

ENIGMATIC EXPERIENCE IN PSYCHOSIS

THREE ENIGMAS: MEANING, SIGNIFICATION, *JOUISSANCE*

Eric Laurent

"Je ne suis pas ce que je suis, car, si j'étais ce que je suis, je ne serais pas ce que je suis."¹ This is an enigma proposed in *Le Moniteur* and the solution to the enigma is a "servant" who, if he did not follow his master, would not have to be a servant and be what he follows.

What is the thing that one receives without thanks, which one enjoys without knowing how, that one gives to others when one does not know where one is at, and that one loses without noticing? It's life.

This is shared experience, that of the enigma which presents itself as a question. The enigma according to Littré is "the definition of things in obscure terms but which, taken together, exclusively designate their object and are given to be divined."²

The enigma, this definition of things in obscure terms, has for a long time been an elective path for the discourse of the Master. We are told that among the first Babylonian kingdoms, the first City States, the masters exchanged enigmas between them and stole from one another the soothsayers skilled in their fabrication or resolution. The Bible tells us how the Queen of Sheba, having heard about Solomon's great reputation, came to Jerusalem to experience his great wisdom, armed with enigmas. Such is the path she took to find out whether he was a man, a real one.

Why should one choose to pursue the study of paranoia and schizophrenia through the enigma? Is psychosis not *par excellence* the domain in which what is present is certainty, delusion, where everything is explained according to an order of reason, giving substance to the classic adage: "The madman has lost everything but reason". Why this title then, since it is rather neurosis that pertains to an enigmatic experience? Oedipus was chosen by Freud as the emblem of

all human beings, of himself, and of neurotics. As early as October 15th 1897, this is what Freud wrote to Fliess: "I have found, in my own case too, falling in love with the mother and jealousy towards my father, and I now regard it as a universal event of early childhood, even if not so early as in children who have been made hysterical. (Similarly with the romance of parentage in paranoia – heroes, founders of religions.) If that is so, we can understand the riveting effect of *Oedipus Rex*, in spite of all the objections raised by reason against its presupposition of destiny [...]. Each member of the audience was once, in germ and in fantasy, just such an Oedipus, and each one recoils in horror from the dream-fulfilment here transplanted into reality, with the whole quota of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one."³

What is *Oedipus Rex* then, if not the story of the deciphering of an enigma, as well as of the impossibility for the one who had deciphered it of knowing what it implied for his destiny?

We note that, from the outset, Freud knots paranoid delusion, founding hero of religion and the Oedipal question. (I draw your attention to the fact that in the French version of the letters to Fliess, "romantisation" is used for "delusion of filiation".) Whether it concerns neurosis or psychosis, psychoanalytic work rests on the establishment of a meaning, a *Deutung*, an interpretation.

Meaning

In the Freudian study of "The Memoirs" of President Schreber, the second part follows the explanation of Schreber's path and the recall of his biography. This part, which is entitled "Attempts at interpretation", begins as follows: "There are two angles from which we could attempt to reach an understanding of this history [...] and to lay bare in it the familiar complexes and motive forces of mental life. We might start either from the patient's own delusional utterances or from the exciting causes of his illness."⁴

Freud adopts the first angle: "It is perhaps worth giving a more detailed illustration of this procedure [...] the so-called 'miracled birds' [...]. They cannot understand the meaning of the words they

speak, but they are by nature susceptible to similarity of sounds."⁵ Thus Freud travels along what he calls the explanation of the universe produced by the paranoiac in these terms: "patient has withdrawn from the people in his environment and from the external world generally the libidinal cathexis which he has hitherto directed on to them. Thus everything has become indifferent and irrelevant to him, and has to be explained by means of a secondary rationalisation":⁶ he has to explain the universe to himself. And the paranoiac reconstructs the universe by means of his delusional work. There is thus a production, by the paranoiac subject, of a whole world, using phenomena of meaning as starting points, their transformations, their distributions. If Freud emphasises this positive, productive side of psychotic phenomena, he evidently does not ignore their foundation in the negative, and he adds: "[...] the process of repression proper consists in a detachment of the libido from people [...] It happens silently; we receive no intelligence of it [...]. What forces itself so noisily upon our attention is the process of recovery, which undoes the work of repression and brings back the libido again on to the people it had abandoned."⁷

Freud articulates this experience of silent detachment as part of a series of different phenomena: confusion, perplexity, etc. This is where the experience of an enigma is situated for the paranoiac, since for him the whole world becomes a world of obscure things, organised in a way that has been lost and which has to be reconstructed so that they eventually come to designate something.

These two movements, reconstruction and preliminary loss, are summarised by Freud in his 1911 text in an aphorism: "What was abolished internally [*aufhebt*] reappears from without."⁸ It is with the same mechanism that thirteen years later, in 1924, after having introduced the *id* and the superego in "The loss of reality in neurosis and psychosis", he will conclude his text: "Thus we see that both in neurosis and psychosis there comes into consideration the question not only of a *loss of reality* but also of a *substitute for reality*."⁹ These two sides, loss and reconstruction, are intimately linked for Freud without

however the structure of the experience of loss ever being distinct, in his work, from that of reinvestment.

In Freud's work there is no idea of an experience of decomposition of the ego functions, or again of a hierarchical regression of the different functions according to the definition given by Ribot of depersonalisation in 1894, a definition taken up again by Dugas. Ribot will keep to his idea until 1915, throughout the sixteen editions of his treatise, and will keep to this approach in academic psychopathology.

Freud refused to separate the experience of loss from that of return, considering both to be taken up in what he called the distribution of libido, which he entirely describes as a phenomenon of meaning. It is exactly on this point that Dr Lacan's thesis will take up the opposition between abolition of meaning and dissolution of functions. Lacan's thesis of 1932 is preceded by his article on "The structure of paranoid psychoses" in the *Semaine des Hôpitaux* in 1931. This thesis, he says, expresses a conception which is founded "neither on the *sentiment* of personal synthesis, such as one sees disturbed in the subjective troubles of depersonalisation [...] nor on the psychological unity given by *individual conscience* [...] nor on the extension of memory phenomena"¹⁰ but on the contrary, on *relations of comprehension* ... and further on, "Let us define the characters specific to *delusional interpretation* [...] it presents itself moreover as a *gripping* experience, as a specific *illumination*, a character that early authors, whose scrutiny was not veiled by any psychological theory, had in mind when they designated this symptom with the excellent term of phenomenon of "*personal signification*".¹¹

This thesis, constructed against any idea leaning against the dissolution of a synthesis or the continuity of a personality and a constitution, places, on the contrary, all the emphasis on the emergence of a new signification, a productive phenomenon certainly, a phenomenon which is not deficient, but which nonetheless proposes itself to the subject as an enigma to be deciphered. This signification, if it is articulated, is not immediately articulable, and the subject will deploy it for the duration of his delusion. Lacan thus proposes an investigative method inspired by Jaspers; a method of investigation that starts with

the most comprehensible psychoses and moves on to discordant psychoses.

We will now distinguish three parts in Lacan's approach to this question of the enigmatic experience in psychoses. The first part will be "Propos sur la causalité psychique", or enigma and meaning. The second part will be "Function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis" up to *Seminar III, The psychoses*, which could be entitled: from enigma to signification. The third part goes from the text that Lacan wrote as a preface to the writings of President Schreber in *Cahiers pour l'analyse* in 1967 to "Joyce-le-symptôme" (1975).

Enigma and meaning

Let us start with "Propos sur la causalité psychique", where Lacan takes up his thesis again after the war for the first time, having abstained from publishing during the war. One forgets how singular a position that was, not to publish during the war: eminent spirits such as Merleau-Ponty and Sartre had continued to do so. Lacan made it clear that he would wait for "the disappearance of the enemies of mankind from the soil of his fatherland" to take up the thread of his thinking. He had chosen to express himself in 1949 before the public of *L'Evolution psychiatrique*, composed of young psychiatrists whom he calls a "young academia", and there he exposed anew the advances present in his thesis, simply stripped of the respect due to the authors he had to explore and oppose at the time. He recalls that "madness is lived entirely in the register of meaning [...]. The phenomenon of madness is not separable from the problem of signification for being in general, that is to say from language for man."¹² Faced with the organo-dynamic thesis which aims to isolate a first experience of loss, of dissolution - however one calls it - whose cause would be organic, and which is then followed by a psychic reconstruction, Lacan maintains there is a unique psychic causality. He exposes, on the one hand, a phenomenon of rupture which he notes to be a decision, "[...] unfathomable decision of the being through which it understands or misrecognises its liberation [...]"¹³, and on the other

an experience homogenous in its structure of the reconquest of being, which will be the unfolding of madness itself.

Thus he can say that all the phenomena of psychosis "whatever they be, hallucinations, interpretations, intuitions, and with whatever extraneousness and strangeness they may be experienced by him, these phenomena target him personally: they redouble him, reply to him, echo him, read in him, just as he identifies them, interrogates them, provokes them and deciphers them. And when he comes to lack all means of expressing them, his perplexity still manifests to us an interrogative gap in him [...]"¹⁴

How best to isolate the enigmatic experience in psychoses, paranoia and schizophrenia, since Lacan does not distinguish them on this point? He evokes *psychosis*, since he can designate it in the singular whereas he isolates *phenomena* in the plural, *psychosis* is played out in the register of meaning. Under the heading of madness he specifically underlines this unity in front of the attentive ears of those present, members of *L'Evolution Psychiatrique* whose project it was "to accustom" French psychiatry to the concept of schizophrenia. He knew that his choice to continue approaching psychosis from the angle of paranoia rather than from that of schizophrenia, and to conserve the name of madness, amounted to affirming his distance.

Having defined this madness entirely in terms of phenomena of meaning, he could add that his discussion aimed at nothing less than "the heart of the dialectic of the being." This is the term he uses and it is on this point that the essential misrecognition of madness lies. It is from this perspective that the ego can be defined as a central system for the formations of misrecognition and not as a synthesis of the relational functions of the organism. Lacan criticises what links "the organicist illusion to a realist metapsychology",¹⁵ the link between the organicist illusion of the loss of relational functions to a realist metapsychology through which these relational functions would ensure a relation with the real. This critique of realist metapsychology is still relevant today since one of the effects of science on our world is certainly to dissolve the naive realism according to which an organism and the world would adapt themselves to each other. It makes

the real retreat ever further, to express myself like Despagnat, an epistemologist whose position has been amusingly termed "depressed realist" in his books, for example in his work entitled *In search of the real*.

The enigma and signification

Lacan will transform the notion of madness as taken up entirely in phenomena of meaning by insisting on the fact that madness is taken up entirely in a phenomenon of language. As early as in "Function and field in speech and language" Lacan introduces a new term, which had not appeared in "Propos sur la causalité psychique", that of symbolic function, with which he now designates phenomena of meaning and their support. He says that it is "in the name of the father that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function."¹⁶

In this text he gives a new definition of madness as "negative freedom of speech that has given up trying to make itself recognised [...] [with] the singular formation of a delusion which [...] objectifies the subject in a language without dialectic."¹⁷ From then on, the distribution of meaning phenomena takes place differently, and the experience of the enigma will be centred differently by Lacan. We will see it in his 1958 text, "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis", where he shows that it is the very nature of the signifier that becomes the object of communication in psychosis. The phenomena of meaning in Schreber's psychosis will be distributed between message phenomena and code phenomena. Schreber's fundamental language teaches him, instructs him on how it is done, on what the new signifier that comes into the world to reconstruct it is made of. This phenomenon allows Lacan to add that it is the very signifier which is the object of communication. "[...] we are presented here with phenomena that have wrongly been called intuitive. [...] What is involved here, in fact is an effect of the signifier, in so far as its degree of certainty [...] assumes a weight proportional to the enigmatic void that first presents itself in the place of the signification itself."¹⁸ So there the enigmatic void of signification is knotted in a new way to the raising to the power of a second stage that certainty provides. So first, there is elision and void, then there is certainty. The

emptier the void, the greater the certainty. In this text Lacan will take up the whole series of phenomena that he had established in "Propos sur la causalité psychique": interpretation, hallucinations, perplexity, all that and also the "tensions, the lapses, the phantasies that the analyst encounters [...]; it should be added, by means of elements of the particular discourse in which this question is articulated in the Other. [...] their chain is found to survive in an alterity in relation to the subject as radical as that of as yet indecipherable hieroglyphs in the solitude of the desert."¹⁹ The presentation of delusion itself, and of its experience, will be that of a deciphering of these hieroglyphics in the subject's attempt at answering the production of these new significations.

To qualify the position of the psychoanalyst, Lacan says: "[...] we must listen to the speaker when it is a question of a message that does not come from a subject beyond language, but from speech beyond the subject."²⁰ What would seem possible there nevertheless remains enigmatic in the degree of effectiveness of speech on the structuration of the subject, since what is being listened to is a speech that comes from beyond him. In a way that is perhaps enigmatic for the reader, Lacan refers back to the work of President Schreber, who could declare with relief that all non-sense annuls itself, *alles Unsinn aufhebt*. The path traced there by Lacan for analytic action remains enigmatic in this text and will only find a solution much later with Joyce. Let us simply remember that from the moment at which madness is centred around language phenomena, Lacan displaces the emphasis from sense to non-sense. The two are distributed according to the instance of the letter, which is fundamentally outside of sense.

In *Seminar III*, which preceded "On a question preliminary...", Lacan insisted on the point, that, contrary to what Wernicke had claimed, a delusion is not the explication of a primitive experience. He strongly underlines that elementary phenomena already have the structure of the delusion, and that delusion has exactly the same structure as the elementary phenomenon.²¹

This page of the *Seminar* goes back exactly to what had been said in a page of Lacan's thesis, where he founded the homology of

structure in the metaphor of the leaf and the tree: "this striking structural identity between the elementary phenomena of delusion and its general organisation imposes an analogical reference to the type of morphogenesis materialised by the plant."²²

This is why it is possible to speak of an enigmatic experience in Lacan, an enigmatic experience in the elementary phenomena that precede the triggering, and that it is without doubt legitimate to speak of non-triggered psychosis. When Lacan says that delusion and elementary phenomena have the same structure, it does not mean that between someone who has entrenched phenomena which remain limited to that for thirty years, and a fully deployed delusion, we are speaking about exactly the same thing. It means that it is exactly the same thing from the point of view of the structure of meaning. That said, its full weight must be given to the discontinuous experience of triggering, an experience that underlines the conception that Lacan took from Jaspers who, beyond a nosographic definition, called schizophrenia a conception of psychosis that marks a discontinuity. "This term theoretically designates all the mental illnesses whose process begins at a definite moment."²³

Enigma and jouissance.

From 1967, in the preface he writes to Schreber's *Memoirs*, Lacan reformulates "Freud's operation" on psychosis. He notes that, if Freud turns President Schreber's memoirs into a Freudian text, it is because he introduces there "the subject as such, which means not evaluating the madman in terms of deficit and of dissociation of functions."²⁴

This is what he recognised as Freud's merit, and it is what he had himself recognised in his "On a question preliminary...". But at this point he adds "To give credit to the psychotic would amount to nothing more in this case than what would remain of any other treated just as liberally: to force an open door has absolutely nothing to do with knowing onto what space it will open."²⁵ It is a critique. It is a critique, or at least a complement that Lacan wants to bring. He will underline the importance of *jouissance* phenomena in Schreber, approached in this short preface from the perspective of the object *a*.

Over ten years ago, driven by Jacques-Alain Miller's compelling introduction, the year's work of the clinical section was dedicated to the introduction of the object "petit a" in the reading of President Schreber. That year we were able to reread the precious indications given by Lacan on the question of *jouissance* in psychosis, and on the place to be given to the singular term in this text of "subject of *jouissance*", as distinct from "subject represented by the signifier."²⁶

This expression, which had not been taken up again by Lacan, had the merit of clarity for the audience, who nonetheless completely missed it at the time. Still, eventually, fifteen years later, the clinical section took it up. This is the delay which Lacan considered to be normal for the reading of his texts.

The whole consideration of Schreber's text could be that of an enigma in a third sense, not only the enigma of meaning, not only the enigma of signification, but also the enigma of the *jouissance* of God. What is enigmatic for Schreber is that God or the Other should enjoy his passive being and that he should support this. What surprises him is that it is sufficient that he should abandon himself to "thinking of nothing", *nichts denken*, for God, this Other made of an infinite discourse, to slip away and that from "this torn text that he himself becomes, a scream should arise",²⁷ a scream that no longer had anything to do with any subject. He experienced himself as an isolated subject, One, in relation with a *jouissance* full to the point of becoming the point of *jouissance* of the universe. He becomes this subject who experiences the mystery of seeing himself as the repository for all the little experiences of *jouissance* of the souls of the universe, which allows Lacan to add "[...] which will allow us to come up with a more precise definition of paranoia as identifying *jouissance* in the locus of the Other as such."²⁸

Here we witness the emergence of a central distinction, on the basis of *jouissance*, between a signifying mechanism common to the psychoses, foreclosure, and the diverse destinies of *jouissance*. This is what Jacques-Alain Miller pointed out in a course on schizophrenia and paranoia, noting that in this 1965 definition we have a perfectly valid definition of paranoia, while that of schizophrenia remained to

be found. We find it in "L'Étourdit" in 1973, where Lacan, referring to, dialoguing with, and rectifying the position taken the year before by Deleuze and Guattari in their *Anti-Oedipus*, speaks of the schizophrenic's relation to the organ. It so happens that Deleuze and Guattari had found it useful to distinguish a "body without organs" in schizophrenia, and that this seemed to them to be a major concept, affording a possible liberation from the ascendancy of the signifier. Lacan replies to them in "L'Étourdit". "What becomes an organ for his body [...], this is even the starting point for him to be reduced to realising that his body is not without other organs, and that each of their functions is a problem for him; accordingly, the said schizophrenic can be characterised as being caught without the help of any established discourse."²⁹ In bringing together the two definitions, the return to *jouissance* in the Other qualifying paranoia, and the return to *jouissance* in the body which completes, we obtain a distribution of the enigmatic experiences of *jouissance* in paranoia and schizophrenia.

So we have quite a distinct distribution across these different periods: phenomena of meaning and their emptying, the place of the excess of signification and that of the excess of *jouissance*. However, we had to wait for the new definition that Lacan gives of the symptom in the seminar *RSI*, a definition later developed in "Joyce-the-symptôme", for the insertion of *jouissance*, the distribution of meaning and of *jouissance* to occur differently than in "On a question preliminary...". In this text Lacan could speak of the role of fantasy in President Schreber in so far as it was distributed between two poles: that of transsexual *jouissance*, that of the future of the creature. The place of the fantasy is still defined according to the effects of signification. The fantasy is taken as an effect of signification interfering in the chain going from the signification of need to the Ideal. In *RSI* and "Joyce-le-symptôme" this is no longer the case. The symptom is produced in the same register as the miracle of the scream isolated in 1965, which no longer had anything to do with any subject. The symptom, or *sinthome*, as underlined in the introduction to the volume *Joyce with Lacan*, is introduced so that the "symptom does not say anything to

anybody: it is ciphering and it is pure *jouissance* of a writing", to use J.-A. Miller's expression.³⁰

The symptom is then no longer defined in relation to effects of signification, nor even to a signification outside of dialectic, but in the register of a writing, which is the way in which each subject enjoys the unconscious in so far as the unconscious determines him or her.

This new definition of the symptom affects that of the fantasy, which it puts in another place. The fantasy finds itself no longer an intersection in a chain directed towards a subject, but it echoes, as distinct from the symptom, a way of enjoying the unconscious that is no longer determined by it. We can find a clinical translation of this in noticing, in the context of extremely varied psychoses, the presence of perverse experiences, of fantasies acted with a great ease that contrast in this very ease, in this *laissez-être*, with the rigour of the delusion.

It is from here, from this introduction of the letter in so far as it abolishes the symbol, that we can now return to what Lacan had underlined in Schreber: Schreber's relief at being able to note that all non-sense annuls itself... *alles Unsinn aufhebt*, this is Schreber's central enigmatic experience, or the *Unsinn* with which he is confronted. This is precisely what can be abolished in the experience of constructing his delusion, a construction that owes everything to the letter, to writing, and so little to speech. It is the construction of a delusion that endeavours to be its own reference. It is what renders attempts at interpretation derisory - as if the productions of writing led to a subject. Lacan does not interpret the production of President Schreber, he shows its coherence, its consistency. Similarly Jakobson, as a linguist interested in the productions of Hölderlin does not aim to do the least exegesis of the poet, distinguishing himself on this point from Blanchot. He simply aims to explore why Hölderlin's later poems were better than those written before the breakdown. These were in the same vein but they were even simpler, or more self-conscious about their poetic effects.³¹

The delusional work can be conceived thus: to construct the letter with the aid of the letter to the point where it can abolish the symbol and so really raise it to a second power. This is what will make its co-

existence compatible with the absence of support, not of an established discourse, but of any established Name-of-the-Father.

Translated by Heather Chamberlain.

1. In French 'je suis' could either refer to the verb 'to be' or the verb 'to follow', thus 'I am' and 'I follow' are two meanings of 'je suis': hence the equivocation with which the paper opens: "I am/follow not what I am/follow, for if I was what I am/follow, I would not be what I am/follow." (*trans. note*).
2. Littré Dictionary (Paris: 1878).
3. S. Freud, *Letter 71 to W. Fliess* (15 October 1897), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud vol. I*, p. 265.
4. S. Freud, *Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical account of a case of paranoia (Dementia paranoides) (Schreber)*, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud vol. XII*, p. 35.
5. *Ibid.* at 35-6.
6. *Ibid.* at 70.
7. *Ibid.* at 71.
8. *Ibid.*
9. S. Freud, *The loss of reality in neurosis and psychosis*, Penguin Freud Library 10, p. 226.
10. J. Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 43-44.
11. *Ibid.* at 211.
12. J. Lacan, *Propos sur la causalité psychique*, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 166.
13. *Ibid.* at 177.
14. *Ibid.* at 165.
15. *Ibid.* at 178.
16. J. Lacan, *Function and Field of Speech in Psychoanalysis*, *Ecrits* (London & New York: Routledge, 1977, 2002), p. 74.
17. *Ibid.* at 75.
18. J. Lacan, *On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis*, *Ecrits* (London & New York: Routledge, 1977, 2002), p. 205.

19. *Ibid.* at pp. 214-5.
20. *Ibid.* at p. 237.
21. J. Lacan, *Séminaire III*, p. 28.
22. J. Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*, *op. cit.* p. 297, note 58.
23. K. Jaspers, *Strindbergh et Van Gogh* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1953), p. 38.
24. J. Lacan, *Présentation, Cahiers pour l'analyse 5* (novembre/décembre 1966), p. 70.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. J. Lacan, *L'Étourdit, Scilicet 4* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 30-31.
10. J.-A. Miller, *Préface, Joyce avec Lacan* (Paris: Navarin, 1978), p. 11.
11. R. Jakobson, *Un regard sur La Vue de Hölderlin, Russie folie poésie* (Paris: Seuil, 1986).