

The Psychoses

The Seminar of Jacques Lacan

Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller

BOOK III 1955-1956

Translated with notes
by Russell Grigg



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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This is a translation of the seminar that Lacan delivered to the Société Française de Psychanalyse over the course of the academic year 1955–56. The original French text is the third in a series of Lacan's seminars, beginning in 1953, that is being edited by Jacques-Alain Miller.

I have been mindful of James Strachey's translations of Freud in the *Standard Edition*. On the whole it has been possible to avoid major divergences from Strachey, the two exceptions being to render "*investissement*" as "investment" rather than "cathexis" and "*pulsion*" as "drive" rather than "instinct." In this I follow the practice adopted by the translators of Seminars I and II and by Stuart Schneiderman in *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

The translation of this seminar is faced with one further complication arising from the fact that it deals extensively with Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*. Schreber's terms have often been rendered differently in the English translation of the *Memoirs*, in the *Standard Edition* version of Freud's case history, and in Lacan's article, "The question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis," in *Ecrits: A Selection*. This has, on a very small number of occasions, required some explanation, which will be found in the footnotes.

I should add that I have diverged in two major ways from the translations of Seminars I and II.

First, the terms "*signification*" and "*sens*," which appear in Seminars I and II as "signification" and "meaning" respectively, have been translated as "meaning" and "sense." I am following the practice of Stuart Schneiderman here, for essentially the same reason he gives: there seems little reason to resort to the archaism of the English "signification" when there are two common English terms that will do adequate service.

Secondly, the term "*méconnaissance*" is rendered as "misrecognition," instead of "failure to recognize" or "misunderstanding." The latter term has to be

reserved for “*malentendu*,” while there are contexts in which the first does not capture the appropriate meaning.

I have followed Seminars I and II in indicating the distinction, a significant one in the original, between “*moi*” and “*ego*” by putting “*ego*” in roman when “*moi*” appears in the original and in italics when “*ego*” has been used.

Finally, the numbers in the margin of this translation refer to the pagination of the French edition published by *Editions du Seuil* in 1981. It is hoped that this practice will assist those who, while needing to refer to the English edition, are in a position to consult the original.

I wish to thank Jacques-Alain Miller for the assistance and advice he gave me while I was preparing this translation. I am also grateful to the editor at W. W. Norton, Susan Barrows Munro, for her encouragement and patience in helping me to bring this long and sometimes difficult translation to publication.

Many very helpful comments were made by Kerry Murphy and Rosemary Sorensen, who both generously read an entire draft of the manuscript. I owe them gratitude for invaluable suggestions on ways to improve the style of the translation. Dominique Hecq, with her sensitivity to the idiom of both languages, gave me sound advice on a number of difficult points.

Finally, I would like to record my thanks to Deakin University for its support while I was engaged on this work.

Russell Grigg
Geelong, Australia
June 1992

ABBREVIATIONS

- Mem D. P. Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, translated and edited with introduction, notes, and discussion by Ida MacAlpine & Richard Hunter, with a new introduction by Samuel M. Weber, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988. Originally published as *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken*, Leipzig: Oswald Mutze, 1903. Page numbers refer to the pagination of the original German edition, noted in the margin of the English translation.
- SE Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 volumes), translated and edited by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis; New York: Norton, 1953–74.
- GW Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (18 volumes), Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag.
- Sem Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Books I and II, New York: Norton, 1988.
- E Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966. Where there are two numbers, separated by a slash, /, the first number refers to the page number in the French edition, the second to the page number in *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: Norton, 1977.

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| Freud-
Fliess | <i>The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887–1904</i> , translated and edited by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985 |
| Origins | Sigmund Freud, <i>The Origins of Psycho-Analysis. Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes 1887–1902</i> , edited by Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, and Ernst Kris, translated by Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey, introduction by Ernst Kris, New York: Basic Books, 1954. |

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INTRODUCTION TO THE QUESTION OF THE PSYCHOSES

I

Introduction to the question of the psychoses

SCHIZOPHRENIA AND PARANOIA
M. DE CLÉRAMBAULT
THE MIRAGES OF UNDERSTANDING
FROM VERNEINING TO VERWERFUNG
PSYCHOSIS AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

This year the question of the psychoses begins.

I say the *question* because one can't speak straightaway of their *treatment*, as was announced in the initial notice, and still less of the treatment of psychosis *in Freud*, for he never spoke of it, except by allusion.

We shall start with Freud's theory and assess what it contributes to the issue, but we shall not fail to introduce the notions we have developed over the past years, nor to deal with all the problems that the psychoses raise for us *today*. Clinical and nosographic problems first. I've been thinking that all the benefit analysis might produce with respect to them hasn't yet been fully extracted. Problems of treatment, too, which our work for this year ought to lead into – this is our aim.

Thus it's not by chance that I initially gave what we shall finish with as our title. Let us say it was a lapsus, a significant lapsus.

1

I would like to stress one primary, self-evident truth – the least noticed as is always the case.

In what has been done, is done, and is now in the course of being done concerning treatment of the psychoses the schizophrenias are much more readily explored than the paranoias, a much more lively interest is taken in them, and greater results are expected from this. Why then does paranoia, on the contrary, have a rather privileged position for Freudian doctrine – that of a knot, but also of a resistant nucleus?

It might take us a long time to answer that question, but it will remain just below the surface of our approach.

Of course, Freud wasn't unaware of schizophrenia. The movement involving this concept's development was contemporary with him. But while he recognized, admired, and even encouraged the work of the Zurich school and

put analytic theory into relation with what was being constructed around Bleuler, he kept his distance nevertheless. He was initially and essentially interested in paranoia. And, to give you straightaway a reference point that you can return to, I remind you that at the end of the observation on the Schreber case, which is his major text concerning the psychoses, Freud traces out a watershed, as it were, between paranoia on the one hand and on the other everything he would like, he says, to be called paraphrenia, which exactly covers the field of the schizophrenias.¹ This is a necessary reference point for the intelligibility of everything we shall subsequently have to say – for Freud the field of the psychoses divides in two.

What does the term *psychosis* cover in the field of psychiatry? Psychosis is not dementia. The psychoses, if you like – there is no reason to deny oneself the luxury of this word – correspond to what has always been called and legitimately continues to be called *madness*. This is the domain Freud divides in two. He did not go in for much more nosology than this on the subject of psychosis, but on this point he is quite clear, and given the status of its author we cannot neglect this distinction.

In this respect, as sometimes happens, Freud is not absolutely in step with his time. Is he way behind it? Is he way ahead of it? There lies the ambiguity. At first sight he is way behind it.

I can't recount to you here the history of paranoia since it made its first appearance with a psychiatrist disciple of Kant at the beginning of the nineteenth century,² but let me tell you that at its maximum extension in German psychiatry it covered almost all forms of madness – seventy percent of the ill in asylums bore the label of paranoia. Everything we call psychosis or madness was paranoia.

In France the word *paranoia*, at the time it was introduced into nosology – this was very late, a matter of some fifty years – was identified with something fundamentally different. A paranoiac – at least until the thesis of a certain Jacques Lacan attempted to stir up people's minds,³ which was limited to a small circle, to the small circle that matters, which means that nobody talks of paranoiacs as they used to before – a paranoiac was a nasty person, an intolerant one, a bad-humored type, proud, mistrustful, irritable, and who overestimated himself. This feature formed the foundation of paranoia – when the paranoiac was far too paranoid, he would end up deluding. It was less a question of a conception than of a clinical picture, moreover a very fine one.

¹ "Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," SE 12:75–76.

² R. A. Vogel is generally credited with having introduced the term into modern usage in 1764.

³ Jacques Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*.

This is roughly where things stood in France, without my distorting anything, after the publication of M. Génil-Perrin's work on the paranoid constitution, which had spread the characterological notion of anomaly of the personality, essentially made up of what one may well describe – the book's style bears the mark of this inspiration – as the perverse structure of character.⁴ Like all pervers, it sometimes happens that the paranoiac goes beyond the limits and falls into that frightful madness, the unbounded exaggeration of his unfortunate character.

That outlook can be described as psychological, psychologizing, or even as psychogenetic. All the formal references to an organic base, to temperament for example, don't change a thing – it's really a psychological genesis. Something is defined and assessed at a certain level, and its development follows uninterrupted with an autonomous coherence that is self-sufficient in its own field. This is why, in a word, it's a question of psychology, despite the author's own explicit rejection of this point of view.

In my thesis I tried to promote another view. I was certainly still a young psychiatrist then, and I had been introduced to psychiatry largely through the works, the direct teaching, and, I would even be so bold as to say, the intimacy of someone who played a very important role in French psychiatry of that period, M. de Clérambault, whose personality, action, and influence I call to mind in this introductory discussion.⁵

For those among you who have only an approximate knowledge of his work – and there must be some – M. de Clérambault is supposed to have been the fierce defender of an extreme organicist conception. That was certainly the explicit design of his theoretical statements. However, I do not believe they give a correct perspective – either on the influence of his personality and teaching or on the true range of his discoveries.

His work has, independently of its theoretical aims, a concrete clinical value – there are a considerable number of clinical syndromes that Clérambault located in a completely original manner and that have since then been

⁴ See Georges Génil-Perrin, *Les Paranoïaques*, specially pt. 2, "La constitution paranoïaque."

⁵ Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault (1872–1934), Psychiatrist-in-charge at the Special Infirmary for the Insane of the Paris Prefecture of Police from 1920 to 1934, sought to describe the psychoses on the basis of a common element, the *syndrome of mental automatism*, on the grounds that delusion underlies all the different forms in which psychosis appears. He claimed that the disturbances from which delusions stem, which he called *elementary phenomena*, are of purely organic origin; not being part of the subject's own thought processes, they impose themselves upon the subject's mind from without. These phenomena include thought-echoes, verbal enunciations of actions, and various forms of hallucination. See de Clérambault, "Psychoses à base d'automatisme."

In 1966 Lacan, describing de Clérambault as his "only master in psychiatry," observed that "his mechanistic ideology . . . seems to me, in its grasp of the subjective text, to be closer to what can be constructed as a structural analysis than does any other clinical effort in French psychiatry." "De nos antécédents," E, 65.

integrated into the heritage of psychiatric experience. He made precious, original contributions which have never been taken up since. I have in mind his studies on psychosis caused by toxic substances. In a word, in the realm of the psychoses Clérambault remains absolutely indispensable.

The notion of mental automatism is apparently brought into focus in Clérambault's work and teaching by his concern to demonstrate the fundamentally *anideational* [*anidéique*], as he put it, character of the phenomena that manifest themselves in the development of psychosis. What this means is *that which doesn't correspond to a train of thought*, but unfortunately this doesn't make much more sense than the master's discourse does. This reference point is supposedly located, then, in terms of being understandable. The initial reference to understanding serves to decide exactly what it is that introduces a breach and appears as unintelligible.

Here we have an assumption that it would be an exaggeration to describe as naive, since surely none is more commonly held – and still, I fear, by you, or at least many among you. The major progress in psychiatry since the introduction of this movement of investigation called psychoanalysis has consisted, or so it's believed, in restoring meaning to the chain of phenomena. This is not false in itself. But what is false is to imagine that the sense in question is what we understand. What we are supposed to have learned once again, as is thought everywhere in medical quarters, the expression of psychiatrists' *sensus commune*, is to understand patients. This is a pure mirage.

The notion of understanding has a very clear meaning. It's a source that, under the name of *relation of understanding*, Jaspers has made the pivot of all so-called general psychopathology.⁶ It consists in thinking that some things are self-evident, that, for example, when someone is sad it's because he doesn't have what his heart desires. Nothing could be more false—there are people who have all their heart desires and are still sad. Sadness is a passion of quite another color.

I would like to insist on this. When you give a child a smack, well! it's understandable that he cries – without anybody's reflecting that it's not at all obligatory that he should cry. I remember a small boy who whenever he got a smack used to ask – *Was that a pat or a slap?* If he was told it was a slap he cried, that belonged to the conventions, to the rules of the moment, and if it was a pat he was delighted. But this isn't the end of the matter. When one gets a smack there are many other ways of responding than by crying. One can return it in kind, or else turn the other cheek, or one can also say – *Hit me, but listen!* A great variety of possibilities offer themselves, which are

⁶ See Karl Jaspers, "Meaningful Connections," "*Verständliche Zusammenhänge*," chap. 5 of his *General Psychopathology*.

neglected in the notion of relation of understanding as it's spelled out by M. Jaspers.

Before next time you can refer to his chapter entitled "Meaningful Connections." Its inconsistencies soon appear – this is the value of a sustained discourse.

Understanding is evoked only as an ideal relation. As soon as one tries to get close to it, it becomes, properly speaking, ungraspable. The examples that Jaspers takes as the most apparent – his reference points, with which he very quickly and inevitably confuses the notion itself – are ideal references. But what is striking is that in his own text he cannot, despite all the art he puts into sustaining this mirage, avoid giving precisely the examples that have always been refuted by the facts. For example, since suicide demonstrates a tendency towards decline, towards death, it seems that each and every one of us could say – but only if one sets out to get us to say it – that it more readily takes place at the decline of nature, that is during autumn. Yet it has been known for a long time that many more people commit suicide in spring. That is neither more nor less understandable. Surprise at there being more suicides in spring than autumn can only be based on this inconsistent mirage called the relation of understanding – as if there were anything that could ever be grasped in this order!

One is led to think then that psychogenesis is to be identified with the reintroduction of this celebrated relation into a relationship with the object of psychiatry. This is in fact very difficult to conceive, because it's literally inconceivable but, like all things that are not well grasped, or captured in a real concept, it remains a latent assumption, one that has been latent throughout all the changes in the complexion of psychiatry over the last thirty years. Well, if that is what psychogenesis is, I say – because I think that most of you are by now capable of grasping it, after two years of teaching on the symbolic, the imaginary and the real, and I also say it for those who aren't yet up to it – that the great secret of psychoanalysis is that there is no psychogenesis. If that is what psychogenesis is, there is precisely nothing that could be further from psychoanalysis in its whole development, its entire inspiration and its mainspring, in everything it has contributed, everything it has been able to confirm for us in anything we have established.

Another way of expressing things, one that goes much further, is to say that the psychological is, if we try to grasp it as firmly as possible, the ethological, that is, the whole of the biological individual's behavior in relation to his natural environment. There you have a legitimate definition of psychology. There you have an order of real relations, an objectifiable thing, a field with quite adequately defined boundaries. But to constitute an object of science, one must go a little bit further. It has to be said of human psychology what Voltaire used to say about natural history, which was that it's not as

natural as all that and that, frankly, nothing could be more anti-natural.⁷ Everything that in human behavior belongs to the psychological order is subject to such profound anomalies and constantly presents such obvious paradoxes that the problem arises of knowing what needs to be introduced in order for a cat to find its kittens.

If one forgets the landscape, the essential mainspring, of psychoanalysis, one comes back – which is naturally the constant, daily-observed tendency of psychoanalysts – to all sorts of myths formed ages ago. How long ago remains to be defined, but they date more or less from the end of the eighteenth century. The myth of unity of the personality, the myth of synthesis, of superior and inferior functions, confusion about automatism, all these types of organization of the objective field constantly reveal cracks, tears and rents, negation of the facts, and misrecognition of the most immediate experience.

Make no mistake, though. I'm not going to fall into the myth of immediate experience that forms the basis of what people call existential psychology or even existential psychoanalysis. Immediate experience is no better placed to arrest or captivate us than in any other science. In no way is it the measure of the development that we must ultimately reach. Freud's teaching, which in this respect is in total agreement with what takes place in the rest of the scientific domain – however differently we have to conceive it from our own myth – brings resources into play that are beyond immediate experience and cannot be grasped in any tangible fashion. In psychoanalysis, as in physics, it's not the property of color as sensed and differentiated by direct experience that holds our attention. It's something which is behind this, and which conditions it.

Freudian experience is in no way preconceptual. It's not a pure experience, but one that is well and truly structured by something artificial, the analytic relation, as it's constituted by what the subject recounts to the doctor and by what the doctor does with it. It's by setting out from this initial mode of operation that everything gets worked out.

Throughout this reminder you must have already recognized the three orders that I'm forever harping on as so necessary to understanding anything at all about analytic experience – that is, the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real.

You saw the symbolic appear just now when I alluded, and from two different directions, to what is beyond all understanding, which all understanding is inserted into, and which exercises such an obviously disruptive influence over human and interhuman relationships.

You have also seen the imaginary indicated in the reference I made to

⁷ On hearing someone praise Buffon's monumental work, *L'histoire naturelle*, Voltaire is said to have exclaimed, "Not so natural as all that!"