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THE MYSTERY OF THE PAPIN SISTERS AND THE KNOT OF PARANOIA

"Lacan is a block, we take it as a whole, Lacan's teaching is inseparable from his practice," Jacques-Alain Miller claims.¹ This implies that we cannot separate Lacan the theoretician, the exceptional reader of Freud, the prodigious rhetorician, from the Lacan who was a practitioner of analysis. To take Lacan as a block is also to consider that his first explorations into psychosis (his 1932 thesis on the case of Aimée is its highest achievement) can be reread in the light of his final teaching. In the Seminar Le Sinthome, when he is considering Joyce's relationship to writing, Lacan himself refers to his article in "Écrits 'Inspirés': Schizographie" of 1931 (published by Masson, Paris). What were Joyce's writings inspired by, he asks?

The admirable article on the Papin sisters, published by Lacan in the Surrealist review Le Minotaure at the end of 1933, is no exception to this rule. It aims to elucidate the double crime that scandalized the era: two daughters of the common people massacre two members of the bourgeoisie; French society itself was attacked, and justice must be swift! The scandal and fascination block out the logic of a criminal act that Lacan succeeds in decoding, while also giving it its tragically human signification.

One night in February 1933, Christine and Léa Papin, until then irreproachable maids in the service of a well-to-do family in Le Mans, savagely assassinated their boss and her daughter. Having committed the double crime, the sisters washed themselves, changed, and locked themselves in their room. The police found them huddled together in a bed. During the hastily put together trial, experts concluded that the

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1. Jacques-Alain Miller, "L'homme décidé," *Vacarme*, no.18 (2002/1): 51-54. Online: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-vacarme-2002-1-page-51.html>.

2. Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome*, Tr. Jacques-Alain Miller, Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

THE PAPIN KNOT DIA

Lacan's teaching is inseparable from his clinical work. This implies that we must be exceptional readers of Freud, and Lacan who was a practitioner of psychoanalysis. Consider that his first exploration of the case of Aimée is its highest point of his final teaching. In the seminar on Joyce's relationship to his daughter, "Écrits 'Inspirés': Schizo-phantasy." What were Joyce's writings, published by Lacan in the seminar of 1953, is no exception to this. The scandalized the era: two young members of the bourgeoisie; the scandal must be swift! The scandal of the final act that Lacan succeeds in giving human signification. Christine and Léa Papin, until then a well-to-do family in Le Mans, their daughter. Having committed the crime, they changed, and locked themselves in a room, and the experts concluded that the

two sisters were of perfectly sound mind and that their fits of anger had escalated into a homicidal rage.

Using the only medical testimony that picked up on the strangeness of the psychological couple formed by Christine and Léa Papin, Lacan takes a view opposed to the experts who had not been able to identify the subtle signs of psychosis before the accomplishment of their murderous passage to the act. For Lacan, it was an obvious case of folie à deux. He also relies on an article by Freud that was written in 1921, in which Freud discusses narcissistic object choice and the passage from hatred to love in sibling relations, leading to an erotic and rejected homosexual fixation in the case of the paranoiac. Lacan shows that the Papin sisters were stuck in the dead end of a specular relation. In order to resolve the mystery of femininity's connection to the phallus, these Siamese sisters only had at their disposal the real of two other female bodies, to be cut up and scrutinized. In addition, the figurative expression "to tear out the eyes" (crever les yeux à quelqu'un) was not a metaphor, since the Papin sisters did tear out the eyes of their victims while they were still alive.

In his seminar on Joyce the issues of folie à deux and the continuation of the symptom return in the question that bears on James Joyce's relation to his schizophrenic daughter, Lucia. In addition, the knot of paranoia will correspond to the trefoil knot, and Lacan will show that when a subject knots together the imaginary, symbolic, and real, the knot is only supported by the continuity of these three dimensions. R.S.I. are from then on "one and the same consistence, and it is in this that paranoid psychosis consists."²

Laura Sokolowsky

1. Lacan, *Écrits* (1966), 2002:1): 51–54. Online: <http://www.lacan.com/...>

2. Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXXIII*, ed J.-A. Miller, trans. A.R. Price (Cambridge: Polity: 2016), 41.