

# Lituraterre

by Jacques Lacan

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This word is legitimized by *Ernout and Meillet: lino, litura, litturarius*. It has come to me, however, from that play on words of which it happens that one might make a joke: the spoonerism returning to the lips, the inversion to the ear.

This dictionary (let one go to it) brings me an auspice from being founded on a departure I took (to depart, here is to *répartir*<sup>1</sup>) from the *equivoque* by which Joyce (James Joyce, I say) slips from *a letter* to *a litter*, from *a lettre* (I translate) to a piece of trash.

One recalls that a "*messe-haine*"<sup>2</sup> wishing him well, offered him a psychoanalysis, as one would a shower. And with Jung no less . . .

In the game we evoke, he would have gained nothing there, going in it straight to the best one can expect from psychoanalysis at its end.

To make litter of the letter, is it Saint Thomas who again returns to him, as his work shows through all its length?

Or else psychoanalysis attests there to its convergence with what our epoch accuses of the loosing of the ancient tie by which is contained the pollution in culture.

I had embroidered on that, as if by chance a little before May of '68, so as not to fall short due to the loss of those crowds that follow me where I visit now, at Bordeaux that day. Civilization I recalled as my premise is the sewer.

It must be said no doubt that I was tired of the wastebasket to which I have channeled my fate. You know that I am not the only one, to be generous, to admit it (*L'avouer*).

The admission (*L'avouer*) or, as pronounced of old, "*L'avoit*" (the having) of which Beckett makes a balance to the debt that makes refuse of our being, saves the honor of literature, and relieves me of the privilege I believed owed to my place.

The question is of knowing if what the textbooks seem to lay out, if literature be the using up of leftovers (*accommodation des restes*), is an affair of a collocation in the written of what first would be song, spoken myth, dramatic procession.

As for psychoanalysis, that it be appended to the Oedipus, does not in any way qualify it to rediscover itself in the text of Sophocles. The evocation by Freud of a text of Dostoevski does not suffice to say that the criticism of texts, a game (*chasse*) until now reserved for university dis-

course, has received more air from psychoanalysis,

Here my teaching has a place in a changing of configuration which is posted as a slogan for the promotion of the written, but of which other evidences, for example, that it is beginning in our day that finally Rabelais is read, show a displacement of interests to what agrees with me better.

I am as author less implicated than one might imagine, and my *Écrits* a more ironic title than one might believe: when it is a question either of reports, functions of Congress, or, let us say, of "open letters" where I bring into question a patch of my teaching.

Far in any case from committing myself to that literary *frotti-frotta* by which the psychoanalyst is denoted lacking in invention, I denounce therein the attempt never failing to demonstrate the inadequacy of his practice to motivate the least literary judgment.

It is striking however that I open this collection with an article that I isolate from its chronology, and that it concerns itself with a story, itself very particular in not being able to re-enter into the ordained list of dramatic situations: that of what comes about from the posting of a letter missive, known to those to whom its returns occur, and by what terms it is supported that I might say it has come to its destination, after, from the detours it has submitted to there, the story and its count (*le conte et son compte*) are sustained without any recourse to its content. It is only the more remarkable that the effect it brings to those who turn-by-turn detain it, all arguing for the power it confers if they be there to claim it, can be interpreted, as I do, as a feminization.

There the account is well rendered of what distinguishes the letter from the signifier itself it carries. In which this is not to make a metaphor of the epistle. Since the story consists in the message vanishing in it like a conjurer's ball from which the letter makes its peripeteia without it.

My critique, if it is its place to be taken for literary, could only bear, such was my effort, on what Poe makes of being a writer in forming such a message on the letter. It is clear that in not saying so, it is not insufficiently, it is all the more rigorously he admits it.

Nonetheless, the ellipsis cannot be elucidated by means of some aspect (*trait*) of his psychobiography; rather this would clog it up.

(Thus the psychoanalyst who has scoured Poe's other texts, here declares his housekeeping forfeit.)

My own text would no more resolve itself by mine: the wish I might form for example of finally being read suitably. For that, it would still be necessary that we develop my understanding of what the letter carries to arrive *always* at its destination.

It is certain that, as usual, psychoanalysis here receives, from literature, if it takes of the scope of repression an idea less psychobiographical.

For me, if I propose to psychoanalyze the letter as in sufferance, it is because it shows there its failure. And it is by this that I shed light on it: when I thus evoke the *lumières*,<sup>3</sup> it is to

demonstrate where it makes a *hole*. We have known it for a long time: nothing is more important in optics, and the most recent physics of the photon arms itself therewith.

A method whereby psychoanalysis better justifies its intrusion; for if literary criticism could effectively renew itself, it would be in that psychoanalysis be there so the texts can measure themselves against it, the enigma being on its side.

But those of whom it is not slander to advance that, rather than exercising it, they are exercised by it, at the very least in being taken in body—they understand my theses badly.

I oppose to their skill (*adresse*) truth and knowledge: it is the first<sup>4</sup> where immediately they recognize their office, while on the hot seat, it is their truth I await. I insist on correcting my aim from a failed knowledge: as they say, *figure en abyme*, this is not a failure of knowledge. I learn while one believes oneself exempted from putting any knowledge to the test.

Would this be the dead letter I have put in the title of one of those pieces I have called *Ecrits . . . the instance of the letter*, as reason of the unconscious?

Is it not enough to designate in the letter that which, in its duty to insist, is not fully entitled there to be as reasonable as is advanced? The word (*dire*) mean, or else extreme, is to show the bifidity in which all measure is engaged, but is there nothing in the real which dispenses with this mediation? The frontier, certainly, in separating two territories, symbolizes what they are even for whoever crosses it, that they have a common measure. This is the principle of the *Umwelt*, which reflects the *Innenwelt*. Irritating, this biology which gives to itself already its whole principle: the fact of adaptation notably, not to speak of selection; it crosses ideology to bless itself for being natural.

The letter is it not . . . littoral more properly, that is, figuring as a domain entirely made for the other frontier, in that they are strangers, to the extent of not being reciprocal.

The edge of the hole in knowledge, is that not what it sketches? And how could psychoanalysis, if precisely what the letter says "literally" ("*à la lettre*") with its mouth, it did not have to be misrecognized, how could it deny that it is, this hole—since to fill it, it returns to invoking *jouissance*?

It remains to be known how the unconscious which I say to be an effect of language, in that it supposes its structure as necessary and sufficient, commands this function of the letter.

That it be the instrument proper to the writing of discourse, does not render it improper to designate the word taken for an other, indeed by an other, in the sentence, thus to symbolize certain effects of the signifier, but does not impose that it be primary in these effects.

An examination of this primarity does not impose itself, which is not even to be supposed, but from what language calls the littoral in the literal.

What I have inscribed, with the help of letters, of the formations of the unconscious to

recuperate them from that of which Freud formulates them, as being what they are, effects of the signifier, does not authorize us to make of the letter a signifier, nor to affect for it, which is more, a primarity in regard to the signifier.

Such a confused discourse could only have arisen from that which is important to me. But it imports me into an other that I pinned down, the time come, as university discourse, the knowledge put in use beginning with the *semblant*.<sup>5</sup>

The least sentiment that the experience in what I defend, can only be situated from another discourse, must have been careful to produce itself, without admitting that it was from me. That they spared me that—thank God!—does not prevent that in importing me (*m'importer*), in the sense I mean, they importune me.

If I have found the models Freud articulates in an *Outline* receivable for boring impressive routes for myself, I would not for all that have taken from it the metaphor of writing. It is not the impression, it does not displease the mystic writing pad.

When I pull out part of the letter to Fliess 52e, it is to read what Freud might have stated under the term he contrives as *wz*, *Wahrnehmungszeichen*, the closest to the signifier, at a date when Saussure had not yet reproduced it (from the Stoic *signans*).

That Freud writes it with two letters, does not prove any more than with me, that the letter is primary.

I am going then to indicate the essence (*le vif*) of what appears to me to produce the letter as consequence, and of language, precisely from what I say: that he who speaks inhabits it.

I will borrow the traces (*traits*) from what with an economy of language permits the sketching of what is promoted in my idea that literature perhaps turns to *lituraterre*.

One will not be astonished to see me proceed by a literary demonstration since it is there to walk with the step from which the question produces itself. In which however it can be affirmed what such a demonstration is.

I return from a voyage I expected to make to Japan in that I had experienced from a first . . . the littoral. Let us take a hint from what I have just repudiated of the *Umwelt* as rendering the voyage impossible: indeed from one side, according to my formula, assuring its real, but prematurely, only to render, but from a misdeal, the departure impossible, that is, all the more in singing "Let us depart."

I will note only the moment that I received from a new route, taking it in that it was no longer as on the first time prohibited. I admit however it was not in going the length the arctic circle by air that I made the reading of what I saw of the Siberian plane.

My present effort, inasmuch as it could title itself a siberiethic, would not have seen the light if the mistrust of the Soviets had allowed me to see the villages, indeed the industries, the

military installations that give Siberia its worth for them, but this is only an accidental condition, although less perhaps to name it occidental, to indicate the accident of a heaping up of carnage (*amoncellement de l'occire*).

The only decisive thing is the littoral condition, and that only comes into play in the return from being literally what Japan of its letter has without doubt made for me this little too much which is precisely what is needed for me to feel it, since after all I have already said it is this by which its language is eminently affected.

Without doubt this too much is owed to what art brings: I would say the fact of what the painter demonstrates there of his marriage to the letter, very precisely in the form of calligraphy.

How to say what fascinates me in those things which hang, chattered about as *kakemono*, hang on the walls of all the museums in those places, bearing inscriptions of characters, of Chinese formation, which I know a little, but which, as little as I know them, permit me to measure what is elided in the cursive, where the singular of the hand crushes the universal, that is, properly what I teach you has no value but from the signifier: I find it there no longer but it is because I am a novice. There for the rest not being the important thing, for even inasmuch as this singular supports a firmer form, and adds to it the dimension, the demansion,<sup>6</sup> have I already said, the demansion of *papeludun*,<sup>7</sup> that from which is evoked what I install of the subject in the *Hun-En-Peluce*,<sup>8</sup> in that it furnishes<sup>9</sup> the anxiety of the *Achose*,<sup>10</sup> that is, what I connote of the *petit a* here made an object from being the stake of what wager won with ink and brush?

As appeared to me invincibly, this circumstance is not nothing: the between-the-clouds, the streaming (*ruissellement*), only trace to appear, operating there to do more still than indicate relief in this latitude, in that which of Siberia makes a plain, a plain desolate of any vegetation but reflections, which push into the darkness what does not shimmer.

The streaming is the bouquet of a first stroke (*trait*) and of what effaces it. I have said it: it is from their conjunction that the subject is made, but in that two times are marked there. It is necessary then that the erasure be distinguished there.

Erasure of no trace that might be in advance, this is what makes the shore (*terre*) of the littoral. Pure *Litura*,<sup>11</sup> this is the literal. To produce it, is to reproduce that half without complement (*paire*) by which the subject subsists. Such is the exploit of calligraphy. Try to make this horizontal bar which is drawn from left to right to figure with a stroke (*trait*) the unary one (*l'un unaire*) as character, it will take you a long time to find from what support it is attacked, by what suspense it is arrested. To tell the truth, it is without hope for an occidentalized.

It requires a movement (*train*) which is only captured in being detached from whatever it is that you strike out.

Between center and absence,<sup>12</sup> between knowledge (*savoir*) and *jouissance*, there is a

littoral which only turns to the literal insofar as this turn, we might take it the same at any instant. It is from this alone that you can take yourself for the agent who sustains it.

What is revealed by my vision of the streaming, inasmuch as the erasure dominates it, is that in producing itself from between the clouds, it conjoins itself to its source, that it is indeed in the clouds Aristophanes hails me to find what concerns the signifier: that is, the *semblant, par excellence*, if it is from its rupture that it rains, the effect inasmuch as is precipitated from it, what was matter in suspension.

This rupture which dissolves what made form, phenomenon, meteor of which I have said science operates to pierce the appearance, would not this be also to discharge that which of this rupture would make *jouissance* in that in the world (*monde*) as well as in filth (*immonde*), there is a drive to figure life?

What is evoked of *jouissance* insofar as a *semblant* is broken, this is what in the real presents itself as a furrowing.

It is from the same effect that writing is in the real the furrowing of the signified, which has more of the *semblant* insofar as it makes the signifier. Writing does not trace (*décalque*) the signifier, but its effects of language (*langue*), what is forged by whoever speaks it. It only climbs back in taking a name there, as happens in those effects among things that the signifying battery names (*dénomme*) to have them numbered (*dénombrées*).

Later the plane swerving to sustain itself in isobars, as if it were slanting from an embankment, from other normal trails to those for which the supreme inclination of relief was marked by waterways.

Have I not seen in Osaka how the highways are posed one over the other like gliders come from heaven? Elsewhere than there the most modern architecture rediscovers the ancient to make itself a beating wing of a bird.

How would the shortest path from one point to another be shown if not by the cloud the wind pushes without it changing its heading? Neither the amoeba, nor man, nor the branch, nor the fly, nor the ant would have served as an example before light was proven in solidarity with a universal curvature, where the straight line only sustains itself by inscribing distance in the effective factors of a dynamic of the cascade.

There is no straight line except in writing, as if from a surveying come from heaven.

But writing like surveying is an artifact only to inhabit language. How could we forget this when our science is only operant from a streaming of little letters and graphics combined?

Under the Mirabeau bridge certainly, as under that of which a *revue* of mine made an insignia, borrowing it from the eared-bridge of Horus Apollo, under the Mirabeau bridge, yes, flows the primitive Seine, and it is a scene such as can beat the Roman V of the fifth hour (cf. *The*

*Wolfman*). But, also, one only enjoys it inasmuch as the speech of interpretation rains there. That the symptom institutes the order admitted by our politics, implies on the other hand that all that articulates itself of this order be liable to interpretation.

This is why one has good reason to put psychoanalysis at the head of politics. And it might not make for the complete repose of what has made a figure in politics until now, if psychoanalysis would admit itself warned (*s'en averait avertie*).

It will suffice perhaps, one tells oneself this no doubt, that from writing we turn to account something other than the tribune or the tribunal, so that other words might come into play for us to pay tribute to.

There is no metalanguage, but the written that is fabricated from language is perhaps the material by force of which our arguments change themselves.

Is it possible from the littoral to constitute a discourse such as characterizes itself as not being emitted from the *semblant*? There is the question only proposed by the literature called *avant-garde*, which is itself made of the littoral: and thus does not sustain itself by the *semblant*, but for all that proves nothing but the breakage, which only a discourse can produce, with an effect of production.

This to which a literature seems to aspire in its ambition to *lituraterre*, is to order itself from a movement it calls scientific.

It is a fact that writing has made a marvel there and that everything marks that this marvel is not about to be silenced.

However, physical science finds itself, is going to find itself, led back to the consideration of the symptom in the facts, by the pollution of what of the terrestrial we call, without further critique of the *Umwelt*, the environment: this is Uexküll's idea behaviorised, which is to say, cretinised.

To *lituraterre* myself, I make remarked that I have not made in the furrowing which images it any metaphor. Writing is this furrowing itself, and when I speak of *jouissance*, I invoke legitimately what I accumulate from my audience: no less by that from those of whom I deprive myself, for this occupies me.

I would like to testify to what is produced from a fact already marked: to wit, that of a language, Japanese, insofar as a writing works it.

If there be included in the Japanese language an effect of writing, the important thing is that this effect remain attached to writing and that that which is the carrier of the effect of writing is there a specialized writing in that in Japanese it can be given two different pronunciations: in *on-yomi* its pronunciation as character, the character is pronounced as such distinctly, in *kun-yomi* the fashion in which is said in Japanese what the character means.

It would be comical to see designated there under the pretext that the character is a letter, the flotsam of the signifier flowing in the rivers of the signified. It is the letter as such that supports the signifier according to its law of metaphor. This is from elsewhere: from discourse, as it takes the letter in the net of the *semblant*.

The letter is however promoted from there as a referent as essential as anything, and this changes the status of the subject. That the subject is supported by a constellated heaven, and not only by the *trait unaire*, for its fundamental identification, explains that it can only take support from the *Tu*, which is to say, under all the grammatical forms by which the least statement varies itself from the relations of *politesse* it implies in its signified.

The truth reinforces there the structure of fiction I denote in it, in that this fiction is submitted to the laws of politeness.

Singularly this seems to bring the result that there is nothing to defend of a repressed, since the repressed itself finds its lodging by reference to the letter.

In other terms the subject is divided as everywhere by language (*langage*), but one of its registers can be satisfied by reference to writing and the other by speech.

This is without doubt what has given Roland Barthes the giddy feeling (*sentiment enivré*) that of all its manners the Japanese subject makes an envelope for nothing. The empire of signs, he titles his essay, meaning: empire of *semblants*.<sup>13</sup>

The Japanese, I have been told, find it bad. For nothing is more distinct from the void hollowed by writing than the *semblant*. The former is a bucket always ready to receive *jouissance*, or at least to invoke it by its artifice.

In keeping with our customs, nothing communicates less of itself than such a subject that in the final analysis hides nothing. It has only to manipulate you: you are an element among others of a ceremonial where the subject composes itself precisely in being able to decompose itself. The *bunraki*, theater of marionettes, reveals the structure quite ordinary for those to whom it gives their manners themselves.

Moreover, as in the *bunraki*, all that is said might be read by a narrator. This might have comforted Barthes. Japan is the place where it is most natural to be sustained by an (*d'un ou d'une*) interpreter, precisely in that it does not necessitate interpretation.

It is perpetual translation made language.

What I like, is that the only communication I might have had there (other than with Europeans with whom I know how to handle our cultural misunderstanding), is also the only one that there as elsewhere might be communication, in not being dialogue: to wit, scientific communication.

It impelled an eminent biologist to demonstrate to me his labors, on a blackboard naturally.



The fact that, for lack of information, I understood nothing of it, did not prevent what remained written there from being valuable. Valuable for the molecules of which my descendants will make themselves subjects, without my ever having had to know how I transmitted to them what rendered it plausible that I class them with me, from pure logic, among the living beings.

An asceticism of writing seems to me only able to succeed by rejoining an "it is written" by which would be installed the sexual rapport.

## Notes

1. To divide up or distribute.

2. A homophone of *mécène* (its spelling in the typescript version of this text presented by Lacan in his seminar, "D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant"), translatable as sponsor or benefactor. The closest literal translation of this neologism might be "mass-hater"--possibly a reference to the probability that the wealthy American benefactress in question, Mrs. McCormick, was not a practicing Catholic.

3. In an early version of this *écrit* presented in *Seminaire XVIII: D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* ("of a discourse that would not be a [of the] *semblant*") (unpublished) on May 12, 1971, this passage reads "It is by this that I shed light on it, psychoanalysis. And one knows, one knows that I know, that I thus evoke—it is on the back of my volume—the *lumières*. For that I shed light on it by demonstrating where it makes a hole, psychoanalysis." Lacan is alluding here to the notes on the back cover of the French edition of the *Écrits* (*Seuil*, 1966) in which *lumières*—which can also be translated as "insights" or "lights"—seems to refer to *Les Lumières*, the philosophers of the Enlightenment. The notes in question read as follows:

It is necessary to have read this collection, in its length, to feel that a single debate is being pursued in it, always the same, and which, if this need appear to be given a date, is recognized to be the debate of the *lumières*.

It is a domain where the sunrise itself tarries: that which proceeds (*va*) from a prejudice of which psychopathology is not cleared, based on the false evidence from which the ego entitles itself (*se fait titre*) to strut forth (*parader*) from existence.

The obscure passes in it for an object and flowers from the obscurantism that rediscovers in it its values.

No surprise therefore that one resists even the discovery of Freud there, a term extended here from an amphibology: the discovery of Freud by Jacques Lacan.

The reader will learn what is demonstrated there: the unconscious arises from pure logic, in other words, from the signifier.

Epistemology will always fail here, if it does not take its departure from a reform, which is a subversion of the subject.

Its advent can only be produced really and at a place that psychoanalysts hold at present.

It is to transcribe this subversion, from their most everyday experience, that Jacques Lacan has worked for them for fifteen years.

The thing has too much interest for everyone, for there to be no rumor of it.

It is so that it might not come to be diverted by cultural commerce that Jacques Lacan has made of these *Écrits* a call to attention.

4. In *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* this line reads "It is *la preuve* [the proof or evidence] where immediately they recognize their office . . . ."

5. Semblance, or seeming.

6. In *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, Lacan remarks,

It is very important, in our times and in view of certain statements which have been made and tend to establish some very regrettable confusions, to recall . . . that the written is, not first, but second in relation to any function of language, and that, nonetheless, without the written there is no possible fashion to return to the question of what results in the first power (*premiere chef*) from the effect of language as such, in other words from the symbolic order; this is, to wit, to give you pleasure, but you know that I have introduced the term *demansion*, the *demansion*, the residence, the place of the Other of Truth . . . Interrogate the *demansion* of truth, truth in its abode (*demeure*), it is something . . . which is only made by the written, and by the written insofar as it is only from the written that logic is constituted" (February 17, 1971).

7. Eric Laurent, in "The Purloined Letter and the Tao of the Psychoanalyst" (*The Later Lacan: An Introduction*, edited by Veronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf, State University of New York Press, 2007, pp. 25-52), translates *papeludun* as *nomorthunwonn* (37), noting that it "is a homophone of the French *pas plus d'un*, which could be translated in English as 'not more than one' " (51n.).

8. Translated by Laurent as "Wonn-mor . . . The One more [*Un en plus*], one could say, the One more with which the anguish of *l'Achose* is filled, is the object (*a*), and in what form if not that of the teddy bear [*l'ours en peluche*]?" (37).

9. *Meuble*, which means "furnishes" in the sense of furnishing an apartment.

10. The "A-thing."

11. Latin for "erasure," or more specifically, the rubbing-out of impressions on a wax tablet.

12. Lacan refers to this distinction "between center and absence" in his seminar ". . . *ou Pire*," (March 8, 1972):

. . . the Other . . . is a BETWEEN, the "between" of which it would be a question in the sexual rapport, but displaced, and precisely in 'Other-posing' itself . . . it is curious that in posing this Other, what I have had to advance today only concerns the woman. And it is indeed her who, of this figure of the Other, gives us the illustration within reach, in being, as the poet writes, 'between center and absence,' between the meaning she takes in what I have called this "at-least-one" (*au-moins-un*) where she does not find it except in the state of what I have announced--no more than announced--as being only pure existence. Between center and *the absence*, this becomes what for her? Precisely that second bar which I could only have written in defining it as a "Not-all," not contained in the phallic function without however being its negation. Its mode of presence is between center and absence, between the phallic function in which she participates, singularly inasmuch as the "at-least-one" who is her partner, in love, renounces it for her, which permits her to leave that by which she does not participate in the absence which is no less *jouissance* in being "jouis-absence."

The poet alluded to here is Henri Michaux.

13. In *The Empire of Signs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), trans. Richard Howard, Barthes argues that, in Japanese, the proliferation of functional prefixes and the complexity of enclitics suppose that the subject advances into utterance through certain precautions, delays, and insistences whose final volume (we can no longer speak of a simple line of words) turns the subject, precisely, into a great envelope empty of speech, and not that dense kernel which is supposed to direct our sentences, from outside and from above, so that what seems to us an excess of subjectivity (Japanese, it is said, articulates impressions not affidavits) is much more a way of diluting, of hemorrhaging the subject in a fragmented, partiled language diffracted to emptiness (7).

Barthes, in effect, reduces the envelope constituted by Japanese manners, linguistic and otherwise, to the temporality of the preparation of *tempura*, the product or content of which is a virtual nothing whose "real name would be the *interstice* without specific edges, or again: the empty sign" (26).