ALSO BY JACQUES LACAN
THE FOUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS
THE HOGARTH PRESS AND THE INSTITUTE OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS, 1977

JACQUES LACAN
ÉCRITS
A SELECTION
TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY ALAN SHERIDAN

TAVISTOCK/ROUTLEDGE
Contents

Translator's note
page vii

Bibliographical note
page xiii

ONE
The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I
page 1

TWO
Aggressivity in psychoanalysis
page 8

THREE
The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis
page 30

FOUR
The Freudian thing
page 114

FIVE
The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud
page 146
Translator's note

This selection of nine essays, representing well under a half of the material contained in the *Écrits*, is Lacan's own.

The Classified Index of Major Concepts and the Commentary on the Graphs are based on those prepared by Jacques-Alain Miller for the original French edition of the *Écrits*.

I am indebted to George Gross, Baudouin Jourdan and Stuart Schneiderman for their help with many of the difficulties presented by this uniquely difficult work.

I should also like to acknowledge assistance from the Arts Council of Great Britain.

The short glossary below is not intended to provide adequate definitions of concepts. To do so would be quite alien to the nature of Lacan's work, which is peculiarly resistant to interpretation of a static, defining kind. Though rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacan's concepts have evolved over the years to meet the requirements of a constant reformulation of psychoanalytic theory. They are best understood, therefore, operationally, at work in a number of different contexts. However, some of the terms do call for comment, if only by way of introduction. This, with the assistance of Jacques-Alain Miller, I have attempted to provide. In certain cases, however, Lacan has preferred that a term be left entirely unglossed, on the grounds that any comment would prejudice its effective operation.

The first italicized word in brackets in each entry is Lacan's French word, the second, where necessary, Freud's German. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the terminology of 'classical' Freudian psychoanalysis.

AGENCY (*instance, Instant*). Lacan's use of the term 'instance' goes well beyond Freud's 'Instant'. It represents, one might say, an exploitation of the linguistic possibilities of the French equivalent of Freud's German term. In the absence of any exact equivalent of Lacan's French term, one is thrown back to the term used by Freud's English
Translator's note

Freud's English translators blur this distinction by translating both terms as 'instinct'.

ENUNCIATION (énonciation). The distinction between ‘énoncé’ and ‘énonciation’ is a common one in contemporary French thinking. ‘Énoncé’, which I translate as ‘statement’, refers to the actual words uttered, ‘énonciation’ to the act of uttering them.

IMAGINARY, SYMBOLIC, REAL (imaginaire, symbolique, réel). Of these three terms, the ‘imaginary’ was the first to appear, well before the Rome Report of 1953. At the time, Lacan regarded the ‘imago’ as the proper study of psychology and identification as the fundamental psychical process. The imaginary was then the world, the register, the dimension of images, conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined. In this respect, ‘imaginary’ is not simply the opposite of ‘real’: the image certainly belongs to reality and Lacan sought in animal ethology facts that brought out formative effects comparable to that described in ‘the mirror stage’.

The notion of the ‘symbolic’ came to the forefront in the Rome Report. The symbols referred to here are not icons, stylized figurations, but signifiers, in the sense developed by Saussure and Jakobson, extended into a generalized definition: differential elements, in themselves without meaning, which acquire value only in their mutual relations, and forming a closed order – the question is whether this order is or is not complete. Henceforth it is the symbolic, not the imaginary, that is seen to be the determining order of the subject, and its effects are radical: the subject, in Lacan’s sense, is himself an effect of the symbolic. Lévi-Strauss’s formalization of the elementary structures of kinship and its use of Jakobson’s binarism provided the basis for Lacan’s conception of the symbolic – a conception, however, that goes well beyond its origins. According to Lacan, a distinction must be drawn between what belongs in experience to the order of the symbolic and what belongs to the imaginary. In particular, the relation between the subject, on the one hand, and the signifiers, speech, language, on the other, is frequently contrasted with the imaginary relation, that between the ego and its images. In each case, many problems derive from the relations between these two dimensions.

The ‘real’ emerges as a third term, linked to the symbolic and the imaginary: it stands for what is neither symbolic nor imaginary, and remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience

Translator's note
of speech. What is prior to the assumption of the symbolic, the real in its 'raw' state (in the case of the subject, for instance, the organism and its biological needs), may only be supposed, it is an algebraic x. This Lacanian concept of the 'real' is not to be confused with reality, which is perfectly knowable: the subject of desire knows no more than that, since for it reality is entirely phantasmatic.

The term 'real', which was at first of only minor importance, acting as a kind of safety rail, has gradually been developed, and its signification has been considerably altered. It began, naturally enough, by presenting, in relation to symbolic substitutions and imaginary variations, a function of constancy: 'the real is that which always returns to the same place'. It then became the basis of its symbolic, that over which the imaginary stumbles, that which is refractory, resistant. Hence the formula: 'the real is the impossible'. It is in this sense that the term begins to appear regularly, as an adjective, to describe that which is lacking in the symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic.

As distinguished by Lacan, these three dimensions are, as we say, profoundly heterogeneous. Yet the fact that the three terms have been linked together in a series raises the question as to what they have in common' a question to which Lacan has addressed himself in his most recent thinking on the subject of the Borromean knot ('Séminaire 1974–75, entitled 'R.S.I.').

**JOUISSANCE (jouissance).** There is no adequate translation in English of this word. 'Enjoyment' conveys the sense, contained in jouissance, of enjoyment of rights, of property, etc. Unfortunately, in modern English, the word has lost the sexual connotations it still retains in French. *Jouir* is slang for 'to come'. 'Pleasure', on the other hand, is pre-empted by *plaisir* - and Lacan uses the two terms quite differently. 'Pleasure' obeys the law of homeostasis that Freud evokes in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', whereby, through discharge, the psyche seeks the lowest possible level of tension. 'Jouissance' transgresses this law and, in that respect, it is beyond the pleasure principle.

**KNOWLEDGE (savoir, connaissance).** Where 'knowledge' renders 'connaissance', I have added the French word in brackets. Most European languages make a distinction (e.g. Hegel's *Wissen* and *Kenntnis*) that is lost in English. In modern French thinking, different writers use the distinction in different ways. In Lacan, connaissance (with its inevitable concomitant, 'méconnaissance') belongs to the imaginary register, while savoir belongs to the symbolic register. 

**LACK (manque).** 'Manque' is translated here as 'lack', except in the expression, created by Lacan, 'manque-à-être', for which Lacan himself has proposed the English neologism 'want-to-be'.

**LURE (leurre).** The French word translates variously 'lure' (for hawks, fish), 'decoy' (for birds), bait (for fish) and the notion of 'allurement' and 'enticement'. In Lacan, the notion is related to 'méconnaissance'.

**MÉCONNAISSANCE.** I have decided to retain the French word. The sense is of a 'failure to recognize', or 'misconstruction'. The concept is central to Lacan's thinking, since, for him, knowledge (connaissance) is inextricably bound up with méconnaissance.

**NAME-OF-THE-FATHER (nom-du-père).** This concept derives, in a sense, from the mythical, symbolic father of Freud's Totem and Taboo. In terms of Lacan's three orders, it refers not to the real father, nor to the imaginary father (the paternal imago), but to the symbolic father. Freud, says Lacan, was led irresistibly 'to link the appearance of the signifier of the Father, as the author of the Law, to death, even to the murder of the Father, thus showing that although this murder is the fruitful moment of the debt through which the subject binds himself for life to the Law, the symbolic Father, in so far as he signifies this Law, is certainly the dead Father' (Écrits, 'Of a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis').

**NEED (besoin).** See desire.

**OBJET PETIT a.** The 'a' in question stands for 'autre' (other), the concept having been developed out of the Freudian 'object' and Lacan's own exploitation of 'otherness'. The 'petit a' (small 'a') differentiates the object from (while relating it to) the 'Autre' or 'grand Autre' (the capitalized Other'). However, Lacan refuses to comment on either term here, leaving the reader to develop an appreciation of the concepts in the course of their use. Furthermore, Lacan insists that 'objet petit a' should remain untranslated, thus acquiring, as it were, the status of an algebraic sign.

**OTHER (Autre, grand Autre).** See objet petit a.

**PLEASURE (plaisir).** See jouissance.
The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I
Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je. An earlier version, entitled simply Le stade du miroir, was delivered at the fourteenth International Psychoanalytical Congress, held at Marienbad in August 1936 under the chairmanship of Ernest Jones. An English translation of this version appeared in The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, vol. 18, part 1, January, 1937, under the title, 'The Looking-glass Phase'. A much revised later version was delivered at the sixteenth International Psychoanalytical Congress, in Zurich on July 17, 1949. It was published in the Revue française de psychanalyse, no. 4, October–December, 1949, pp. 449–55. The present translation is of the later version.

Aggressivity in psychoanalysis

The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis

The Freudian thing
Bibliographical note

The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud

On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis

The signification of the phallus
La Signification du phallus. Lecture given in German under the title Die Bedeutung des Phalhüs at the Max-Planck Institute, Munich, at the invitation of Professor Paul Matussek, 9 May, 1958.

The direction of the treatment and the principles of its power

The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious