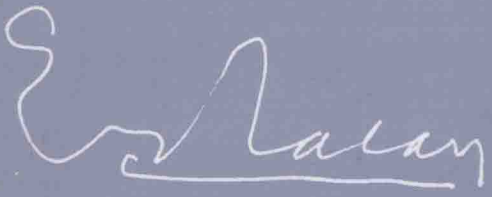
JACQUES LACAN

On the Names-of-the-Father



TRANSLATED BY BRUCE FINK

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Jacques Lacan

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On the Names-of-the-Father

Foreword

This volume brings together, not fortuitously, two talks Lacan gave ten years apart, on July 8, 1953, and November 20, 1963, on what were ostensibly very different topics.

He spoke on "The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real" immediately before writing the so-called Rome Report on "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" during the summer of 1953, a paper that marked the public debut of "Lacan's teaching," as it was later called. The earlier talk included the first thematic presentation of the famous triad that undergirded all of Lacan's work for the next three decades and that went on to become its essential object – not merely a conceptual object, but

a mathematical and material one as well in the form of the Borromean knot and its derivatives.

The next talk included in this volume is the first and only class Lacan gave of his Seminar "On the Names-of-the-Father." Dramatically interrupted by Lacan's demotion from the rank of *didacticien* (which at the time meant a psychoanalyst authorized to train other psychoanalysts [i.e., a "training analyst"]), his Seminar began anew in January 1964 in the rue d'Ulm at the École Normale Supérieure with a new title: "The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis."

Lacan always refused to revisit the theme of the Seminar that was cut short and even to publish while he was alive the text of the single class he had given. Having concluded from his tribulations that "psychoanalytic discourse" had not authorized him to lift, as he had intended, the veil Freud had cast over the true mainspring of psychoanalysis, and that he had been struck down for his sacrilegious act, he signaled, in a word to the wise, in particular in the ironic title that he gave a later Seminar, *Les non-dupes errent*, that he would keep close to his chest truths that were too tempestuous.

The calling into question of the limits of the

Oedipus complex and of the paternal myth continued more discreetly through his seminars and writings nevertheless, going so far as to reduce the Name-of-the-Father to the level of a symptom and utensil (see the Seminar entitled *Le sinthome*, published in 2005).

The co-publication of these two talks is certainly justifiable from an historical perspective (see the bio-bibliographical indications at the end of this volume). But the true reason that I decided to bring them together lies elsewhere: to take seriously Lacan's indication in his final teaching – half-joke and half-sentence, in his classic half-speaking [*mi-dire*] way – that the symbolic, imaginary, and real are the true Names-of-the-Father.

Jacques-Alain Miller

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The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real

My friends, you can see that, for the first so-called scientific presentation of our new Society, I have selected a title that is quite ambitious.

I will thus begin first by apologizing for it, asking you to consider this presentation both as a summary of viewpoints that those here who are my students know well, with which they have become familiar over the past two years through my teaching, and also as a sort of preface or introduction to a certain orientation for studying psychoanalysis.

Indeed, I believe that the return to Freud's texts which my teaching has focused on for the past two years has convinced me – or rather us, all of us who have worked together – that there is no firmer grasp on human reality than that provided by Freudian psychoanalysis and that one must return to the source and apprehend, in every sense of the word, these texts.

One cannot escape the conclusion that psychoanalytic theory, and at the same time its technique, which form but one and the same thing, have undergone a sort of shrinkage and, to be quite frank, decay. For, in effect, it is not easy to remain at the level of such fullness.

Take, for example, a text like that of the Wolf

Man [*The History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918), SE XVII]. I thought of taking it this evening as a basis for and as an example of what I wish to present to you. But although I gave a Seminar on it last year, I spent the entire day yesterday rereading the case and quite simply had the feeling that it was impossible to give you even an approximate idea of it here and that there was but one thing to be done – to give last year's Seminar again next year.

Indeed, what I perceived in this incredible text, after the work and progress we made this year on the case of the Rat Man [*Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis* (1909), SE X], leads me to think that what I stressed last year as the crux, example, or typically characteristic thought furnished by this extraordinary text was but a simple "approach," as the Anglo-Saxons say – in other words, a first step. The upshot being that this evening I will merely try to compare and contrast briefly the three quite distinct registers that are essential registers of human reality: the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real.

I

One thing cannot escape us at the outset – namely, that there is in analysis a whole portion of our subjects' reality [*réel*] that escapes us. It did not escape Freud when he was dealing with each of his patients, but, of course, it was just as thoroughly beyond his grasp and scope.

We should be struck by the way in which he speaks of the Rat Man, setting him apart from his other patients. He concludes that he can see in him the personality of a "fine, intelligent, and cultured man," and he contrasts him with other patients he has worked with. This is not so much the case when he speaks of the Wolf Man, but he mentions it nevertheless. Still, we are not required to endorse all of his appraisals. The Wolf Man does not seem to have had quite as much class as the Rat Man. Yet it is striking that Freud singled him out as a special case. Not to mention Dora, about whom we can virtually say that he loved her.

This direct element, whereby Freud weighs and appraises personalities, cannot fail to strike us. It is something that we deal with all the time in the register of morbidity, on the one hand, and

even in the register of psychoanalytic practice, with subjects who do not fall completely into the morbid category. It is an element that we must always reserve judgment about and that is especially prominent to those of us who bear the heavy burden of choosing among those who wish to go into analysis in order to undergo training as analysts.

What can we say in the end, after our selection has been made? Consider the criteria that are mentioned – must someone be neurotic in order to be a good analyst? A little bit neurotic? Highly neurotic? Certainly not, but what about not at all neurotic? In the final reckoning, is this what guides us in a judgment that no text can define and which leads us to appraise personal qualities? In other words, do we rely on the reality expressed by the following – that a subject either has the right stuff or he doesn't, that he is, as the Chinese say, *xian da*, a worthy man, or, *xiao ren*, an unworthy man? This is certainly something that constitutes the limits of our experience.

What is brought into play in analysis? Is it a real relation to the subject, namely, to recognize his reality in a certain way and according to our own measures? Is that what we deal with in

analysis? Certainly not – it is indisputably something else. This is a question we ask ourselves all the time, and that is raised by all those who try to formulate a theory of psychoanalytic practice [*expérience*]. What is this practice, which is so different from all others and brings about such profound transformations in people? What are those transformations? What is their mainspring?

For years the development of psychoanalytic theory has been designed to answer this question. The average person or man in the street does not seem terribly astonished by the effectiveness of this practice that occurs entirely through speech. And he is, in the end, quite right, for indeed it works, and it would seem that, in order to explain it, we need first but demonstrate its movement by working. To speak is already to go to the heart of psychoanalytic experience. Here it makes sense to first raise a question: What is speech? In other words, what are symbols?

In truth, we witness an avoidance of this question. And we note that in minimizing this question – in seeing in the strictly technical elements and mainsprings of analysis nothing more than instruments designed to modify, through a series of successive approximations, the subject's

behaviors and habits – we are led very quickly to a number of difficulties and dead ends. Going in this direction, we certainly don't go to the point of situating them in a global consideration of psychoanalytic practice, but we go ever further toward a certain number of opacities that arise and that then tend to turn analysis into a practice that seems far more irrational than it really is.

It is striking to see how many subjects who have recently engaged in analysis have talked, in their first way of expressing themselves regarding their experience, about its possibly irrational character, whereas it seems, on the contrary, that there is perhaps no more transparent technique around.

Of course, in an analysis everything goes in this direction: we fall in with a certain number of the patient's more or less partial psychological views, we speak about magical thinking, we speak about all kinds of registers that indisputably have their value and are encountered in a very dynamic fashion in psychoanalysis. There is but one step from that to thinking that psychoanalysis itself operates in the register of magical thinking, and this step is quickly taken when one does not decide first to raise the primordial question: What does

the experience of speaking involve? What is the essence and exchange of speech? And to raise at the same time the question of psychoanalytic practice [*expérience*].

Let us begin with this practice as it is initially presented to us in the first theories of analysis. What is this *neurotic* whom we deal with in psychoanalysis? What is going to happen during the analysis? What about the shift [in focus] from the conscious to the unconscious? What are the forces that give a certain existence to the equilibrium we call the pleasure principle?

To proceed quickly, I will say with Raymond de Saussure that the subject hallucinates his world. The subject's illusory satisfactions are obviously of a different order than the satisfactions that find their object purely and simply in reality [*réel*]. A symptom has never sated hunger or slaked thirst in a lasting manner, unless accompanied by the absorption of food or drink. No doubt a general decline in the subject's level of vitality can result in extreme cases, as we see for example in natural or artificial hibernation, but this is conceivable only as a phase that cannot last without leading to irreversible damage. The very reversibility of a neurotic problem implies that the economy of