complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu", *Autres écrits*, Seuil, Paris, 2006, p. 81.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Lacan, J., "Presentation on Psychological Causality", *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English, op. cit.* p. 152.

14 *Ibid.*





development of the ego quite forcefully of the movement Freud qualified as the return to the inanimate, referring to it as a scansion. He also corrects Melanie Klein's point of view, for being too quick to reduce the death drive to aggression against the other. The primitive sacrifice is the sacrifice of the subject; it is the relation to the Other that is paranoiac. In this respect, melancholic suicide appears as the counterpart to unmotivated murder on the paranoid side; it is the point of the structure where the subject shows himself, in so far as he is entirely taken up in the sacrifice, without any other recourse.

From 1953, Lacan introduced the hypothesis of the unconscious structured like a language. In "The Function and the Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", he grasps the relations of Hegelian dialectics and linguistics in the very movement of the originary designation of the thing. The action of the subject in the *fort/da* is exemplary. By naming the emptiness created by the absence of the mother with the help of the alternation of the bobbin's presence and absence, the subject destroys it as object, but constitutes this very action as object by repeating it. "[T]he subject here does not simply master his deprivation by assuming it – he raises his desire to a second power. For his action destroys the object that it causes to appear and disappear by *bringing about* its absence and presence in advance. His action thus negativises the force field of desire in order to become its own object to itself... Thus the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the Thing, and this death results in the endless perpetuation [*éternisation*] of the subject's desire".¹⁵ The *fort/da* is no longer simply a scansion, but the veritable foundation of the subjective edifice of desire. Melancholia, a suicidal sacrifice, is identified with the death of the subject who names himself [*se nomme*] in the very moment in which he eternalises himself. Through this, the subject makes himself the pure subject of the eternity of desire. Melancholia is no longer situated on the basis of narcissism, but on the basis of the linguistic parasite. More exactly, narcissistic sacrifice is subordinated to symbolic sacrifice.

In July 1963, Lacan will specify the relation that narcissism has with the object of fantasy, that irreducible remainder from the domination of the symbolic over the imaginary, in connection with this fundamental disorder [*trouble*] that is melancholia. In the crossing of the image that he performs in the suicidal impulse, the melancholic subject is presented as the paradigmatic example of the impulse to re-join one's being:

the fact that [...] this object [*a*] is usually masked beneath the *i(a)* of narcissism [...] means that the melancholiac necessarily passes through [...] his own image [...] so as to reach, within it, the object *a* [...] whose control escapes him – and whose collapse [*chute*] will drag him into the suicide-rush.¹⁶

¹⁵ Lacan, J., "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", *ibid.*, p. 262.

¹⁶ Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book X, Anxiety*, transl. A.R. Price, Polity, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 335-6.





In mania, which he then sets in relation to melancholia, Lacan speaks, by contrast, of a 'non-functioning' of the object *a*, which thus produces a subject who is no longer ballasted by anything in the signifying chain, dispersed in the flight of ideas.

Here, mania and melancholia designate two different ways of separating desire from cause. Identification with the endless perpetuation [*éternisation*] of desire is thus taken up in the absolute bonding between the subject and his cause, as is borne out by Cotard's Syndrome, in which the subject becomes "immortal – like desire".¹⁷

Finally, ten years later, in 1973, Lacan redefined the problem in *Television*, in a text that is crucial for the theory of affect. Mania is grasped as "the return in the real of what is rejected from language",¹⁸ if ever the refusal of the duty to speak well, "as rejection of the unconscious, ends in psychosis".¹⁹ It is no longer defined on the basis of narcissism, but directly on the basis of the rejection of the unconscious by the living being. It is not a signifier that appears in the real, but "what is rejected from language", namely the surplus-life [*plus-de-vie*] that the symbolic marks with an effect of mortification. If we distinguish between *lalangue* and language, mania is the overflowing of *lalangue* no longer held back by the action of language, which is the unconscious. It is only with this new definition that what Lacan had referred to, in 1938, as a "specific insufficiency in human vitality" is reformulated in a satisfactory way. Conceived up till then according to the model of prematurity, the vital insufficiency attains its full Lacanian status in the definition of mania as a return in the real of the mortification that language imposes on the living being.

So, the orientation of Lacan's teaching on melancholia is clear: he does not approach it through the affect of sadness, but rather in its relation to the act of suicide. As for mania, it is the non-functioning of the object *a*, the non-extraction of this object, which provokes, with the rejection of any ciphering of jouissance by the unconscious, the return of the real of a jouissance that invades and sacrifices the organism.

On the one hand, the act of suicide, on the other, the rejection of the unconscious. How can they be linked? Precisely on the basis of a binary from Lacan's teaching that has been developed by Jacques-Alain Miller: act and unconscious.²⁰ The act is always situated in the context of a rejection of the

17 Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, transl. J. Forrester, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 238.

18 Lacan, J., "Television", *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, transl. D. Hollier, R. Krauss and A. Michelson, Norton, New York/London, 1990, p. 22, [TN: translation modified].

19 *Ibid.*, [TN: translation modified].

20 Miller, J.-A., "Jacques Lacan: observations sur sa conception du passage à l'acte", *Actualité Psychiatrique*, [January 1988].





unconscious. Mania and melancholia thus present themselves to us as two sides of the same thing, the passage-to-the-act of melancholia corresponds to the manic dispersion of the subject in language. Here, there is a clear line of distinction between the Lacanian orientation and the post-Freudians in that the act and the rejection of the unconscious have to do with the subject and not the organism. The two poles at play in mood disorders presuppose the linguistic parasite in the speaking being.

It is through a decision of *jouissance*, that is, as Colette Soler has underlined, a decision made by *jouissance*,²¹ that the subject's fate is played out, linked to the destiny of his cause. Having re-established this perspective, we can now reread Freud's original texts in order to take up what seems so strange to psychoanalytic currents fascinated by affective deficiencies and their effects on the development of the ego

With Freud

FREUD speaks about melancholia for the first time publicly in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915). He evoked the theme in December 1914 at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society,²² and sent a first draft to Karl Abraham in March 1915. In fact, he is responding to the work of his student, who had insisted on the role of the oral object in mood disorders.²³ In his correspondence, Freud underlines that the essential point lay in the new status of the subject, and not in the role of the object. In his 1915 text, he thus introduces a new identification, which he presents with the following words: "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object".²⁴

The first thing that must be noted is that this paragraph is followed by a development entirely devoted to a point-for-point opposition between hysteric and narcissistic identification. Freud underlines that the narcissistic identification that he sees at work in melancholia is essentially the same as the one he designated for schizophrenia. The object, in so far as the subject abandons it, no longer belongs to the category of *Sachen*, it is an object that comes in place of *das Ding*, of the always already lost Thing. The narcissistic identification with the Thing, which manifests itself in a pure form in melancholia, unveils the relation that the subject entertains with it: "The analysis of melancholia now shows that

21 Soler, C., Seminar of the Department of Psychoanalysis of the University of Paris VIII, Clinical Section and Further Research, University Year, 1987-1988.

22 Strachey, J., from the introductory notes "Mourning and Melancholia" in Freud, S., *Standard Edition of Freud's Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. 14, Hogarth Press, London, 1961, p. 239.

23 Cf. on this point, Laurent, É., "Le comité castration", *Ornicar ?*, Issue No. 16.

24 Freud, S., *Standard Edition of Freud's Complete Psychological Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 249.





the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object cathexis, it can treat itself as an object – if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world."²⁵

It is in this sense that Freud was able to reconcile amorous sublimation and suicidal raptus as two modes of being crushed by the object. In both cases, the object is elevated to the dignity of the Thing. In the case of melancholia, the ego identifies with this self-hate that Freud held, right up to *Civilisation and its Discontents*, to be the sign of the subject's fundamental division. Thus, the Freud of 1915 follows the flash of inspiration of January 1895: *Die Melancholie bestünde in der Trauer über den Verlust der Libido* (melancholia consists in mourning over loss of libido)²⁶ – it “consists in loss of libido as such”. The organic metaphor of an internal haemorrhage, revisited in 1915, is to be seen as a haemorrhage of the subject in his division, in an originary reaction of the ego against the very object of the external world.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud presents another version of melancholic identification. Basing himself on the major revision of his theory of identification, which he presented in chapter seven of “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego”,²⁷ Freud reanalyses the ego, “judged by an external agency”, designating this particular agency as the superego, the heir of the identification with the dead father. Although this is the first time that he says this publicly about melancholia,²⁸ he had made the connection between the melancholic subject and identification with the dead father since 1916. In one of the manuscripts from his *Metapsychology, A Phylogenetic Fantasy: Overview of the Transference Neuroses*, which remained unpublished until very recently, he could say: “The mourning about the primal father proceeds from identification with him, and such identification we have established as the prerequisite for the melancholic mechanism”.²⁹

In naming the agency at play in melancholia the superego, Freud establishes a parallel between the group of melancholias and the agency of surveillance already identified in paranoias. In all cases, “[the superego] is the first identification... which took place”.³⁰ The subsequent differentiation between them is brought about by specifying the particular modality of father in play in this identificatory world.

So, is it identification with the Thing, or identification with the dead father? The post-Freudian's hesitate, and speak of ‘illnesses of ideality’ to refer to

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, “Draft G – Melancholia. Extracts from the Fliess Papers”, Vol. 1, p. 201.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, “Identification”, Vol. 18, p. 105.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, “The Ego and the Super-Ego (Ego Ideal)”, Vol. 19, pp. 28-9.

²⁹ Freud, S., *A Phylogenetic Fantasy: Overview of the Transference Neuroses*, Harvard University Press, Boston, 1987, pp. 18-19.

³⁰ Freud, S., “The Dependant Relationships of the Ego”, *Standard Edition of Freud's Complete Psychological Works*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 19, p. 48.





melancholia. To follow Lacan, we must take the two together, but from different angles, that of the Thing, and that of the father.

For this we must recognise, in the specific mode of identification with the father in play in the psychoses, what Lacan isolated with the term foreclosure, in order to designate the specific form of identification that has occurred. It is this signifying mechanism that allows this mode of the return of *jouissance* that is the Thing, which falls upon the ego. The unveiling of the relation to the Thing comes as a consequence of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father.

We can thus dismiss a certain reading that consists of making narcissistic identification an intermediary form between neurosis and psychosis, according to the degree of impoverishment of the ego. In his *Phylogenetic Fantasy*, Freud explicitly places paranoia, schizophrenia and melancholia under the rubric of narcissistic neuroses.³¹ In this same text, narcissistic identification accounts for both schizophrenic identification and melancholic identification. When Freud distinguishes between psychoses and narcissistic neuroses in 1924, it is in the Kraepelinian tradition of defining two major groups of psychoses, and to insist on the differentiation of productive phenomena produced in each – and not in order to isolate the one from the other.

At the end of our journey through Freud, let us hold on to the fact that there are two presentations of melancholic identification, but that they are two sides of the same thing. He discovers the psychotic identification with the dead father and the originary relation to the Thing at the same time. The melancholic subject is judged by the external agency because he is divided by his own *jouissance*, whose return is determined by the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. In striking himself, the subject manifests, at one and the same time, the register of signifying identification marked by foreclosure and the register of *jouissance*. Post-Freudian attempts to separate the primordial experience of loss in the child from the delusional constructions of the adult are merely attempts to separate the two registers. Freud pins down the obsessional subject's relation to the experience of pleasure with the term *Vorwurf*, reproach, from the *Letters to Fliess* on, before later isolating the feeling of unconscious guilt.³² In wanting to separate judgement and *jouissance*, post-Freudians have not understood that melancholia is to do with the subject. Yet, nowhere is the question "What am I?" more obvious, along with the response from the real: "I am in the place from which 'the universe is a flaw in the purity of Non-Being' is vociferated [...] This place is called *jouissance*, and it is *jouissance* whose absence would render the universe vain".³³ For souls born, foreclosure does not

31 Freud, S., *A Phylogenetic Fantasy: Overview of the Transference Neuroses*, *op. cit.* p. 32.

32 Cf. on this point, Antonio Quinet de Adrade, "Forclusion et incroyance", *Lettre Mensuelle de l'École de la Cause freudienne*, Issue No. 65, p. 14.

33 Lacan, J., "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire", *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, *op. cit.*, p. 694.





await the passing of years or the development of the ego for the child to hallucinate or let itself die.³⁴

Once we have established melancholia as a form of psychosis, as we have done, we can go on to consider its development as a passion of being.

Melancholia as a Passion of Being: Pain of Existence and Moral Cowardice

LACAN evokes the feeling of depression on various occasions and in various ways throughout his work and it is true that each time we evoke the areas of creation, religion, art, or science, the melancholic mistrust of the world is not far away. As an affect, a passion of being, melancholia collectivises just as effectively as hatred, and is institutionalised in the highest social forms. Lacan underlined its central role in Buddhism, where the original evidence is “the pain of existence”. He thus makes melancholia ‘this pain in a pure state’ that any dreamer can sometimes gain an insight into, “having, in the felt condition of an inexhaustible rebirth plumbed the depths of the pain of existence”.³⁵ It is a normal affect if we are forced to think: “of our everyday life as having to be eternal”.³⁶

Fifteen years later, beyond of the collectivising perspective of religious discourse, Lacan makes the depressive affect into a normal affect for an entirely different reason. It is normal in so far as it concerns our evasion, for structural reasons, of our duty to speak well when it comes to our relation to jouissance.

In this respect, sadness is defined as moral cowardice: “we qualify sadness as depression, because we give it soul for support [...]. But it isn’t a state of the soul, it is simply a moral failing, as Dante, and even Spinoza, said: a sin, which means a moral cowardice, which is, ultimately, located only in relation to thought”.³⁷

In his article on depression, Serge Cottet points out the significance of the separation between the object and phallic jouissance at play in the depressive affect.³⁸ It is the loss of phallic brilliance, not the loss of the object, that strikes the fabric of the subject’s narcissism: “This stripping bare of the object, correlative to the thinning out of narcissism, is without doubt accompanied by a loss: that of jouissance – but not just any jouissance, phallic jouissance”.³⁹ What

34 [TN: A reference to Corneille and Act II, scene ii of *Le Cid*: “True, I am young, but for souls nobly born valour doesn’t await the passing of years.”]

35 Lacan, J., “Kant with Sade”, *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English, op. cit.*, p. 655.

36 *Ibid.* p. 656.

37 Lacan, J., *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic establishment, op. cit.* p. 22, [translation modified].

38 Cottet, S., “La belle inertie”, *Ornicar* ?, Issue No. 32, Spring 1985, p. 68.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 79.





separates melancholia from depression and breaks the continuity between them is that in melancholia what's at stake is the object *a* outside any phallic punctuation. When the subject runs up against the impossible inscribed in the inexistence of the sexual relation, an imperative jouissance returns in the place where phallic jouissance is lacking.

On the basis of *Television*, we must distinguish between a clinic of moral cowardice and a clinic of the rejection of the unconscious. In the first case, what is in question is a subject defined on the basis of the structure of language, its key being desire. In the second, the rejection of the unconscious refers to another register, where mortifying jouissance is knotted to the birth of the symbolic. In 1953, Lacan designated this zone in the following terms: "When we want to get at what was before the serial games of speech in the subject, and what is prior to the birth of symbols, we find it in death, from which his existence derives all the meaning it has".⁴⁰ What is indicated here is a clinic that is not at all worn out by following the establishment of a "depressed discourse". We can include here, not only isolated depressive phenomena in adults, which have escaped being taken up in the subject's history and his symptoms, but also major depressive moments for the child. In such cases, it is a matter of interrogating the subject, not with respect to the unconscious as discourse of the Other, but with respect to the silence of the death drives. In the new jouissance that has irrupted for this subject, we will find indications of what to expect at certain moments in life, in the bad encounters that might have taken place, even in the course of the analysis. Our hypothesis is that such moments of rejection of the unconscious have the same indicative value as certain "elementary phenomena" that Lacan identified, for example, following Freud, in the case of the Wolf Man.

In these moments, the subject is confronted not by the Other of the signifier, but by the place of the letter, the terrible universal library from which the subject has been excluded as a living being. Jorge Luis Borges, very interested in Buddhism, made a story out of this feeling. His famous, "The Library of Babel", in fact, bears an epigraph from the great melancholic, Burton, and his *Anatomy of Melancholy*. It picks out an exercise recommended by Burton to distract the melancholic subject and initiate him into "the variation of the 23 letters".⁴¹ Borges's Librarian, who is "preparing to die", observes: "Methodical composition distracts me from the present condition of humanity. The certainty that everything has already been written anuls us, or renders us phantasmal".⁴² The Borgesian subject draws his melancholic certainty from this moment of subjective destitution that the practice of the letter imposes. *The Letter! The Litter!* Borges managed to rework this Joycean axiom into a story. He finds the image

40 Lacan, J., *Écrits*, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", *The First Complete Edition in English*, *op. cit.* p. 263.

41 Borges, J. L., "The Library of Babel", *Fictions*, transl. A. Hurley, Penguin, London, 2000, p. 65.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 73.





that achieves it in that moment when the librarian's body falls into the universe of the libraries books, to the point of being effaced, *sicut palea*. This certainty is the opposite of what Lacan wanted to achieve through that other practice of the letter that is psychoanalysis. Lacan stipulates nothing less than enthusiasm as the affect that falls due at its end.

So, let us now summarise what we have said. Freud gives two versions of the melancholic subject's identification: in "The Ego and the Id", the identification is with the dead father, in "Mourning and Melancholia" it is with the Thing. We have seen that the post-Freudians sought to separate the primary experience of loss from the delusional constructions about guilt aiming at the father. From Lacan's perspective, this is a mistake, since it is a question of knotting the registers of psychotic identification and jouissance, without recourse to any organodynamism, first with reference to narcissism, and then the body as such. We have finally situated sadness among the affects of the living being, within the ethics of a religious social bond and beyond it, and as a passion of being [*l'être*] amid practices of the letter [*lettre*].

Translated from the French by Philip Dravers and Samya Seth

