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The Purveyor of Truth
Author(s): Jacques Derrida, Willis Domingo, James Hulbert, Moshe Ron and M.-R. L.
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Jacques Derrida

The Purveyor of Truth [1]

> Ils le remercient pour les grandes vérités qu'il vient de proclamer, — car ils ont découvert (ô vérificateurs de ce qui ne peut être vérifié!) que tout ce qu'il a énoncé est absolument vrai; — bien que d'abord, avouent ces braves gens, ils aient eu le soupçon que ce pouvait bien être une simple fiction. Poe répond que pour son compte, il n'en a jamais douté.
>
> BAUDELAIRE

Pretexts, 31. — *Supplement to the Investigation*, 39. — *Point of View: the Truth in (the) Place of Feminine Sexuality*, 67. — *First Second: the Truth (out) of the Letter from Freud's Hand*, 78. — *Meeting Place: Four of a Kind, Kings — Double*, 100.

Pretexts

Let us suppose there is psychoanalysis. *(La psychanalyse, à supposer, se trouve.)*

When you think that you have got it, it is—to be supposed—that psychoanalysis evidences itself. *(Quand on croit la trouver, c'est elle, à supposer, qui se trouve.)*

When it is evidenced—to be supposed—it evidences itself—something. *(Quand elle trouve, à supposer, elle se trouve—quelque chose.)*

To limit oneself here to deforming the generative grammar—as it is called—of these three or four statements.

Where then? Where is psychoanalysis—already, still, always—evidenced?

[1] The term "purveyor" has been chosen to render the French term "facteur." "Facteur has retained the meaning of the Latin term "factor" ("maker"). It can thus designate the person who "makes" the mail arrive by delivering it, i.e. the mailman but also refers to each term of a mathematical operation or product. In a way, Derrida is here playing with both senses: he takes Lacan up on the question of whether or not a letter can

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Let us call text that in which it *(ça)* is evidenced, if it is evidenced. Not only for the purpose of recalling that the theoretical and practical inscription of psychoanalysis (in the text as "language," "writing," "culture," "mythology," "history of religion," of philosophy, literature, science, medicine, etc., in the text as a "historical," "economic," "political" realm, field of "drives," etc., in the heterogeneous and conflictual fabric of differance, defined elsewhere as *general text*—and, without boundaries) must have effects that have to be taken into account. But also for the purpose of defining the space of a determined question.

Unless one were to engage here in a particular kind of logic: the species would include the genus.

For example: what occurs in the psychoanalytical deciphering of a text when the deciphered (text), already explains itself? When it reveals a great deal more (a debt acknowledged more than once by Freud)? And above all when it also inscribes in itself the scene of deciphering?[2] When it deploys more force in staging and carries the process down to the very last word—for example, truth?

For example, truth. But is truth an example? What happens —and about what—when a text, for example a so-called literary fiction (but is this still an example?) stages truth? When it defines analytical reading, assigns the analyst his position, shows him in search of truth, and even finding it, holding a discourse about the truth of the text and then pronouncing in general terms the discourse of truth, the truth of truth? What happens then to a text allowing for such a scene and, excelling in its program, in situating the analytical bustle at grips with truth?

always arrive at a destination and he also examines all the "elements" or "terms" involved in the unfolding of the story. Whenever there is a similar difficulty in translation, we have attempted to explain it in a footnote or in the text itself through the use of parentheses. — Ed.

[2] The expression "scene of deciphering" echoes on another major essay of Derrida where psychoanalysis in the text is put in question: "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*, ed. J. Mehlman (Yale French Studies, N.° 48, 1972), pp. 73-117. The term "scene" is used by Derrida to emphasize the theatricality of literary representation. We have followed Jeffrey Mehlman's suggestion to translate "scène" as scene when there is emphasis on visibility and as stage when there is emphasis on conflict. See the Introductory Note in *ibid.*, p. 73. — Ed.

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This excess does not express the mastery of an author, or, even less, the meaning of the fiction. It would be rather the standard effect of an energetic stance. Truth would play a certain part in it: drawn, by the philosopher or the analyst, from within a more powerful functioning system.

As an apologue or parabolic pretext, and for the purpose of first enouncing the question of a certain multiplicative coefficient of truth, I open *The Interpretation of Dreams,* somewhere near the middle.

Questioning the history of repression from *Oedipus Rex* to *Hamlet,* nullifying all the differences between 1) Oedipus, 2) the legend, and 3) Sophocles' tragedy, Freud formulates a rule: the "secondary revision of the material" [*sekundäre Bearbeitung des Stoffes*] includes everything in a text that does not make up the semantic core of two "typical dreams" that he has just defined (incest with the mother and murder of the father), everything that is foreign to the absolute *nakedness* of these dream-contents. The formal (textual, in the usual sense) differences that, from the outside, affect thus this semantic structure, in this case Oedipus, constitute secondary revisions. For example, whenever critics have considered *Oedipus Rex* to be a tragedy of fate, a conflict between men and gods, a theological drama, etc., what they have considered to be the essential element of the play was actually an afterthought, a garment, a disguise, a fabric added to the *Stoff* itself in order to mask its nakedness.

The baring of this *Stoff,* the discovery of the semantic material: such would be the terminus of the analyst's deciphering. Baring the meaning behind these formal disguises, undoing the work, this deciphering exhibits the primary contents under the secondary revisions.

Is the nakedness of the meaning covered by the veiling forms a metaphor? Or already a metaphor of a metaphor? A metaphor in order to render metaphoricity? Here is Bouhours quoted by

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Condillac in *De l'art d'écrire:* "Metaphors are transparent veils that permit us to see what they cover, or the costumes beneath which we recognize the person masked."

After having opposed the (primary) semantic content to the (secondary) formal revision, Freud refers parenthetically to what he was saying some pages earlier about dreams of exhibiting: "Its further modification [*Ihre weitere Gestaltung*] originates once again in a misconceived secondary revision of the material, which has sought to exploit it for theological purposes. (Cf. the dream material in dreams of exhibiting, p. 243f.)" (*Gesammelte Werke* [henceforth G. W.], II/III, 271; *Standard Edition* [henceforth S. E.], IV, 264).

Exhibiting, baring, stripping down, unveiling—this is an old routine: the metaphor *of* truth, which is as much as to say the metaphor of metaphor, the truth of truth, the truth of metaphor. When Freud intends to bare the original *Stoff* beneath the disguises of the secondary processing, he foresees the truth of the text. For him the text would be geared, from its original content, toward its naked truth, but also toward truth as nakedness.

The subchapter to which Freud refers us is very short: four pages. It deals with certain dreams of embarrassment [*Verlegenheitsträume*]. What embarrasses the dreamer is his nakedness [*Nacktheit*]. The four pages contain two or four literary references. Two or four since in each case a "first" text is revived and transformed by a "second": Homer by Keller, Andersen by Fulda; neither this fact nor the very fact of turning to literary material for *illustrations* arouses any question on Freud's part.

Dreams of nakedness, then, calling forth a feeling of modesty or shame [*Scham*]. They are in fact "typical," only by virtue of their association with embarrassment, confusion, discomfort. This "core of their content" can subsequently lend itself to all sorts of transformations, revisions, translations. Nakedness gives place to substitutes. The lack of clothing, the removal of one's clothes [*Unbekleidung, Entkleidung*] carries over to other attributes. The same typical nucleus structures the dream of the former officer thrust into the street without his saber, without a necktie, or dressed in

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the checkered trousers of a civilian. All the examples suggested by Freud concern men, and men exhibiting the lack of a phallic attribute, somewhat affected by this exhibitionistic activity. Even more precisely: their nakedness does not reveal the penis or the absence of the penis, but rather the absence of the phallus as an attribute to fill a possible gap, the absence of the colossal double. Already a certain chain is announced: truth—unveiled woman—castration—modesty. Schreber: "Besides, we know in our hearts that men's lust is aroused by the sight of female nudes, while on the contrary women's lust is aroused much less, if at all, by the sight of male nudes; yet female nudes arouse *both* sexes to the same degree."

Another typical invariant: the contrast between the unbearable shame of the dreamer and the apparent indifference of the surroundings. The dreamer is the only *one* to see himself naked. And in contemplating his nakedness, he is alone. This, Freud says, is "a suggestive point." Everything works as if two parts, two pieces [*Stücke*], did not fit properly in the dream. The other people *should* be starting and laughing or becoming angry, but they are not. There is a force or a movement in play with which the wish of the dreamer must have dispersed. Only the other movement, which leads to exhibiting, remains and keeps its power [*Macht*]. The typical feature of such a dream is precisely this "contradiction." To describe it, to explain it as well, Freud needs an example, a literary illustration, what he calls an "interesting testimony" which as it happens we "possess" [*Wir besitzen ein interessantes Zeugnis dafür*]. We possess an interesting testimony: this is the gesture [*geste*] and the word used by Benveniste to refer to the categories of Aristotle, which conveniently appear to illustrate his demonstration.[3] We shall see another example of this jubilation in illustrating which treats the very subject matter of its "scientific" discourse as a

[3] I have attempted to analyze this pattern and the implications of this procedure in "Le supplément de copule," in *Marges* (Paris, 1972).

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marvelous paradigm which *is* [*found*] *there,* happily available for instructive discourse: usually in the form of a fable, a story, a tale.

For it has come to be the basis [*Grundlage*] of a fairy tale [*Märchen*] which is familiar to us all in Andersen's version, "The Emperor's New Clothes," and which has quite recently been put into verse by Ludwig Fulda in his *Der Talisman.* Hans Andersen's fairy tale tells us how two impostors weave the Emperor a costly garment, which, they say, will be visible only to the good and loyal subjects. The Emperor walks out in this invisible garment, and all the spectators, intimidated by the fabric's power to act as a touchstone, pretend not to notice the Emperor's nakedness.

This is just the situation in our dream. It is hardly rash to assume that the unintelligibility of the dream's content [*der unverständliche Trauminhalt*] has provided the stimulus to create a disguise[4] in which the situation, as it is present in the memory, becomes rich in sense [*sinnreich*]. That situation, however, is deprived in the process [*beraubt*] of its original meaning [*ursprüngliche Bedeutung*] and put to extraneous uses. But, as we shall see later, it is a common thing for the conscious thought-activity of a second psychical system to misunderstand the content of a dream in this way, and this misunderstanding must be regarded as one factor [*Faktor*] in determining the final form assumed by dreams (G. W., II/III, 248f.; S. E., IV, 243, translation modified)." Then Freud provides the key to the "transcription" [*Umdeutung*]:

> The impostor is the dream and the Emperor is the dreamer himself; the moralizing tendency of the dream [the modesty of those who, as good subjects, are unwilling or unable to see the King's nakedness] reveals an obscure knowledge of the fact that the latent dream-content is concerned with forbidden wishes that have fallen victim to repression. For the context in which dreams of this sort appear during my analyses of neurotics leaves no doubt: they are based upon memories from earliest childhood. It is only in our childhood that we are seen in inadequate clothing [*in mangelhafter*

[4] The word — *Einkleidung* — is here more important than ever: the French translation uses the word "fable" [and the *Standard Edition,* "form" —Tr.], reducing the metaphorical fold, the very one that I wish to emphasize here and that Freud, too, had begun by smoothing out. A disguise: a garment that conceals one's true identity and supplies a false one in its place.

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Belkleidung] both by members of our family and by strangers—nurses, maid-servants, and visitors; and it is only then that we feel no shame at our nakedness. *

Note by Freud

* A child plays a part in the fairy tale as well; for it was a small child who suddenly exclaimed: "But he has nothing on!" (G. W., II/III, 249; S. E., IV, 244, translation modified).

Freud pays no attention to a fold in the text, a structural complication that envelops his discourse and within which his discourse must inevitably be situated.

What does he say first? That the literary narrative is a secondary revision and, as such, an *Einkleidung,* a formal garment, a coating, the disguising of a typical dream, of its original simple content. The tale dissimulates or disguises the nakedness of the *Stoff*. Like all stories, like all secondary revisions, it veils a nakedness.

Now what is the nature of the nakedness that it covers in this way? It is the nature of nakedness: the dream of nakedness itself and its essential affect, modesty. For the nature of nakedness thus veiled/unveiled is that nakedness does not belong to nature and that it has its truth in modesty.

The hidden theme in "The Emperor's New Clothes" is indeed the hidden theme. What the formal, literary, secondary *Einkleidung* veils and unveils is the dream of veiling/unveiling, the unity of the veil (veiling/unveiling), of disguising and baring. Such a unity is staged [*se trouve mise en scène*] in a no-snag structure, in the form of an invisible nakedness *and* an invisible garment, a fabric visible to some and invisible to others, a nakedness at once unapparent and exhibited. The same fabric conceals and shows the *Stoff* of the dream, i.e., also the truth of that which is present with no veil. If we take into account the more than metaphorical equation of veil, text, and fabric, Andersen's text has the text as its theme. More precisely, the determination of the text as a veil within the space of truth, the reduction of the text to a movement of *aletheia*. Freud's text is staged when he explains to us that the text, e.g. that of the

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fairy tale, is an *Einkleidung* of the nakedness of the dream of nakedness. What Freud states about secondary revision (Freud's explaining text) is already staged and represented in advance in the text explained (Andersen's fairy tale). This text, *too,* described the scene of analysis, the position of the analyst, the forms of his language, the metaphorico-conceptual structures of what he seeks and what he finds. The locus of one text is in the other.

Would there then be no difference between the two texts?

Well, there are many, many differences, to be sure. But their co-implication is undoubtedly more complex than one would think. One may say that Freud's text has scientific value or claims a scientific status, that it is not a literary fiction. But what is the ultimate criterion for such a division? Its obviousness seems to be guaranteed neither from the formal nor from the semantic point of view. It can be said that their content is equivalent, that they mean the same thing. As for the "form" of the Freudian text, it belongs no more clearly to the tradition of scientific discourse than to a specific genre of fiction. Is *The Interpretation of Dreams* to "The Emperor's New Clothes" as the formulation of a law is to the narration of an individual case? But the individual case is here language, and the event disappears there among the veils in which the discourse of science is implicated (the King, the Law, the truth, nakedness, etc.).

To distinguish science from fiction, one will finally have recourse to the criterion of truth. And to ask, "What is truth?" one will return very soon, beyond the stages of adequation or of *homoiosis,* to the value of unveiling, revelation, baring that which is, as it is, in its being. Who will then claim that "The Emperor's New Clothes" does not present a staging of truth itself—the possibility of truth as a process of baring—the baring of the King, the master, the father, the subjects? And if the shame of the baring had something to do with woman or with castration, the figure of the King would play all the roles here.

A "literature" can thus produce, stage, and advance something like truth. Its power thus extends itself beyond the truth of which

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it is capable. Can such a "literature" be read, consulted, and even deciphered on the basis of psychoanalytic patterns that come under the jurisdiction of what it itself produces? The baring of baring, as Freud proposes, the baring of the motif of nakedness as secondarily revised or disguised [*eingekleidet*] by Andersen's fairy tale, will be exhibited/dissimulated in advance by the fairy tale in a piece of writing that therefore no longer belongs in the realm of decidable truth: exhibited/dissimulated according to an abyssal structure that we shall have to define. The realm of decidable truth is invaded by powers of dissimulation. The analytical scene, a baring and deconstitution of *Einkleidung,* is produced by "The Emperor's New Clothes" in a scene of writing which strips, without seeming to, the master sense, the master of sense, the King of truth and the truth of the King. Psychoanalysis finds—all that it finds—in the text that it deciphers. More than itself. What are the consequences of this, as far as truth and the text are concerned? Where does it lead us?

Supplement to the Investigation

a little *too* self-evident . . .

The issue involved could be evaluated by way of any number of different standards. Within the cultural boundaries of my personal reference and because of analyses begun elsewhere,[5] I believe

[5] *Passim* and more specifically within the range of the maneuvers of a few notes active in their program of ambushing and pouncing upon some of Freud's shorter texts prudently left in corners, animal machines lying in wait in the shadows and menacing the security of a space and a logic. In this case I must especially presuppose "Freud and Scene of Writing" (concerning the "Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad" (1925) in *Writing and the Difference* (1966-67), "*La Double Séance*" (on *Das Unheimliche,* 1919 especially notes 25, 44 and 56), "Hors Livre" (on *Das Medusenhaupt,* 1922) in *La Dissémination* (1969-72). A note in *Positions* augured this reading of "The Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" which was originally the object of a lecture at Johns Hopkins University, Nov., 1971. As regards Freud, I refer throughout to the works of Sarah Kofman (*L'Enfance de l'art,* Payot, 1970; *Camera obscura de l'idéologie,* Galilée, 1973; *Quatre romans analytiques,* Galilée, 1974) and of Jean-Michel Rey (*Parcours de Freud,* Galilée, 1974). And for a rigorous reading of Lacan, to the fundamental and indispensable book by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (*Le titre de la lettre,* Galilée, 1973).

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that the elaboration of this problematic must at the present time pause for the consideration of Jacques Lacan's proposed reading of Freud, or, more specifically, within the space of this article, of the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.' "

Those "literary critics" in France who have been influenced by psychoanalysis have not yet posed the question of the text. Their interest as well as their fecundity lay elsewhere. It seems that the same applies equally and without injustice to Marie Bonaparte's psychobiography, any psychoanalysis of material imagination, existential psychoanalysis, psychocriticism, a thematic phenomenology colored by psychoanalysis, etc.

Quite the contrary as regards the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter' "—at least apparently. Even though Lacan is not directly and systematically interested in so-called "literary" texts, and even though the problematic of *Das Unheimliche* does not, to my knowledge, occur in his discourse, the work of the *general* question of the text is generally present. In other words, the logic of the signifier tempers any naive semanticism. Lacan's "style," moreover, was such that for a long time it would hinder and delay all access to a *unique* content or a single unequivocal meaning determinable beyond the writing itself. Three additional claims on our interest: they are precisely to be found in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.' "

1. Its subject is Poe, a representative of the sort of "fantasy literature" which operates and overflows Freud's *Das Unheimliche*.

2. Although it is not the earliest of Lacan's *Écrits* chronologically, the Seminar comes at the head of this collection after its determinant strategic place has been prepared by an overture.[6]

[6] Delivered in 1955, committed to paper in 1956 and published in 1957, only in 1966 does the Seminar receive its place *at the head* of *Écrits*, thus following an order which, not being chronological, does not arise in any simple way from his theoretico-didactic system. It might stage *Écrits* in a particular way. The necessity of this priority, in any event, happens to be confirmed, recalled and emphasized by the introduction to *Écrits* in the "Points" edition (1970): "... the text, which here keeps the entry post it possesses elsewhere..." Anyone wishing to narrow the scope of the questions raised here can by all means keep those questions in the "place" given to the Seminar by its "author": entry post. "This post [*le poste*] differs from another post [*la poste*] only in gender," according to Littré.

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By the overture, furthermore, the horizon of the analysis of "The Purloined Letter" is drawn. This horizon is the problem of the relation of truth to fiction. After granting the Seminar "the privilege of heading off the other articles in spite of their own diachrony," Lacan names what is "no more feigned than the truth when it inhabits fiction." If the truth inhabits fiction, does this make fiction true or the truth fictional? Is that a real alternative, the true vs. the fictional?

3. Finally, the Seminar is part of a larger investigation of the repetition automatism [*Wiederholungszwang*] which, in the group of texts dating from 1919-1920 *(Jenseits, Das Unheimliche)* transforms, at least in principle (cf. *La Double Séance,* notes 44 and 56),[7] the relationship between psychoanalysis and literary fiction. All of Lacan's work presupposes the urgency of the problematic of *Jenseits* even though that very problem appears mythological, poetic and speculative to so many psychoanalysts. The point, therefore, is to take over the *Wiederholungszwang* and follow out its consequences in the logic of the signifier. "Our inquiry has led us to the point of recognizing that the repetition automatism [*wiederholungszwang*] finds its basis in what we have called the *insistence* of the signifying chain. We have elaborated that notion itself as a correlate of the *ex-istence* (or: excentric place) in which we must necessarily locate the subject of the unconscious if we are to take Freud's discovery seriously."[8] These are the opening lines of the Seminar.

Which will, in effect, demonstrate "the preeminence of the signifier over the subject." No more than meaning, the subject is

[7] See Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972), pp. 279-280 and pp. 300-301. Within a rather long text questioning the literary process through Plato and Mallarmé, Derrida tackles Freud's dealing with a work of art and notably the displacement in Freud's approach before and after *Das Unheimliche*. Derrida also points out there how Freud in *Das Unheimliche* is sensitive to the undecidable ambivalence, "the game of the double, the endless interplay between the fantastic and the real." —Ed.

[8] Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'," trans. J. Mehlman, *French Freud,* pp. 38-72. Hereafter cited in the text as SPL followed by the page number. The problematic set forth in *The Purveyor of Truth* can best be grasped through a rereading of Poe's *Purloined Letter* and of the *Seminar* as well as the editorial notes of Jeffrey Mehlman.—Ed.

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not the master or the author of the signifier. It is not what governs, emits or orients, gives rise [*donne lieu*], makes sense or originates. Any subject *of* the signifier is to be subjected to the law of the signifier. Its place is assigned by the route of the signifier, its literal topology and the rule of its displacements. First consequence: this analysis of a literary text foregoes[9] all reference to the author (whereas Freud never thought necessary to do without it), Poe, whose psychobiography structures Bonaparte's entire analysis. So much for any reference to the author of the text. But he is not "the author of the letter" whose *circulation* (italics mine) Lacan questions. An additional consequence is that "the author of the letter" "remains out of the game" as well. "From then on, the responsibility of the author of the letter takes second place to that of its holder" (SPL, p. 58). The letter is held but never possessed. Never, neither by its sender nor by its addressee. "We say: the *holder* and not the *possessor*. For it becomes clear that the addressee's proprietorship of the letter may be no less debatable than that of anyone else into whose hands it comes" (SPL, p. 58).

The letter apparently has no owner. It is no one's property. It has no proper meaning, no proper content which bears on its trajectory. Structurally, therefore, it is in flight [*volante*] and purloined [*volée*]. Its flight would not have taken place if it had made sense or if it had been constituted by the content of its sense, i.e. if it were limited to making sense and being determined by the legibility of this sense. "And the mobilization of the elegant society whose frolics we are following would as well have no meaning if the letter itself were content with having one" (SPL, p. 56).

Lacan does not say that the letter makes no sense: it simply does not have just one sense. Which could mean: there are other things, more or less, besides making sense in this self-displacing

[9] We should make immediately clear that he foregoes almost all reference, that he foregoes it in appearance, as we shall see later.

Again and again, *Écrits* descries the "resistance" revealed in analysts' making a psychobiographical reference to the writer. If such a suspicion were to be granted, it could be extended to the point of being a formalist neutralization of any signature effect. That presupposes the opening of another (theoretical and more) space for the elaboration of these questions. We ourselves are locked within this other space.

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and mobilizing letter. Or: there is more than one sense and this multiple possibility is responsible for the movement. In any event, sense, according to Lacan, is something the letter does not *just* have. What would happen if it were demonstrated that, according to Lacan, the letter *just* had a sense and just one? But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

The fact that the signifier cannot in appearance allow itself to be brought back to its transmitting origin, its sender, the fact that it depends neither on the signifier nor on the subject, which in fact its movements determine ("the displacement of the signifier determines the subjects' acts"), *would* have as a consequence that the signifier, in its letter, as a sealed text and locality, remains and finally falls. We *would* have, therefore, two remainders [*deux restes*]: 1) a remainder which could be destroyed precisely because it is excessive. The minister replaces the purloined letter with another. "A *remainder* that no analyst will neglect, trained as he is to retain whatever is significant, without always knowing what to do with it: the letter, abandoned by the Minister, and which the Queen's hand is now free to roll into a ball" (SPL, p. 42). 2) a remainder which is indestructible precisely because it steals away, i.e. the "unforgettable" insistence of the purloined letter which determines the repetition and the "persistence of conduct":

> The Minister then is not *altogether* mad in his insane stagnation, and that is why he will behave according to the mode of neurosis. Like the man who withdrew to an island to forget, what? he forgot—so the Minister, through not making use of the letter, comes to forget it. As is expressed by the persistence of his conduct. But the letter, no more than the neurotic's unconscious, does not forget him. It forgets him so little that it transforms him more and more in the image of her who offered it to his capture, so that he will now surrender it, following her example, to a similar capture.
>
> The features of that transformation are noted, and in a form so characteristic in their apparent gratuitousness that they might validly be compared to the return of the repressed (SPL, p. 65).

If the critique of a certain sort of semanticism constitutes an indispensable phase in the elaboration of a theory of the text, the Seminar exemplifies a clear progress beyond any post-Freudian

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psychoanalytic critique. It takes into account the organization, material as well as formal, of the signifier without throwing itself upon any semantic, not to say thematic, content of the text.

"Material" does not imply the empirical materiality of the perceptible [*sensible*] signifier *(scripta manent),* but that which retains, first, a certain *indivisibility* ("that materiality is *odd* [*singulière*] in many ways, the first of which is not to admit partition. Cut a letter in small pieces, and it remains the letter that it is—and this in a completely different sense than *Gestalttheorie* would account for with the dormant vitalism informing its notion of the whole" (SPL, p. 53), and, second, a certain locality. This locality itself is non-empirical and *non-ideal* because it gives rise to what is not where it is and hence "missing from its place" [*manque à sa place*]. It cannot be found where it is to be found, or else (but is this the same thing?) can be found where it cannot be found. The values of indivisibility (the barrier of the score) and of locality are themselves in this case indissociable and mutually selfconditioning, and we will eventually have to interrogate them all together. They may somewhere take charge of confronting us and riveting us again to what binds the sign-manual to singularity [*ce qui lie le seing au singulier*]. The unity of the signifier would bear witness to this in exchange for a certainty which this unity *receives* from it. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Consider first of all what welds the indivisible and the local through the concept of *letter* or of the *materiality of the signifier:*

> But if it is first of all on the materiality of the signifier that we have insisted, that materiality is *odd* in many ways, the first of which is not to admit partition .... For the signifier is a unit in its very uniqueness, being by nature symbol only of an absence. Which is why we cannot say of the purloined letter that, like other objects, it must be *or* not be in a particular place but that unlike them it will be *and* not be where it is, wherever it goes .... For it can *literally* be said something is missing from its place only of what can change it: the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always in its place; it carries it glued to its heel, ignorant of what might exile it from it (SPL, pp. 53-5).

The letter at issue, the materiality of the signifier at issue: perhaps only one letter need be changed, maybe even less than a

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letter in the expression: "missing from its place" [*manque à sa place*]. Perhaps we need only introduce a written "a," i.e. without accent, in order to bring out that if the lack has its place [*manque a sa place*] in this atomistic topology of the signifier, that is, if it occupies therein a specific place of definite contours, the order would remain undisturbed. The letter will always discover its proper place, a thwarted lack, which is certainly not empirical but transcendental (even better and more certain). It will be where it always was, always should have been, intangible and indestructible across the detour of a proper and properly circular trajectory. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Lacan, therefore, pays attention to the letter, i.e. to the materiality of the signifier. He is attentive also to its formality which, just as much as the place of the literal atom, determines the subject: "Subjectivity originally has no relationship to the real, but is of a syntax which engenders within it the signifying mark" (*Écrits,* p. 50).[10]

A break from naive semanticism and naive psycho-biographicism, an elaboration of a logic of the signifier (in its literal materiality and its syntactical formality), an appropriation of the problematic of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* these are the most general forms of what seems at first glance to be a legible advance on the part of the Seminar.

We must draw closer now, reread and question.

From the beginning we recognize the classical landscape of applied psychoanalysis. It is applied in this case to literature. The status of Poe's text is never challenged—Lacan simply calls it "fiction"—yet, Poe's text is summoned up as an example. It is an example for the sake of "illustrating" through a dialectical process a law and a truth which form the proper object of the Seminar. Literary writing occupies an illustrative position, which means making a general law legible through example, making clear the meaning of a law or a truth, manifesting them in a signal or exemplary way.

[10] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1966), p. 10. Hereafter cited in the text as *Écrits* followed by the page number.

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The text is in the service of truth, and, what is more, this truth can be taught:

> Which is why we have decided to illustrate for you today the truth which may be drawn from that moment in Freud's thought under study—namely, that it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject—by demonstrating in a story the decisive orientation which the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier.
>
> It is that truth, let us note, which makes the very existence of fiction possible (SPL, p. 40).

Again an illustration and again of a doctrine, this time Freud's own: "What Freud teaches us in the text we are commenting on is that the subject must pass through the channels of the symbolic, but what is illustrated here is more gripping still: it is not only the subject, but the subjects, grasped in their intersubjectivity, who line up" (SPL, p. 60).

The "truth which may be drawn from that moment in Freud's thought under study," the truth around which the most decorative and most pedagogical literary illustration will be organized, is not, as we will see, just any truth. It is truth itself, the truth of truth. Hence the most rigorously philosophical aspect of the Seminar.

This is, of course, the most classical way of doing things. It is typical of a certain kind of philosophical "literary criticism" but also of Freud himself every time he turns to literature for examples, illustrations, evidence or confirmation of a bit of knowledge or a truth which he arrives at differently elsewhere. Although the Lacanian statements concerning the relationship between fiction and truth are elsewhere not as clear and univocal, there can be no doubt in the present case. "Truth inhabits fiction" should not be understood in the somewhat perverse sense of a fiction which is more powerful than the truth which inhabits it and is inscribed in it. In truth, truth inhabits fiction as the master of the house, as the law of the house and as the economy of fiction. Truth brings about the economy of fiction. It directs, organizes and renders fiction possible. "It is that truth, let us note, which makes the very existence of fiction possible" (SPL, p. 40). The question is thus to

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ground fiction in truth to guarantee it within truth and to do so without stressing, as is the case of *Das Unheimlich,* this resistance, always renewed, of literary fiction to the general law of psychoanalytic knowledge. Lacan never poses the different question of what distinguishes different literary fictions. Even if all fiction were founded on a truth or made possible by a truth, the question may remain pertinent to the type of fiction from which something like literature, in this case "The Purloined Letter," arises, and to the effects literature might have on the very thing which seems to render it possible.

The first limit circumscribes the entire Seminar through which it scatters its mark in definite reimpression. What literary examples are supposed to deliver is a *message* which must be deciphered on the basis of the lessons of Freud. Reimpression: the "*Ouverture de ce recueil*" (Oct. 1966, ten years after the Seminar) speaks of "Poe's message deciphered and coming back from him, reader, in that, to read it, it says that it is no more feigned than the truth when it inhabits fiction" (*Écrits,* p. 10).

What Lacan analyzes, by decomposing it into its elements, origin and destination and discovering it in its truth is a *history* or *story* [*histoire*].

The word "*histoire*" appears at least four times on the first page alone. What serves as an example is a "story":

a. "Which is why we have decided to illustrate for you today the truth which may be drawn from that moment in Freud's thought under study —namely, that it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject—by demonstrating in a story the decisive orientation which the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier" (SPL, p. 40).

b. "It is that truth, let us note, which makes the very existence of fiction possible. And in that case, a fable is as appropriate as any other story for bringing it to light" (SPL, p. 40).

c. "Which is why, without seeking any further, we have chosen our example from the very *story* in which the dialectic of the game of even or odd—from whose study we have but recently profited—occurs (SPL, p. 40).

d. "It is, no doubt, no accident that this *tale* [*histoire*] revealed itself propitious to pursuing a course of inquiry which had already found support in it" (SPL, pp. 40-41: italics mine).

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This is certainly the story of a letter, of a theft and of the displacement of a signifier. But the subject of the Seminar is merely the content of this history, precisely its story, what is related in the account, the internal and narrated side of the narration. Not the narration itself. Lacan's interest in the instance of the signifier in its letter seizes this instance insofar as it constitutes primarily the exemplary content and the meaning of Poe's fiction, i.e. what is written therein as opposed to the writing itself, the signifier and the narrating form. Hence the displacement of the signifier is analyzed as a signified, and as the recounted object in a short story.

At a certain point one could be led to believe that Lacan is preparing to deal with the (narrating) narration, to the complex structure of the scene of writing which is being played [*La scène de l'écriture qui s'y joue*], and of the quite curious place of the narrator. Once glimpsed, however, the narrator's place is excluded by analytical decipherment, neutralized, or more accurately, by a process we hope to follow, this decipherment acquiesces to the narrator's dictation of an effect of neutralizing exclusion ("narration" as "commentary") which transforms the entire Seminar into an analytical fascination with a content. In this way a scene is lacking. Where Lacan sees two ("There are two scenes" [SPL, p. 41]), there are at least three. And where he sees one or two "triads," there is always a supplementary square whose opening complicates the computation.

How does this neutralization work and what are its effects if not its aims?

At first we are led to believe that the position of the narrator and the narrating operation are going to intervene in the decipherment of "Poe's message." A number of distinctions allow us to hope for this at the moment the "tale" is introduced: "As you know, we are talking about the tale which Baudelaire translated under the title: *La lettre volée*. At first reading, we may distinguish a drama, its narration, and the conditions of that narration." The "drama" is the recounted action, the (narrated) *story* which forms the Seminar's specific object. But at the very moment the narration

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is evoked, it is immediately reduced to the level of "commentary" which "redoubles" the drama, staging and making visible, without any intervention of its own, as a transparent element, a general diaphaneity. Later the "general narrator" will come into question. "The narration, in fact, doubles the drama with a commentary without which no *mise en scène* would be possible. Let us say that the action would remain, properly speaking, invisible from the pit —aside from the fact that the dialogue would be expressly and by dramatic necessity devoid of whatever meaning it might have for an audience:—in other words, nothing of the drama could be grasped, neither seen nor heard, without, dare we say, the twilighting which the narration, in each scene, casts on the point of view that one of the actors had while performing it."

"There are two scenes...." There follows the analysis of the two triangles, the content of the "tale," the object of analytical decipherment.

Afterwards narrator, narration and the process of "*mise en scène*" are all dropped. The unique place of the narrator on two sides of the narration, the specific status of his discourse—which is not neutral or the effect of whose neutrality is not neutral—his interventions and his very psychoanalytical position will never be interrogated through the rest of the Seminar which will remain an analysis of "intersubjective triads" which are supposed to constitute the inside of the narrated history, what Lacan calls the "story" or the "drama," the "real drama" ("each of the two scenes of the real drama is narrated in the course of a different dialogue"). All allusions to the narrator and to the act of narration are there simply for the sake of excluding them from the "real drama" (the two triangular scenes) and thus turning them over, once they have been clearly delimited, to the analytical decipherment of the message. This occurs in two moments in accordance with the *dialogues* which divide "The Purloined Letter."

First moment. The exclusion in this case is quite plain and facilitated by Poe's own text which seems to encourage it. This is the moment of what Lacan calls *exactness*. The narrator is called

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the "general narrator." He is like the neutral, homogeneous and transparent element of the narrative. He "adds nothing," says Lacan. As if something had to be added to a relation for an intercession to occur. In a narrative scene no less. And as if nothing were added through questions, remarks and exclamations—which are the "general" narrator's intercessions in what Lacan specifies as the "first dialogue." Even before the "first dialogue" begins, furthermore, the "general narrator" makes some comments which will be of interest later. Finally, the narrator who himself is staged in his staging is staged in turn in a text much broader than the so-called "general narration." Which is a supplementary reason not to consider the narrator as a neutral place of passage. The Seminar pays no specific attention to that extra text. Rather, it isolates as its essential object the two "narrated" triangular scenes, the two "real dramas," neutralizing at once that fourth personnage (the "general narrator"), his narrative operation and the text which stages the narration and the narrator. In effect, as text and as fiction, "The Purloined Letter" begins neither with the triangular dramas nor with the narration which stages them by involving itself with them in a particular way which we will analyze later. Nor does it end there. "The Purloined Letter" stages a narrator and a stage director who—feigned by "The Purloined Letter"—feigns by "The Purloined Letter" to recount the "real drama" of the Purloined Letter, etc. So many supplements which engulf and damage [*abîment*] the triangle which is the subject of the narration. So many reasons to think that the "general narrator" always adds something and that, from the first dialogue on, he is not the general condition of the possibility of the narrative, but an actor of an extremely unusual status. So many reasons not to be satisfied with what Lacan says about the matter in what I called the first moment of exclusion. The filter of the general narrator is not "a fortuitous arrangement" and he does remind us that "the message" "indeed belongs to the dimension of language," simply because that fourth position cannot be excluded as an elementary generality from the

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triangular scenes which would form the object contained under the "real drama."

Second moment. Lacan refines out or delimits a "second dialogue," neglecting once again, this time between the two dialogues, a long period without dialogue during which the narrator makes comments to which we shall turn later. During this "second dialogue" we are supposed to pass from the register of "exactness" to that of "truth," "strictly speaking to the very foundation of intersubjectivity." This time we expect an analysis of the specific position of the narrator. Lacan writes in effect, "Thus the indirect telling sifts out the linguistic dimension, and the general narrator, by duplicating it, 'hypothetically' adds nothing to it. But its role in the second dialogue is entirely different" (SPL, p. 48).

No: The situation was already different in the first dialogue and Lacan in no way changes his treatment during the second. He describes the narrator as the receptacle or mediator or purely formal assistant whose sole function consists in permitting Dupin to lay a trap and thus trap us by trapping the passive narrator, to renew his trick "in a purer form" at the moment at which he pretends to expose his procedure, at that point "really" deceiving the narrator and us.

> What could be more convincing, moreover, than the gesture of laying one's cards face up on the table? So much so that we are momentarily persuaded that the magician has in fact demonstrated, as he promised, how his trick was performed, whereas he has only renewed it in still purer form: at which point we fathom the measure of the supremacy of the signifier in the subject.
>
> Such is Dupin's maneuver . . . (SPL, pp. 49-50).

But when did we find out that the narrator quite happily listened passively and really allowed himself to be deceived? Whoever allows himself to be really deceived whenever the narrator narrates himself? Etc.

How does this neutralization of the narrator affect the Seminar?

1. The narrator (himself redoubled into narrating narrator and narrated narrator and never simply reporting the two dialogues) is

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obviously neither the author himself (whom we shall call Poe) nor, which is not so obvious, the inscriber of a story-telling text, or rather one which makes a narrator speak who himself, in many senses, makes several people speak. Inscriber and scription are original functions which may be confused neither with the author and his actions nor with the narrator and his narration and even less with that particular object, that narrated content which is the "real drama" and which the psychoanalyst precipitately identifies as "Poe's message deciphered." The fact that the entire surface of scription as a whole—the fiction called "The Purloined Letter"—should be enveloped by a narration whose narrator says "I" does not permit us to confuse fiction with narration. Even less, of course, with any given narrated passage, however long and overt it may be. We are faced with a problem of framing, bordering or delimiting which demands an absolutely precise analysis of the effects of fiction are to become evident. Without breathing a word, Lacan excludes the textual fiction within which he isolates "general narration." Such an operation is facilitated, too obviously facilitated, by the fact that the narration contains the entire fiction entitled "The Purloined Letter." But *that* is the fiction. There is an invisible but structurally irreducible frame around the narration. Where does it begin? With the first letter of the title? With the epigraph from Seneca? With the words, "At Paris, just after dark . . ."? It is much more complicated than that and will require reconsideration. Such complication suffices to point out everything that is misunderstood about the structure of the text once the frame is ignored. Within this invisible or neutralized frame, Lacan takes the borderless narration and makes another subdivision, once again leaving aside the frame. He sets apart two dialogues with the narration which form the narrated history, i.e. the content of a representation, the internal meaning of a story, the all-enframed which demands our complete attention, mobilizes all the Oedipal and psychoanalytic schemas available and draws all the effort of decipherment towards its center. Missing, however, is an elaboration of the problem of the frame, the signature and the *parergon*. This lack allows us to recon-

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struct the scene of the signifier as a signified (an ever inevitable process in the logic of the sign), writing as the written, the text as discourse or more precisely as an "intersubjective" dialogue (there is nothing fortuitous to the fact that the Seminar discusses the two dialogues in "The Purloined Letter").

2. It involves, first of all, a *formal* limit to the analysis. The formal structure of the work is ignored, quite classically, as soon as, or perhaps whenever, one claims to decipher the "truth" or the exemplary message. The fictional structure is reduced as soon as it is related to the condition of its truth. In this way one practices bad formalism. Formalism is practiced because no interest is taken in the subject-author. In certain situations this could constitute progress and a legitimate requirement. But this formalism is rigidly inconsequential whenever, on the pretext of excluding the author, no account is taken of 1) the scription-fiction and the scriptor-fictor and 2) the narrating narration and the narrator. This formalism guarantees, as always, the surreptitious subdivision of a semantic content to which psychoanalysis devotes all of its work of interpretation. Formalism and hermeneutic semanticism always reinforce one another: it depends on the angle.

3. The limit, therefore, is not merely formal and for the moment of no interest to a science of poetic fiction or narrative structure. We are not trying to save something like literature or literary form from the grips of psychoanalysis. Quite the contrary. There is a profound historical and theoretical complicity between the formalist backtrack and psychoanalysis applied to literature, which it is supposed to avoid. We have just hit upon the principle. Noteworthy in this case is the fact that formal deficiency implies a semantic and psychoanalytic decision. Once distinguished from the author and thereafter from the scriptor, the narrator is not merely the formal condition of the narration which could be symmetrically contrasted with the content, such as the narrating and the narrated, for example. He intercedes in a specific way, at once "*too* self-evident" and invisible in a triangle which thus touches another triangle at one of its points. It intercedes in two "intersubjec-

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tive" triangles. All of which singularly complicates the "intersubjective" structure, this time within the framed, twice framed, scenes, with the represented content. Not taking this complication into account is no fault of "formalist" literary criticism, but rather the operation of a psychoanalyst-semanticist. The narrator does not fade away [*s'effacer*] as a "general narrator" or rather, in making himself fade away into homogeneous generality, he moves forward as a uniquely singular character in the narrated narration, in the framed. He constitutes an instance, a position with which the triangle, through the intermediary of Dupin (who himself represents all the positions in turn), maintains an *extremely determinate and cathected* relationship. The violence of the Seminar's framing, the cutting off of the narrated figure from a fourth side to leave merely triangles evades a certain perhaps Oedipal, difficulty which makes itself felt in the scene of writing.

Before showing this more concretely, let us follow Lacan into the framed content in the analysis of the two triangles which constitutes the specific contribution of the Seminar. Let us begin from his own premisses and with his own framework [*encadrement*]. Let us assume that the frame can be neutralized, both as a delimitation and as a precarious construction, a four-sided artefact at least.

The expressions, "trio," "triangles," "intersubjective triangle," occur quite frequently in order to describe the two scenes of the "real drama" thus deciphered. First of all, a long quotation in order to recall to memory and to testimony this logic of the excluded quarter. On Oedipus:

> There are two scenes, the first of which we shall straightway designate the primal scene, and by no means inadvertently, since the second may be considered its repetition in the very sense we are considering today.
>
> The primal scene is thus performed, we are told (by neither Poe, nor the scriptor, nor the narrator, but by G, the Prefect of Police who is *mis en scène* by all those involved in the dialogues—J. D.), in the royal *boudoir*, so that we suspect that the person of the highest rank, called the "exalted personnage," who is alone there when she receives a letter, is the Queen. This feeling is confirmed by the embarrassment into which she is plunged by the entry of the other exalted personnage, of whom we have already been told (again by G—J. D.) prior to this account that the knowledge he might have of the letter in question would jeopardize for the lady nothing

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less than her honor and safety. Any doubt that he is in fact the King is promptly dissipated in the course of the scene which begins with the entry of the Minister D.... At that moment, in fact, The Queen can do no better than to play on the King's inattentiveness by leaving the letter on the table "face down, address uppermost." It does not, however, escape the Minister's lynx eye, nor does he fail to notice the Queen's distress and thus to fathom her secret. From then on everything transpires like clockwork. After dealing in his customary manner with the business of the day, the Minister draws from his pocket a letter similar in appearance to the one in his view, and, having pretended to read it, places it next to the other. A bit more conversation to amuse the royal company, whereupon, without flinching once, he seizes the embarrassing letter, making off with it, as the Queen, on whom none of his maneuver has been lost, remains unable to intervene for fear of attracting the attention of her royal spouse, close at her side at that very moment.

Everything might then have transpired unseen by a hypothetical spectator of an operation in which nobody falters, and whose *quotient* is that the Minister has filched from the Queen her letter and that—an even more important result than the first—the Queen knows that he now has it, and by no means innocently.

A *remainder* that no analyst will neglect, trained as he is to retain whatever is significant, without always knowing what to do with it: the letter, abandoned by the Minister, and which the Queen's hand is now free to roll into a ball.

Second scene: in the Minister's office. It is in his hotel, and we know —from the account the Prefect of Police has given Dupin, whose specific genius for solving enigmas Poe introduces here for the second time—that the police, returning there as soon as the Minister's habitual, nightly absences allow them to, have searched the hotel and its surroundings from top to bottom for the last eighteen months. In vain, —although everyone can deduce from the situation that the Minister keeps the letter within reach.

Dupin calls on the Minister. The latter receives him with studied nonchalance, affecting in his conversation romantic *ennui*. Meanwhile Dupin, whom this pretense does not deceive, his eyes protected by green glasses, proceeds to inspect the premises. When his glance catches a rather crumbled piece of paper—apparently thrust carelessly in a division of an ugly pasteboard card-rack, hanging gaudily from the middle of the mantelpiece—he already knows that he's found what he's looking for. His conviction is re-enforced by the very details which seem to contradict the description he has of the stolen letter, with the exception of the format, which remains the same.

Whereupon he has but to withdraw, after "forgetting" his snuff-box on the table, in order to return the following day to reclaim it—armed with a facsimile of the letter in its present state. As an incident in the street, prepared for the proper moment, draws the Minister to the window, Dupin

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in turn seizes the opportunity to seize the letter while substituting the imitation, and has only to maintain the appearances of a normal exit.

Here as well all has transpired, if not without noise, at least without all commotion. The quotient of the operation is that the Minister no longer has the letter, but, far from suspecting that Dupin is the culprit who has ravished it from him, knows nothing of it. Moreover, what he is left with is far from insignificant for what follows. We shall return to what brought Dupin to inscribe a message on his counterfeit letter. Whatever the case, the Minister, when he tries to make use of it, will be able to read these words, written so that he may recognize Dupin's hand: "...Un dessein si funeste/ S'il n'est digne d'Atrée est digne de Thyeste,"[11] whose source, Dupin tells us, is Crébillon's *Atrée*.

Need we emphasize the similarity of these two sequences? Yes, for the resemblance we have in mind is not a simple collection of traits chosen only in order to delete their difference. And it would not be enough to retain those common traits at the expense of the others for the slightest truth to result. It is rather the intersubjectivity in which the two actions are motivated that we wish to bring into relief, as well as the three terms through which it structures them.

The special status of these terms results from their corresponding simultaneously to the three logical moments through which the decision is precipitated and the three places it assigns to the subjects among whom it constitutes a choice.

That decision is reached in a glance's time. For the maneuvers which follow, however stealthily they prolong it, add nothing to that glance, nor does the deferring of the deed in the second scene break the unity of that moment.

This glance presupposes two others, which it embraces in its vision of the breach left in their fallacious complementarity, anticipating in it the occasion for larceny afforded by that exposure. Thus three moments, structuring three glances, borne by three subjects, incarnated each time by different characters.

The first is a glance that sees nothing: the King and the police.

The second, a glance which sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides: the Queen, then the Minister.

The third sees that the first two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whomever would seize it: the Minister and finally Dupin.

In order to grasp in its unity the intersubjective complex thus described, we would willingly seek a model in the technique legendarily attributed to the ostrich attempting to shield itself from danger; for that technique might ultimately be qualified as political, divided as it here is among three partners: the second believing itself invisible because the first has its head

[11] "So infamous a scheme/ If not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thystes."

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stuck in the ground, and all the while letting the third calmly pluck its rear; we need only enrich its proverbial domination by a letter, producing *la politique de l'autruiche,* for the ostrich itself to take on forever a new meaning.

Given the intersubjective modulus of the repetitive action, it remains to recognize in it a *repetition automatism* in the sense that interests us in Freud's text (SPL, pp. 41-44). [12]

We will analyze later the singular relationship between the "subject" (narrated narrator) of the narration and Dupin insofar as he complicates definitively and from the start the triangular structure. Let us consider for the moment what is implied in this exclusion of the fourth or of the third-plus-or-minus-one in this rush to truth. We should also consider how the demand for the truth leads to setting aside the scene of writing, to setting aside what almost (feigned) always itself allows (itself) to be set aside, set apart, such as the quarter, for example. The remainder, what can be dropped, not only in the narrated content of writing (the signifier, the writing, the letter) but also in the operation of writing, must be taken into account.

Lacan leads us back to the truth, but *this* truth does not get lost. He returns the letter and shows that it returns itself to its *proper* place by way of a *proper* trajectory, and, as he expressly mentions, this destination is what interests him. Destiny as destination. The signifier has its place in the letter which rediscovers proper meaning in its proper place. A certain reappropriation and re-adequation will reconstitute the proper, the place, the meaning and the truth which are self-distanced for the duration of a detour or a suspended delivery [*une souffrance*]. Algorithm. A whole, once more, has to be covered over: it need not be filled but its contour has to be seen and delimited.

We have read it: the signifier (in the letter, in the message) has no self-identical place. The signifier is *missing* from its place. Its

[12] *La politique de l'autruiche* combines the policy of the ostrich *(autruche),* others *(autrui)* and Austria *(Autriche).*

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meaning is of little importance since the signifier is not encapsulized therein. But what the Seminar would like to show in the end is that there is a single proper trajectory for the letter. The letter always returns to its own, ever the same and determinable place. The Seminar would show furthermore, that, although its meaning (what is written on the note in circulation) is (according to a hypothesis which is itself rigorously inadmissible) indifferent and unknown to us, the meaning of the letter and of its trajectory are necessary, unique and determinable in truth, just like the truth itself.

The place and the meaning of the letter are, of course, not at the disposition of the subjects who are subject to the moment of the signifier. But when Lacan says the letter has no proper place, we will have to take this as an objective place which is determinable in a naive and empirical topology. When he says that the letter has no proper meaning, we must assume this is meaning as content, completely contained by what is written on the note. The signifier-letter, according to the psychoanalytico-transcendental topology and semantics with which we are dealing, has a proper place and meaning which form the condition, origin and destination of the entire circulation, as of the entire logic of the signifier.

First, the proper place. The letter was sent from a place and arrived at a place. It is not a subject but a void the lack out of which the subject is constituted. The contour of this void is determinable and magnetizes the entire trajectory of the detour which leads from void to void and from the void to itself and which has, therefore, a circular form. This is a regulated circulation which organizes a return from the detour to the void, and a transcendental reappropriation and readequation which accomplish an authentic contract. Lacan says quite literally that the trajectory is proper and circular.

> Thus we are confirmed in our detour by the very object which draws us into it: for we are quite simply dealing with a letter which has been diverted from its path; one whose course has been *prolonged* (etymologically, the word of the title), or, to revert to the language of the post office, a *letter in sufferance* [*une lettre en souffrance*].

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> Here then, *simple and odd,* as we are told on the very first page, reduced to its simplest expression, is the singularity of the letter, which as the title indicates, is the *true subject* of the tale: since it can be diverted, it must have a course *which is proper to it:* trait confirming its incidence as signifier. For we have learned to conceive of the signifier as sustaining itself only in a displacement comparable to that found in the electric news strips or in the rotating memories of our machines-that-think-like-men, this because of the alternating operation which is its principle, requiring it to leave its place, even though it returns to it by a circular path (SPL, pp. 59-60: Lacan's italics.)

"*Quitte*": "leave [*quitte*] its place, even though [*quitte*] it returns to it by a circular path." [13] Circulation, the payment [*acquittement*] of a debt, steps in to repair the dehiscence which, by opening the debt and the contract, expelled for a time (the time of the signifier) the signified from its proper origin. Circulation allows it to return. This readequation (the truth), therefore, implies a theory of the proper place which itself implies a theory of the letter as an indivisible locality. The signifier should never venture an unreturning loss, destruction or shredding of itself.

Next, proper meaning. Since the letter has (a) place of origin and destruction, and remains what it is en route (but what guarantees this?), it has a proper meaning first in the law of its trajectory if not in its content, although the latter is sufficiently if minimally conditioned through decipherment. It must have a relationship with what constitutes the contract or the "pact," i.e. with the subjection of the subject and hence somewhere with the hole as the proper place of the letter. Its place has an essential relationship with its sense which must be such that the letter is constantly directed back to its place. We know in fact what the note contains. Indeed, Lacan must speak of and recall its sense, at least as that which threatens the pact by which it is constituted. It is the phallic law represented by the King and in the custody of the Queen, a custody which, ac-

[13] The French "quitte" can mean both "leave" *(quitter)* and "even though" as in *(quitte à).*

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cording to the pact, she should share with the King but which she precisely threatens to divide, dissociate and betray.

> But all this tells us nothing of the message it conveys.
>
> Love letter or conspirational letter, letter of betrayal or letter of mission, letter of summons or letter of distress, *we are assured of but one thing:* the Queen must not bring it to the knowledge of her lord and master.
>
> Now these terms, far from bearing the nuance of discredit they have in *bourgeois* comedy, take on a certain prominence through allusion to her sovereign, to whom she is bound by pledge of faith, and doubly so, since her role as spouse does not relieve her of her duties as subject, but rather elevates her to the guardianship of what royalty according to law incarnates of power: and which is called legitimacy.
>
> From then on, to whatever vicissitudes the queen may choose to subject the letter, it remains that the letter is the symbol of a pact, and that, even should the recipient not assume the pact, the existence of the letter situates her in a symbolic chain foreign to the one which constitutes her faith.... Our fable is so constructed as to show that it is the letter and its diversion which governs their entries and roles. If *it* be 'in sufferance,' *they* shall endure the pain. Should they pass beneath its shadow, they become its reflection. Falling in possession of the letter — admirable ambiguity of language — its *meaning* possesses them (SPL, pp. 57-58, 60; italics mine).

A passage typical of Heidegger's formulations as is most often the case in these decisive pauses.

The letter, therefore, has a proper meaning, a proper trajectory and a proper place. Which ones? In the triangle, only Dupin seems to know. Let us drop for the moment the problem of this knowledge and concern ourselves first of all with what is known therein: What in fact does Dupin know? He knows that the letter *ends up* where it should *be* in order to return circularly and adequately to its proper place. This proper place (known to Dupin *and* the psychoanalyst who, as we shall see, occupies Dupin's place) is the place of castration. It is, woman, a place unveiled as that of the lack of the penis, as the truth of the phallus, i.e. of castration. The truth of the purloined letter is the truth itself, its meaning is meaning, its law is law, the contract of truth with itself in the logos. Subtending this value as pact (and thus adequation), that of veiling/unveiling brings the entire Seminar into harmony with Heidegger's

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discourse on truth. What is veiled/unveiled in this case is a hole, a non-being [*non-étant*]; the truth of being [*l'être*], as non-being. Truth is "woman" as veiled/unveiled castration. Here, at the place of the signifier and the letter, begins the departure of the signifier (its inadequation to the signified). But the trial begins here as well, the promise of reappropriation, of return and readequation "at the cost of restoring the object." The singular *unity* of the letter is the place of truth's contact with itself. That is why the truth *returns to* the woman (at least as long as she wants to keep the pact and hence what reverts to the king and to the phallus of which she has custody). That is why, as Lacan says elsewhere, the letter reverts to being [*la lettre revient à l'être*], i.e., to that nothingness which is to be openness [*l'ouverture*] as a hole between the woman's legs. Such is the proper place, where the letter can be found, where its meaning can be found and where the Minister believes it is the most protected, but where in fact, in its very hiding place, it is the most utterly exposed. As possessor of the sheltered letter, the Minister begins to identify with the Queen (but is not Dupin forced to do the same in turn, not to speak of the psychoanalyst within him? We are, however, getting ahead of ourselves).

Thus:

> ... everything seems intended for a character, all of whose utterances have revealed the most virile traits, to exude the oddest *odor di femina* when he appears.
>
> Dupin does not fail to stress that this is an artifice, describing behind the bogus finery the vigilance of a beast of prey ready to spring. But that this is the very effect of the unconscious in the precise sense that we teach that the unconscious means that man is inhabited by the signifier: could we find a more beautiful image of it than the one Poe himself forges to help us appreciate Dupin's exploit? For with this aim in mind, he refers to those toponymical inscriptions which a geographical map, lest it remain mute, superimposes on its design, and which may become the object of a guessing game: who can find the name chosen by a partner? — noting immediately that the name most likely to foil a beginner will be one which, in large letters spaced out widely across the map, discloses, often without an eye pausing to notice it, the name of an entire country....
>
> Just so does the purloined letter, like an immense female body, stretch out across the Minister's office when Dupin enters. But just so does he

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already expect to find it, and has only, with his eyes veiled by green lenses, to undress that huge body.

And that is why without needing any more than being able to listen in at the door of Professor Freud, he will go straight to the spot in which lies and lives what that body is designed to hide, in a gorgeous center caught in a glimpse, nay, to the very place seducers name Sant' Angelo's Castle in their innermost illusion of controlling the City from within it. Look! between the cheeks of the fireplace, there's the object already in reach of a hand the ravisher has but to extend . . . (SPL, pp. 66-67).

The letter—the place of the signifier—is in effect where Dupin and the psychoanalyst expect to find it: on the immense body of the woman, between the cheeks [*jambages*] of the fireplace. Such is its proper place, the terminus of its circular trajectory. It returns to the sender who is not the signatory of the note, but the place where it began to detach itself from its feminine possessor or inheritor, the Queen, seeking to reappropriate for herself that which (in virtue of the pact subjecting her to the King, namely, the Law) guarantees her the disposition of the phallus (of which she would otherwise be deprived, which she took the risk of dividing, multiplying and thus depriving herself of); this same Queen undertakes to reconstruct and reclose the circle of restrained economy [*l'économie restreinte*] and the circulatory pact. She wants to retrieve the letter-fetish and to that end begins by replacing or exchanging one fetish for another. She emits a quantity of money—without really spending it since there exists a certain equivalency—and this money is exchanged for the letter thus assuring the latter's circular return. Like the analyst, Dupin finds himself on the circumference in that circle of restrained economy which I have called elsewhere the constriction of the ring [*la stricture de l'anneau*] and which the Seminar analyzes as the truth of fiction. We should return later to this problem of economy.

This determination of the proper, of the law of the proper and of *economy* leads back, therefore, to castration as truth, to the figure of the woman as a figure of castration *and* of truth. Of castration as truth, which does not at all mean, as one might tend to believe, that we are led back to truth as essential dislocation and

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irreducible parcelling. On the contrary, castration is what contracts (constriction of the ring) to bring the phallus, the signifier, the letter or the fetish back to their oikos, their familiar dwelling, their proper place. In this sense castration-truth is the opposite, the very antidote, of parcelling. What is in this case missing from its place has its own fixed and central place, away from any substitution. Something is missing from its place but the lack itself is never missing. Because of castration, the phallus always remains in place in the transcendental topology we spoke of above, where it is indivisible and thus indestructible, like the letter which *takes its place*. Hence the undisinterested and never demonstrated presupposition of the materiality of the letter *as indivisibility* was indispensable to Lacan's restrained economy and his circulation of the proper.

The difference I am interested in here is that the lack has no place in dissemination—a formula to be understood however you will.

By determining the place of the lack (the topos of what is missing from its place), by constituting it as a fixed center, Lacan is in fact proposing at once a discourse-truth and a discourse on the truth of the purloined letter as the truth of "The Purloined Letter." In spite of the appearance of denegation, his is a hermeneutical decipherment. The link between Femininity and Truth is its ultimate signified. Fourteen years later, in re-introducing the Seminar at the head of *Écrits* by means of an "Unpublished Introduction" ("Points," 1, 1969), Lacan emphasizes above all this link and this meaning. He capitalizes Woman and Femininity, which elsewhere is often reserved for the Truth: "What Poe's tale shows in my hands is that the effect of the signifier's (in this case the purloined letter's subjection bears primarily on its post-theft possessor, and that along its travels what it conveys is that very Femininity which it is to have taken into its shadow."

Femininity is the Truth (of) castration. It is the first figure of castration, because in the logic of the signifier it is always in a state of having been castrated and "leaves" something in circulation

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(the letter in this case), detached from itself, to bring it back to itself so that "it never had it: from where the truth comes out of the hole, but never only at mid-body."

This first castration (pre-castration) tends to castrate and thus feminize whoever holds the letter which signifies phallus and castration. "Here is no more than completed what first feminizes him (the Minister—J.D.) as by a dream.... Wherewith our Dupin shows his success to be equal to that of the psychoanalyst" ("Points," Introduction, p. 8).[14]

Point of View: Truth in (the) Place of Feminine Sexuality

What of this success? Before answering this question, let us reconsider in all its complexity the relationship between the position of Dupin and that of the analyst, then between the analyst and he who says Freud and I in the Seminar as well as in presentations of the Seminar. This calls for a long excursus.

Our questions up till now suggest that if there is such a thing as a purloined letter there might be an additional trap here. The letter would have no fixed place, not even that of a definable gap or void. The letter would not be found; it might always not be found; it would in any case be found less in the sealed writing whose "story" is told by the narrator and "deciphered" by the Seminar, less in the context of the story, than "in" the text escaping on a fourth side the eyes of both Dupin and the psychoanalyst. The rest, the remnant, would be "The Purloined Letter," the text that bears this title, and whose place, like the once more invisible large letters on the map, is not where one was expecting to find it, in the enclosed content of the "real drama" or in the hidden and sealed interior of Poe's story, but in and as the open letter, the very open letter, which fiction is. This, because it is written, implies at least a fourth avenue for appeal that escapes and manages the escape of the letter of the

[14] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits I* (Collection "Points"; Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 8. Hereafter cited in the text as "Points," Introduction followed by the page number. — Ed.

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text from the decoder, the purveyor of truth [*facteur de la vérité*] who puts it back in the circle of its proper course: this is the operation of the Seminar, which repeats the operation of Dupin who, in no way contradicting the circularity of the proper course, "has succeeded in returning the letter to its proper course" (SPL, p. 69), in accordance with the Queen's wishes.

To return the letter to its proper course, supposing that its trajectory is a line, is to correct a deviation, to rectify a divergence, to recall a direction, an authentic line, so that it can serve as the good rule, i.e., as the norm. Dupin is clever: he knows his cleverness *(connaît son adresse)* and he knows the law.[15] The moment one believes that one can get hold of the letter by drawing triangles and circles and manipulating the opposition imaginary/symbolic, the moment one reconstitutes truth, self-adequation, "The Purloined Letter" escapes by a too-self-evident opening. Baudelaire bluntly reminds us of this. The purloined letter is in the text: not only as an object with its proper course described, contained in the text, a signifier that has become a theme or a signified of the text, but also as the text producing framing effects. At the very moment when Dupin and the Seminar find the letter, when they find its proper place and course, when they believe the letter is at one place or another as if on a map, a place on a map as if on the woman's body, they no longer see the map itself: not the map described by the text at one moment or another but the map that the text "is," that it describes, "itself," like the four-way divergence *(l'écart du quatre)* with no promise of topos or truth. The remaining structure of the letter, contrary to the final words of the Seminar ("what the 'purloined letter,' nay, the 'letter in sufferance' means is that a letter always arrives at its destination"), is that a letter can always not arrive at its destination. Its "materiality" and its "topology" result from its divisibility, its ever-possible partition. It can always be broken up irrevocably and this is what the system of the symbolic, of castration, of the signifier, of truth, of the contract, and so forth, try

[15] The text plays with two possible meanings of the French term "adresse," i.e. "address" and "adroitness." — Ed.

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to shield it from: the point of view of the King and that of the Queen are here the same, bound together by contract in order to reappropriate the bit. Not that the letter never arrives at its destination, but part of its structure is that it is always capable of not arriving there. And without this danger (breach of contract, division or multiplication, irrevocable division, of the phallus mutilated for a moment by the Queen, that is, by every "subject"), the circuit of the letter would never have even begun. But with this danger, it may always not be completed. Here dissemination threatens the law of the signifier and of castration as a contract of truth. Dissemination mutilates the unity of the signifier, that is, of the phallus.

At the moment when the Seminar, like Dupin, finds the letter where it is to be found, between the legs of the woman, the deciphering of the enigma is anchored in truth. The sense of the story, the meaning of the purloined letter ("what the 'purloined letter,' nay, the 'letter in sufferance' means is that a letter always arrives at its destination"), is discovered. The hermeneutic discovery of meaning (truth), the deciphering (that of Dupin and that of the Seminar), arrives itself at its destination.

Why then does it find, at the same time that it finds truth, the same meaning and the same topos as Bonaparte when, leaping over the text, she proposes a psycho-biographical analysis of "The Purloined Letter?" [16] Is this a coincidence?

Is it a coincidence if, while claiming to break with psycho-biographical criticism ("La Science et la vérité," *Écrits,* p. 860), one rejoins it in its ultimate semantic anchoring—and after a possibly less rigorous textual analysis?

For Bonaparte, too, the castration of the woman (the mother) is the final meaning of "The Purloined Letter"; and, with it, truth, readequation, or reappropriation as the desire to plug the hole. But

[16] Marie Bonaparte, *Edgar Poe: Etude analytique* (1933; rpt. in 3 vol. Paris, 1958). Translated by John Rodker as *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-analytic Interpretation* (London, 1949). References in the text are indicated by "Bonaparte," the page number corresponds to the English translation. In some cases, however, the translation had to be slightly modified. — Tr.

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Bonaparte does what Lacan does not do: she establishes the connection between "The Purloined Letter" and other texts of Poe —and she analyzes how they function. Later, the *internal* necessity of this operation will become clear.

One example is "The Black Cat," in which "the castration fear, embodied in the woman as the castrated being, lies at the core of the tale" (Bonaparte, p. 481). "Nevertheless, all the primitive anxieties of the child, which often remain those of the adult, seem to be gathered here as if by appointment, in this story of extreme anxiety, as if at a crossroads" (Bonaparte, p. 481): at this crossroads [*quadrifurcum*], absent-mindedly named, neglected as a frame, the representation of a circle or a triangle. The Seminar: "Here we are, in fact, yet again at the crossroads at which we had left our drama and its round with the question of the way in which the subjects replace each other in it" (SPL, p. 60). Bonaparte continues with a page of generalizations about castration anxiety that can be summed up in a statement of Freud's that she does not quote here: the realization of the mother's lack of a penis is "the greatest trauma"; or one of Lacan's "Division of the subject? This is a nodal point. Let us recall how Freud spins it out [*où Freud le déroule*]: in terms of the mother's lack of a penis, in which the nature of the phallus is revealed" ("La Science et la vérité," *Écrits,* p. 877).

After having dealt with the Law and with fetishism as a process of rephallization of the mother (for the purpose of restoring to her what has been stolen—or detached—from her), Bonaparte writes the following passage, in which we recognize the crux of Lacan's interpretation, and a few other things as well:

> Finally, with the gallows theme, we see death-anxiety, or fear of death. All these fears, however, remain subordinate to the main theme of fear of castration, with which all are closely interwoven. The cat with the white breast has also a missing eye; hanging represents not only death, but rephallization; the urge to confess leads to the discovery of a corpse surmounted by an effigy of castration; even the cellar and tomb, and the gaping aperture of the chimney, recall the dread cloaca of the mother.
>
> Other tales by Poe also express, though in different and in less aggressive fashion, regret for the missing maternal penis, with reproach for its loss. First among these, strange though it seem, is "The Purloined Letter."

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The reader will remember that, in this story the Queen of France, like Elizabeth Arnold, is in possession of a dangerous and secret correspondence, whose sinister writer is unknown. A wicked minister, planning political blackmail and to strengthen his power, steals one of these letters under the Queen's eyes, which she is unable to prevent owing to the King's presence. This letter must at all costs be recovered. Every attempt by the Police fails. Fortunately Dupin is at hand. Wearing dark spectacles with which he can look about him, while his own eyes are concealed, he makes an excuse to call on the Minister, and discovers the letter openly displayed in a card-rack, hung "from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece." *

Here, then, a note of Bonaparte's:

* Baudelaire translates: "*suspendu . . . à un petit bouton de cuivre au-dessus du manteau de la cheminée.*" The imprecision of Baudelaire's translation, as far as this sentence is concerned, is obvious: in particular, "beneath" is translated by "*au-dessus*" ("above"), which is completely wrong.

This note is not without importance. In the first place, it makes clear that Lacan had read Bonaparte, although the Seminar never alludes to her. As an author so careful about debts and priorities, he could have acknowledged an irruption [17] that orients his entire interpretation, namely, the process of rephallization as the proper course of the letter, the "return of the letter" restored to its "destination" after having been found between the legs of the mantelpiece. Or he could have suppressed it. But since footnotes represent, if not the truth, the appendix in which is revealed that which is not to be said or that which as Schelling, quoted in "The Uncanny," says, "should remain hidden," the Seminar drops a note in response:

Look! between the cheeks of the fireplace, there's the object already in reach of a hand the ravager has but to extend. . . . The question of deciding whether he seizes it above the mantelpiece as Baudelaire translates, or beneath it, as in the original text, may be abandoned without harm to the inferences of those whose profession is grilling [*aux inférences de la cuisine*]. *

[17] The term "frayage" has been rendered here by "irruption" which is closer to the "directed disruption" involved in the process of *Bahnung* as viewed by Derrida. — Ed.

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Here, then, a note of Lacan's:

"*And even to the cook herself" (SPL, pp. 66f.).

Without harm? On the contrary, the harm would be decisive, within the Seminar itself: *on* the mantelpiece, the letter could not have been "between the cheeks of the fireplace," "between the legs of the fireplace." The stakes are thus important, even if one left aside (imagining it to be extraneous) the scornful irritability with regard to [*à l'endroit de*] a woman psychoanalyst and her legacy.[18] Why relegate the question to the kitchen, as if to contingency, and the woman who replies to it to the rank of cook? Certain "masters of truth," in Greece, knew how to hold the kitchen as a place for thinking.

A bit before this note, we recall, the Seminar named the "toponymical inscriptions," the "geographical map" of the "huge body" and the place of what Dupin "expects to find," because he repeats the action of the Minister who himself identifies with the Queen, whose letter always occupies, properly, the same place: the place of detachment and attachment.

Bonaparte continues, after the note:

By a further subterfuge, he possesses himself of the compromising letter and leaves a similar one in its place. The Queen, who will have the original restored to her, is saved.

[18] Legacy *(legs)* and rephallization:

1. "Is it the letter that makes Woman the subject, at once all-powerful and in bondage, so that every hand to which she leaves the letter takes with it that which, by receiving it, she bequeaths *(fait lais)?* 'Legacy' means what Woman bequeaths by never having had it: hence, truth emerges from the well, but only at waist-level" ("Points" Introduction, pp. 7f.).

2. "To the grim irony of rephallizing the castrated mother, by hanging, we must now add the irony that relactifies her dry breasts by the broad spattering of the splotch of milk . . . even though the main resentment comes from the absence of the penis on the woman's body" (Bonaparte, II, 572; 475).

Later we shall return to the question implied here of the "part-object." As for the well, Dupin recalls in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," after the discovery of the "fearfully mutilated" "body of the mother": "He [Vidocq] impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole. Thus there is such a thing as being too profound. Truth is not always in a well."

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> Let us first note that this letter, the very symbol of the maternal penis also "hangs" over the fireplace, in the same manner as the female penis, if it existed, would be hung over the cloaca which is here represented — as in the foregoing tales — by the frequent symbol of the fireplace. We have here, in fact, what is almost an anatomical chart, from which not even the clitoris (or brass knob) is omitted. Something very different, however, should be hanging from that body! (Bonaparte, p. 483).

After this brief allusion to the knob (which the Seminar does not echo), Bonaparte links this interpretation to Oedipal behavioral and clinical patterns. The interest in "the author's life" does not simplify the reading of the text any more than disinterest, under other circumstances, would be enough to certify it. The accent is placed on an "archaic, pregenital, and phallic" Oedipal struggle for the possession of the maternal penis, here determined as an incomplete object. Bonaparte is never tempted to accord to Dupin the position of analyst, not even to surpass him with a different sort of mastery. His lucidity comes from the war in which he is engaged, the war that he declares himself at the end of the story (" 'But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers; since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was... D—, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember.' ") and that has never ceased to motivate him—nor to place him on the circuit of debt, of the phallus, of the signifier in its letter, of money, which Bonaparte, unlike Lacan, does not consider here as neutralizing or "destructive of all signification." She writes:

> Small wonder that Dupin, the embodiment of the son, when speaking of his "political prepossessions," should declare himself "a partisan of the lady concerned." Finally, in return for a cheque of 50,000 francs, leaving to the Prefect of Police the fabulous reward, Dupin restores to the woman her symbolic letter or missing penis. Thus, once more, we meet the equation gold = penis. The mother gives her son gold in exchange for the penis he restores.
>
> So, too, in "The Gold Bug"... (Bonaparte p. 484f.).

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The circle of this restitution traces indeed the "very course" of the Seminar. What then of the movement sketched out there that would identify Dupin's position with that of the analyst? Bonaparte is never tempted by this movement. It is strangely divided or suspended in the Seminar. First, the signs of this identification.

1. The third glance, which involves no delusion, sees the triangle. Dupin, probably, occupies within it a position identical to the position of the Minister—the Minister in the first scene and not in the second, in which the Minister has assumed the place of the powerless Queen. Dupin would thus be the only one not letting himself be plucked like an ostrich. ("The third sees that the first two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whoever would seize it: the Minister, and finally Dupin.... Three partners: the second believing itself invisible because the first has its head stuck in the ground, and all the while letting the third calmly pluck its rear" [SPL, p. 44].) Finally Dupin: at the end Dupin is thus considered to break off his temporary identification with the Minister and to remain the only one who sees everything, thus withdrawing from the circuit.

2. This is supposedly confirmed by a first interpretation of the money that Dupin demands in return for the letter, by "the business of Dupin's remuneration." The problem of indebtedness that it raises is examined by Lacan just after the note about the cook—and a supplementary blank space of a few lines.[19] The "we" refers to the community of analysts. The author of the Seminar seems at first to include himself among them:

> Do we not in fact feel concerned with good reason when for Dupin what is perhaps[20] at stake is his withdrawal from the symbolic circuit of the letter — we who become the emissaries of all the purloined letters which at least for a time remain in sufferance with us in the transference. And is it not the responsibility their transference entails which we neutralize by equating it with the signifier most destructive of all signification namely: money (SPL, p. 68).

[19] One of six divisional spacings in the French text of the Seminar; they are not indicated in the English-language edition. — Tr.
[20] This "perhaps" will be forever suspended.

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As the "perhaps" indicates, as these questions without question marks suggest, the "But that's not" opening the following paragraph, the question will not receive a clear answer. The very position of the question, in its form, in its terms, was elaborated to prevent this response: indeed, how could one establish the conceptual rigor of the expression "equal the signifier most destructive of all signification"? Is money destructive of all signification or not? The question is neither a formal one as it has been stated, nor simply one to know who is playing, the ostrich by wielding an annihilating plus or minus. If money is not totally destructive of all signification, if it is only "the most destructive," it cannot "equal" a "neutralization." And money is not sufficient for "withdrawal" from the "symbolic circuit of the letter."

3. A confirmation again in the new introduction to the *Écrits* (in the collection "Points"), which we have already quoted:

> This is why the Minister comes to be castrated: castrated, the word for the fact that he continues to believe he has it: that letter which Dupin has been able to spot in its obvious location, dangling between the legs of his high mantelpiece [*Cheminée de haute lisse*].... Wherewith our Dupin shows his success to be equal in his success to that of the psychoanalyst.... ("Points," Introduction, p. 8).

Under cover of the indetermination that we have just noted ("perhaps," "the most destructive"), these signs of identification between Dupin and us psychoanalysts will thus become complicated: not merely to refuse Dupin admission into the institution of analysts, which would neutralize "the responsibility [that] transference entails," but to split the we of the psychoanalysts into two Dupins, the fool, the one who remains a participant in the triangle, believing himself the master, and the other one, who sees everything, from the place from which all psychoanalysts are addressed who understand nothing of Dupin, of his "real strategy," i.e., of the author of the Seminar who is capable of returning to the letter of Freud, of finding it where it is found for the purpose of restitution, and by whose efforts both Freud's teaching and Poe's demonstration are meted out: the entire Seminar opens with the

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project, repeated a hundred times elsewhere, of "taking Freud's discovery seriously" and of organizing "the lesson of this seminar" accordingly, this in opposition to the re-routing from which Freud's letter has suffered in the institution of Lacan's colleagues; and "what Poe's story demonstrates as the result of my efforts" contributes to this return of Freud's text to its proper place. From this position one ridicules the too rapid identification of (all) the other psychoanalysts with Dupin, with a certain Dupin: they do not see that as keeper of the letter he continues to resemble the Minister, is henceforth in the place of the latter and begins like him to become feminine, to identify with the Queen. The author of the Seminar cuts himself off from the community of analysts. "We" means from now on Freud, Poe, one of the Dupins, and "I":

> In which our Dupin demonstrates himself to be equal in his success to that of the psychoanalyst, who cannot function without an unexpected slip of the other. Ordinarily, his message is the only real failure of his treatment: just like Dupin's it must remain concealed, even though it closes the case.
>
> But if I were to explain — since the text that retains here the entry post that it has elsewhere will be judged on this basis — these terms which are always more, they would be understood that much less.
>
> Less understood by the psychoanalysts, by virtue of the fact that these terms are for them as plain to see as the purloined letter, that they see the letter even in themselves, but that on that basis they believe themselves to be its masters, as does Dupin.
>
> They are actually masters only of using my terms without rhyme or reason — by which several of them have made themselves look ridiculous. These are the very ones who assure me that what produces skepticism in the others is actually a rigor to which they know they could never measure up ("Points," Introduction, p. 8).

The ridiculous disciples or heirs thus divert, without rhyme or reason, the master's own terms, and he reminds them that they must not take themselves for masters by identifying with the naive Dupin. And to use the master's terms properly, to bring them back to him, is also to remember the right way, to remember that the master, like Dupin (which one?) is master of the return to Freud of Freud's own letter.[21] To be continued.

[21] Freud's letter, itself also in sufferance, awaited restoration. The community of analysts is organized like a general-delivery service keeping sealed

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There is a double benefit to be gained by identifying Dupin with the psychoanalyst from the beginning: first, the lucidity of he who can see what no one else can: the place of the thing, between the legs (the author of the Seminar then says we-psychoanalysts, we withdraw from the symbolic circuit and neutralize the scene in which we do not participate); second, the possibility, in creating the impression that Dupin continues to be a participant (and how), and in maintaining the identification of Dupin with the psychoanalyst, of denouncing the naiveté of the community of analysts, of saying: you psychoanalysts, you delude yourselves at the very moment when, like Dupin, you think you are the masters.

Indeed. After the paragraph whose indecisiveness we detected ("perhaps," "the signifier most annihilating," etc.), a cunning game is played, but one which, in order to show the extent to which

the threatening power of a legacy. As we know, the return to the literality of Freud's letter is the motive of the entire course of the *Écrits*. This is declared throughout, particularly under the title "D'un dessein" (this word will later appear in quotation marks within quotation marks), in an introduction proposed after the fact (1966) to the "Introduction au commentaire de Jean Hyppolite sur la Verneinung de Freud." This foreword on the subject of negation begins by insisting: above all, don't expect a "sanctification" of the letter of Freud, or some sort of "appointment" arranged in advance to meet there: "The two specimens of our seminar that follow move us to communicate to the reader some idea of the intention of our teaching....

For to let oneself be guided thus by the letter of Freud to the flash of illumination that it entails, without making an appointment with it in advance; not to recoil before the ultimate residuum of one's enigmatic outset; and even not to release oneself, at the end of the process, from the astonishment by which one entered into it — this is how an established logician brought us the warranty of what formed our quest when, as long as three years ago, we sought to found our authority upon a *literal commentary* of Freud.

This *necessity of reading* is not the vague cultural demand for which it might be taken.

The privilege accorded to the letter of Freud is for us in no way superstitious. It is when one takes it lightly that one brings to it a sort of sanctification entirely compatible with its degradation to merely routine application.

Every text, whether it presents itself as sacred or profane, experiences an increase in literality as it implies properly a greater confrontation with truth: the discovery of Freud indicates the structural reason for this relationship.

Precisely in what the truth that this discovery provides, the truth of the unconscious, owes to the letter of language, to what we call the signifier" ("D'un dessein," *Écrits*, pp. 363ff.). Cf. also, e.g., "Réponse au commentaire de Jean Hyppolite," *Écrits*, p. 381.

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Dupin's ruse—the greatest in the Oedipal scene—introduces *motivation* into his own trap, goes here so far as to be carried away itself.

This concerns the final pages of the Seminar, set off by a "But that's not all" (SPL, p. 68) and an "Is that all..." (SPL, p. 72). From that point onward when the remuneration demanded by Dupin is interpreted as an analytic procedure for the purpose of withdrawing from the circuit by means of the "signifier most destructive of all signification: money," it is difficult to keep track of all the signs of non-neutrality that build up at the end of "The Purloined Letter." Isn't this a shocking paradox?

> "But that's not all. The profit Dupin so nimbly extracts from his exploit, if its purpose is to allow him to withdraw his stakes from the game, makes all the more paradoxical, even shocking, the partisan attack, the underhanded blow, he suddenly permits himself to launch against the Minister, whose insolent prestige, after all, would seem to have been sufficiently deflated by the trick Dupin has just played on him" (SPL, p. 68).

So that was not all. And we must call attention to Dupin's "explosion of feeling" at the end of the story, his "rage of manifestly feminine nature" at the moment when he says he is settling up with the Minister by signing his blow. Thus he reproduces the so-called process of feminization: he conforms to the (wishes of the) Minister whose place he occupies from that point on when, holding the letter—the place of the signifier—he accommodates himself to the wishes of the Queen. Here, because of the pact, it is no longer possible to distinguish between the place of the King (marked by blindness) and that of the Queen, the place where the letter, in its "proper course" must return circularly. Since the signifier has only one proper place, there is ultimately only one place for the letter, and it is occupied successively by all those who hold the letter. Thus it must be recognized that Dupin, once he has entered the circuit, having identified with the Minister in order to take the letter away from him and return it to its "proper course," cannot leave. He must traverse the circuit in its entirety. The Seminar asks a strange question about this:

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He is thus, in fact, fully participant in the intersubjective triad, and, as such, in the median position previously occupied by the Queen and the Minister. Will he, in showing himself to be above it, reveal to us at the same time the author's intentions?

If he has succeeded in returning the letter to its proper course, it remains for him to make it arrive at its address. And that address is in the place previously occupied by the King, since it is there that it would re-enter the order of the Law.

As we have seen, neither the King nor the Police who replaced him in that position were able to read the letter because that *place entailed blindness* (SPL, p. 69).

If Dupin now occupies the "median position," has he not always occupied it? And is there any other position in the circuit? Is it only at this moment in the story, when he holds the letter, that he finds himself in this position? This hypothesis does not take us far enough. Dupin acts from the beginning with an eye to the letter, to getting hold of it for the purpose of giving it to whoever has the right to it (neither the King nor the Queen but the Law that binds them) and thus being preferable to his enemy(-brother) his younger or twin brother (Atreus/Thyestes), the Minister, who pursues fundamentally the same object, with the same acts. Thus if he is in a "median position," the distinction made above among the three glances is no longer pertinent. There are only ostriches, no one escapes being plucked, and the more one is the master, the more one presents one's rear. This is thus the case of whoever identifies with Dupin.

On the subject of Dupin, as we were saying, a strange question: "Will he, in showing himself to be above it, reveal to us at the same time the author's intentions?"

This is not the only allusion to the "author's intentions" (SPL, p. 41). Its form implies that the author, in his intention, is in a situation of general mastery, his *superiority* with respect to the triangles he stages (supposing that he stages only triangles) being representable by the superiority of the actor: Dupin. Let us abandon this implication: a whole conception of "literature."

Does Dupin demonstrate himself to be superior? The Seminar, proceeding from what Dupin sees where he expects to find it,

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repeating the operation of the restoration of the letter, cannot reply "no." Nor can it reply "yes," for Dupin, too, is an ostrich. Thus the "true" position of Dupin will be left in the obscurity of a non-revelation or in the suspense of a hypothesis, without this hampering, however, the "decipher[ing of] Dupin's real strategy" (here there is no more obscurity or hypothesis). This is the unrevealed: "Wherewith our Dupin shows his success to be equal in his success to that of the psychoanalyst, who cannot function without an unexpected slip of the other. Ordinarily his message is the only real failure of his treatment: just like Dupin's, it must remain concealed, even though it closes the case" ("Points," Introduction, p. 8).

This is the hypothesis in suspension: "But if [the Minister] is truly the gambler we are told he is, he will consult his cards a final time before laying them down and, upon reading his hand, will leave the table in time to avoid disgrace" (SPL, p. 72). Does he do so? Nothing in the Seminar says so, although it sojourns in this territory long enough to make sure, despite the unrevealed or the hypothesis, that it has in its possession the cipher of the letter, Dupin's real strategy, and the true meaning of the purloined letter. The "yes" is here "doubtless." Just as Dupin, to whom the narrator leaves the last word at the end of the story, seems sure to have won. The end of the Seminar:

> ... [he] will leave the table in time to avoid disgrace.
>
> Is that all, and shall we believe we have deciphered Dupin's real strategy above and beyond the imaginary tricks with which he was obliged to deceive us? Yes, doubtless, for if "any point requiring reflection," as Dupin states at the start, is "examined to best purpose in the dark," we may now easily read its solution in broad daylight. It was already implicit and easy to derive from the title of our tale, according to the very formula we have long submitted to your discretion: in which the sender, we tell you, receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form. Thus it is that what the "purloined letter," nay, the "letter in sufferance" means is that a letter always arrives at its destination (SPL, p. 72). These are the last words of the Seminar).

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First Second: the Truth (out) of the Letter from Freud's Hand

In seeing what Dupin sees (unseen of the others), even what Dupin himself does not see or, double as he is (in and out of circulation, being both recipient and non-player),[22] only half sees (like all the others, finally), the Seminar is enunciated from the place where everything is seen, "easily," "in broad daylight."

Somewhat, like Dupin, at the moment when, not taking into account his blindness as "recipient," he was described as "the third [which] sees that the first two glances . . . etc." And like Dupin, the Seminar delivers the letter at (to) its destination after having recognized its place and its course, its law and its destiny, namely destination (as such): the arrival at (one's) destination.

But Dupin, the lucid one, could only be so by entering into the circuit so far as to occupy in it successively all the positions, including, unwittingly, those of the King and of the Police. Like all the others, whom he has perfectly doubled, he is put in motion by the desire of the Queen and by the pact contracted therein. And for him "proving oneself superior," even in relation to all the other masters, his rivals, twins, brothers or colleagues [*confrères*] (Atreus/Thyestes), meant repeating the trick without being able to look back. Which did not necessarily deprive him of pleasure at the time when somebody else keeps the pen in hand.

Hence Dupin repeats. By dint of being able to "read easily now its solution in broad daylight," the author of the Seminar, let us not forget, stages a quarrel with his colleagues, ill keepers, and unfaithful, of Freud's legacy. He wants at least, with the passional explosion whose signs we have spotted, to re-discover the direction: to rectify, to redress, to put back on the right track, "to correct a deviation too manifest not to avow itself as such at all of its turns" ("*D'un dessein,*" in *Écrits,* p. 366). He reproaches his male colleagues [*confrères*] but also his female colleagues [*consœurs*]

[22] "Recipient" translates "partie prenante," designating the party who receives a pecuniary benefit. Besides keeping the legal connotation of the term, "recipient" with its Latin etymology (it is a component of capio-ere-to take) stresses also the active aspect implied here. — Ed.

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who seem to have appropriated his terms ("like Dupin," see above), to have diverted them, his own terms, those of the author of the Seminar. He thus reappropriates his terms, but he too in order to return them, to render them unto Freud the restitution of whose true teaching, the right doctrine, is here in question.[23] Just as Dupin, in calling himself "the lady's partisan," obliges the Queen and mimics the contract which binds her to the King, so there is supposed to be something like a pact between Freud—who, having died too soon to know anything, like the King, about the outcome—and the author (the place of the author) of the Seminar. But is a King bound by a pact? Is a dead person? The question must wait.

The most remarkable attack, let us say the most insidious "blow below the belt," "the rage of a manifestly feminine nature," is unleashed against him or her among his colleagues, Bonaparte, who, for a long time, believed him [her] self to be in France the most authorized depositary, the legatee of Freud's authority, maintaining with him a correspondence, ties of personal confidence, even representing him in France as a sort of minister of whose both betrayal and blindness the author of the seminar is aware. This minister has even wanted, in his [her] book, to lay hands[24] on "The Purloined

[23] More literally, "the Freudian experience along its authentic lines" ("The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious," in *Structuralism* ed. Ehrmann *Yale French Studies,* N.° 36-37, 1966, p. 132) ["*dans sa ligne authentique*" (*Écrits,* p. 523)].

[24] *Question de main:* as the self-styling detainer of the Freudian message, Bonaparte was destined to receive blows. In an insistent, repetitive, automatic manner. The footnote coming down hard on the cooking-woman [*la cuisinière*] where one had *simply scorned* the kitchen was added, in the *Écrits,* some ten years after the first publications of the Seminar in *La psychanalyse.* But from Rome already the speech of that name, five years before, hurls at Bonaparte a major accusation: second hand! Her texts have not got Freud's letter first hand. Such and such is "little alert" to the Freudian theory "since he approaches it through the work of Marie Bonaparte, which he quotes incessantly as an equivalent of the Freudian text and with nothing to inform the reader of this fact, relying perhaps, not without reason, on the latter's good taste not to confuse them, but proving thereby no less that he sees nothing of the true level of the second hand" (*Écrits,* p. 247). And as it is necessary to keep to oneself the first and not to generalize too much about the second, there are two "levels," a good and a bad second hand. The "good" one, we shall see, takes the letter of the Freudian text as "a text vehicle of a word [speech, *parole*], inasmuch as it constitutes a new emergence of the truth," it knows "to treat it as true word," "to experience it in its authenticity" of "a full word [*parole pleine*]" (*Écrits,* p. 381): it is Freud's text which is in question. And the obstinacy

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Letter." First on Freud's diverted letter. And she has used the front of her book on Poe, an affidavit signed by Freud, a kind of letter which seals at the same time the pact and the betrayal (depending on the place), putting the father of psychoanalysis *simultaneously* in the place of the King, of the Queen (to whom one must restitute "her" letter in order to reconstitute the pact, to stamp out the betrayal and "correct the deviation") and of the mysterious signatory of the purloined letter, the Queen's friend or fellow conspirator. As it will be said later of the truth (*causa sui* is to be at once cause and effect), Freud is the only one (and on account of his death, since he also occupies the place of the dead [king]) to contract with none but himself.

This affidavit signed by Freud's hand, must be read here. For the fun of it, but also in order to gauge how much the King will have seen that, by removing the pen from the last handwritten document, he has mobilized since his death, while awaiting for the restitution if not for the restoration. In a position of having died too soon, *a priori,* he will have never prefaced the Seminar which has taken this task upon itself several times over. But one can dream of what a foreword by Freud would have looked like. In order to encourage daydreaming, here is the foreword which he signs, in his very own hand, solely for Bonaparte herself (from the *Pretexts* on, the theory of factors [*facteurs*] is there only to be continued):

> In this book my friend and pupil, Marie Bonaparte, has shone the light of psycho-analysis on the life and work of a great writer with pathological trends.
>
> Thanks to her interpretative effort, we now realize how many of the characteristics of Poe's works were conditioned by his personality, and can see how that personality derived from intense emotional fixations and painful infantile experiences. Investigations such as this do not claim to explain creative genius, but they do reveal the factors which awaken it and the sort of subject matter it is destined to choose. Few tasks are as appealing as enquiry into the laws that govern the psyche of exceptionally endowed individuals. Sigm. Freud (Bonaparte, p. XI.)

to keep off Bonaparte's "second hand" could be read a few lines before the chapter to the glory of the "full word."

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This seal is handed down first in Bonaparte's translation, let it be noted, not to cast doubt on its exactitude, but to concede that it does not appear in an authenticity of an absolute first hand.

At the very moment he cuts short the identification with the Dupin who is the recipient in order to keep only the other one; when he deciphers "the true strategy" of this latter at the instant of his getting up from the table; when "yes, no doubt," he exhibits in broad daylight the true meaning [*vouloir - dire*] of "the purloined letter," it is at that very moment that the analyst (which one? the other one) most resembles Dupin (which one? the other one) when the chain of identifications has sent him in the opposite direction, through the whole circus, has made him repeat automatically, compulsively, the minister, the Queen, the King (the Police). As each one occupies, at one time or another, the King's place, there are at least four kings (to be continued) in the game.

What then of the truth according to Lacan? Is there *a* Lacanian doctrine, a Lacanian *doctrine* of the truth? Two reasons might make this seem doubtful. The first is general and has to do with the terms of the question. That a purely homogeneous systematic is an impossibility of structure has appeared to us elsewhere. The second reason has to do with the mobility of the discourse which interests us here. In the publications of a later date than the *Écrits,* in the indications they give of an ongoing oral teaching, one perceives a certain retreat muting the incantation of the *aletheia,* the *logos* (live) speech, the word, etc. An even more noticeable effacing of the connotations, if not of the post-war Existentialist concepts. Nonetheless a certain type of statement, the truth, has given itself out, has multiplied itself, at a precise moment, in a systematic form. And it involved all the features necessary for that effect. As the Seminar belongs to this system (this is at least my hypothesis), as well as a certain number of other essays to which I shall refer (so as not in turn to engulf all of the *Écrits* in the Seminar), it must be disengaged if one is to understand the reading of "The

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Purloined Letter." This can and must be done even if, after 1966, in a transformed theoretical field, the Lacanian discourse on truth, on text or on literature has lent itself to a certain number of alterations in size or of decisive retouchings, which is not even certain.[25] Its chronological and theoretical ordering would still remain rather suspect, given the remote time-lag of publication.

Whatever the case after 1965-1966, all the texts situated, more accurately, published, between 1953 (the so-called Rome Speech) and 1960 seem to belong to the same system of the truth. That is, quantitatively, almost the totality of the *Écrits,* including, therefore, the Seminar (1955-1957); "works of the early Lacan," might say future academics in a hurry to separate what cannot stand partition.

We are not going to expose this system of the truth, the condition of a logic of the signifier. It consists precisely in that which is non-exposable in exposition. We shall simply attempt to recognize those of its features which are pertinent to the Seminar, to its possibility and to its limits.

It is first of all a question of "emphasis," the authentic excellence of talking, of speech, of the word: of the *logos* as *phonè*. One must *explain* this emphasis, account for its necessary link to a theory of the signifier, of the letter and of the truth. It is necessary to explain why the author of "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" and of "The Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" incessantly subordinates writing, the letter and the text. Even when he repeats Freud on rebus, hieroglyphs, engravings, etc., he always resorts ultimately to a writing sublated [*relevée, aufgehoben*] by the voice. This would be easy to show. One example among many: "A writing [*écriture*], like dream itself, may be figurative, (yet) it is always like language symbolically articulated, that is (it is) just

[25] The doctrine of the truth as cause *(Ursache),* as well as the expression "truth effects," can accord with the system in which we are going to be interested. Truth effects are the effects of the truth and as "La direction de la cure" (where the question is "to direct the subject towards the full word," in any case to leave him "free to try his hand at it" (*Écrits,* p. 641)) has already said, "the point is the truth, the only one, the truth about the effects of the truth" (p. 640). The circulation (traffic; *circulation*) will always be that of the truth: towards the truth. Cause and effect of the circle, *causa sui,* proper course and destiny of the letter.

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like, phonemic, and phonetic in fact, as soon as it is read[able]" ("Situation de la psychanalyse en 1956," *Écrits,* p. 470). This fact is a fact only within the boundaries of the so-called phonetic systems of writing. At the most, for there are non-phonetic elements in such systems of writing. As to the non-phonetic field of writing, its factual enormity no longer needs demonstration. But this does not matter much. What matters here, and even more than the relation of fact to right, is the implied equivalence ("that is") between the symbolic articulation and *the phoneticity.* The symbolic passes through the voice, and the law of the signifier unfolds only in vocalizable letters. Why? And what relation does this phonematism (which does not go back to Freud and hence is lost in the attempt to return to Freud) entertain with a certain truth value?

Both scopes [*portées*] of the truth value, as we have seen, are present in the Seminar: 1. *Adequation,* in the circular return and the proper course, from the beginning to the end, from the place of the detachment of the signifier to the place of its re-attachment. This circuit of adequation guards and regards the circuit of the pact, of the contract, of the pledged faith. It restores it against the threat and as the symbolic order. And it takes shape itself at the moment the guarding of the phallus is entrusted as the guarding *of* the lack. By the King to the Queen, but from there on in a play of alternation without end. 2. *Veiling/unveiling* as the structure of lack: castration, the *proper* place of the signifier, origin and destination of the letter, shows nothing while unveiling. It thus veils itself while unveiling. But this truth operation has a proper place: the contours *being*—the place of the *manque à être* from which the signifier is detached for its literal circuit. These two truth values prop each other up [*s'étaient*].[26] They are indissociable. They require speech or the phonetization of the letter as soon as the phallus must be *kept* [*gardé*], must return to its point of departure, must

[26] "Prop up" represents an attempt to translate the French "s'étaient." The verb echoes on the Freudian notion of anaclisis [*étayage*]. See J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis,* intro. Daniel Lagache and trans. D. Nicolson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973), p. 52.

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not be disseminated on the way. Now for the signifier to be kept [*pour que le signifiant se garde*] in its letter and thus make a (safe) return, it is necessary that in its letter it should suffer no "partition," that it should be impossible to say some letter, only a letter, letters, the letter (SPL, pp. 53-54). Were the signifier divisible it might always be lost on the way. It is against this possible loss that is erected the statement of the "materiality of the signifier," that is to say of its indivisible singularity. *This "materiality," deduced from an indivisibility which is not found anywhere, corresponds in fact to an idealization.* Only the ideality of a letter resists destructive division. "Cut a letter in small pieces, and it remains the letter it is" (SPL, p. 53), as this may not be said of empirical materiality, an ideality (intangibility of a self-identity travelling without alteration) must be implied therein. It alone permits the singularity of the letter to preserve itself [*se garder*]. If this ideality is not the meaning-content [*contenu de sens*], it must be either a certain ideality of the signifier (the identifiable [aspect] of its form inasmuch as it is distinct from its empirical events and re-editions) or the points of stability [*point de capiton*] which pins the signifier onto the signified. The latter hypothesis conforms better to the system. This system is in fact that of the ideality of the signifier. The idealism which resides in it is not a theoretical position of the analyst, it is a structure-effect [*effet structurel*] of *signification* in general, whatever transformations or adjustments are practiced on the space of *semiosis*. It is understandable that Lacan finds this "materiality" "unique": he retains only its ideality. He considers the letter only at the point where, determined (whatever he says about it) by its meaning-content, by the ideality of the message which it "vehiculates," by the (spoken) word [*parole*] which, in its meaning, remains out of the reach of partition, it can circulate, intact, from its place of detachment to the place of its re-attachment, that is to say, to (at) the same place. In fact, this letter does not elude only partition, it eludes movement, it does not change place.

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This presupposes, besides a phonematic limitation of the letter, an interpretation of the *phonè* which spares it divisibility as well. The latter provokes this of itself, is made so as to lend itself thereto: it has the phenomenal characters of spontaneity, of presence unto itself, of the circular return to itself. The *phonè* keeps all the better for the belief that it may be kept without external accessory, neither paper nor envelope: it is, so it tells us, always available, wherever it is. That is why it is believed to remain longer than writings *(écrits)*. "May it but please heaven that writings remain, as is rather the case with spoken words" (SPL, p. 56). It would be rather different were one to become more attentive to writing within the voice, namely *avant la lettre*.

The same problem indeed recurs concerning the voice or concerning what can be called, in order to preserve the concept's Lacanian definition, its letter (the indivisible materiality or locality of the signifier). This vocal "letter" would then be also indivisible, always identical to itself no matter how its body is dismembered. It can be guaranteed of this integrity only through its link to the ideality of meaning within the unity of the spoken word.

We are always led back, step by step, to this contract of contracts which guarantees the unity of the signifier to the signified through all the point of stability, thanks to the "presence" (see below) of the *same* signifier (the phallus), of the "signifier of signifiers" underneath all the signified-effects [*effets de signifié*]. This transcendental signifier is therefore also the signifier of all signifieds and it is the one which finds protection in the indivisibility of the letter (graphic or oral). Protection from this threat, but also from that disseminating power which, in *De la grammatologie,* I have proposed to call "Writing before the Letter" ("*L'écriture avant la lettre,*" title of the first part): the privilege of the "full word" [*la "parole pleine"*] is there questioned (cf. for example p. 17 ff.). The insistence of the Lacanian letter is the sublation of writing in the system of speech.

"The drama" of the purloined letter begins at the moment— which is not a moment— in which the letter *is presented*. At the

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motion of the minister who acts in order to preserve the letter (he might have torn it to pieces, and it then would indeed have been an ideality which would have remained available [*disponible*] and, for a while,[27] effective), of course, but even before that, when the Queen wants to keep the letter or to recover it: as a double of the pact which binds her to the King, a threatening double but one which as long as it is in her keeping cannot betray the "pledged faith" *("foi jurée").* The Queen wants to be able to play both contracts. This analysis cannot be pursued here; it is to be read elsewhere.

What matters here is that what is indestructible in the letter resides in that which elevates it toward the ideality of a meaning. Little as we know of the content of the letter, it must be related to the original contract which it indicates and subverts at the same time. And this knowledge, this memory, this retention (conscious or unconscious) makes up its property and assures its proper course towards its proper place. As the ultimate content of the letter is that of a pact binding two "uniquenesses," it implies an irreplaceability, it excludes, as threat and unmasterable anxiety, all simulacra of the double. The impact of life, presence of the word *(parole),* guarantees, in the last instance, the indestructible and unforgettable uniqueness of the letter, the taking-place of a signifier which does not get lost, does not ever go astray. The subject is very divided, but the phallus is never shared [*ne se partage jamais*]. Dismemberment is an accident which does not concern it. At least according to the insurance built up by the symbolic. And through a discourse on the assumption of castration which erects an ideal philosophy against dismemberment.[28]

[27] Only for a while: till the moment when, incapable of returning a "material," divisible, effectively "unique" letter which is subject to partition, he would have had to let go of the hold which only a destructible document could assure him on (of) the Queen.

[28] What we are analyzing here is supposed to be the most rigorous philosophy of psychoanalysis today, more precisely the most rigorous Freudian philosophy, undoubtedly more rigorous than Freud's and more strictly controlled in its exchanges with the history of philosophy.

It would be hard to exaggerate here the scope of this proposition on the indivisibility of the letter, or rather in its identity to itself inaccessible to

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Such would be, in its principle, the articulation of this logic of the signifier on a phonocentric interpretation of the letter. From here on the two values of the truth (adequation and process of veiling) can no longer be dissociated from the word, from present, living, authentic speech. The final word is that there is, when all is said, at the origin or at the end (proper course, circular destination), a word which is not feigned, a meaning [*vouloir-dire*] which, through all the imaginable fictional complications, does not mislead or else *truly* misleads, still teaching us the truth of decoy [*leurre*]. At this point the truth permits the analyst to treat the fictional characters as real people, and to resolve at the depth of the Heideggerian meditation on the truth, this problem of the literary text where Freud (more naively but more certainly than Heidegger and Lacan) would sometimes admit being at a loss. And it is still a literature with characters which is in question. Let us first quote the Seminar. A suspicion has just been aroused in the Seminar that the author's purpose was perhaps not to state, as Baudelaire calls it, *le vrai*. Which does not always mean, by the same token, that his purpose is to have fun. Here:

No doubt Poe is having a good time....

But a suspicion occurs to us: might not this parade of erudition be destined to reveal to us the key words of our drama? Is not the magician repeating his trick before our eyes, without deceiving us this time about divulging his secret, but pressing his wager to the point of really explaining it to us without us seeing a thing. *That* would be the summit of the illusionist's art: through one of his fictive creations to *truly delude* us.

And is it not such effects which justify our referring, without malice, to a number of imaginary heroes as real characters?

As well, when we are open to hearing the way in which Martin Heidegger discloses to us in the word ἀληθής the play of the truth, we rediscover a secret to which truth has always initiated her lovers, and through which

dismemberment ("Tear a letter into little pieces, it remains the letter that it is"), as well as on the so-called materiality of the signifier (the letter) [a materiality which is] intolerant to partition. A torn-up letter may be purely and simply destroyed, it happens (and if it is considered that the unconscious effect called here letter is never lost, that repression keeps everything and never allows any lowering of insistence, then this hypothesis — nothing is ever lost or mislaid — must be granted too with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), or produce other letters, whether the question is of characters or of messages.

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they learn that it is in hiding that she offers herself to them *most truly*" (SPL, pp. 50-51).

The *effets d'abîme* are here severely controlled, [as] a scientifically irreproachable precaution: it is science itself, at least ideal science and even the truth of the science of the truth. From the statements which I have just quoted it should not be induced that truth is a fiction but that through fiction truth properly asserts itself (i.e. manifestation). *Dichtung* (*le dit poétique* or fiction, the term used by Goethe and Freud: as in Heidegger, it is literary fiction as *Dichtung* which is in question) is the manifestation of the truth, its being-confirmed *(être avéré):*

There is so little opposition between this *Dichtung* and the *Wahrheit* in its nakedness, that the fact of poetic operation should rather make us stop at this feature which is forgotten in every truth, which is that it is confirmed [*s'avère*] in a structure of fiction" (*Écrits,* pp. 741-2).

Truth commands the fictional substance of its manifestation which allows it to be or become what it is, to be confirmed. It commands this substance from its origin or from its telos, which ultimately subordinates this concept of literary fiction to a rather classical interpretation of *mimesis:* [as] detour towards the truth, more truth in fictive representation than in reality, increased faithfulness, "superior realism." The previous quotation called for a note:

The propriety of this reminder in our subject would be sufficiently confirmed if that were necessary by one of these numerous unpublished texts which Delay's work brings to us shedding upon them the most appropriate light. Here, from the *Unpublished Diary* so-called of la Brévine, where Gide stayed during October 1894 (note on p. 667 of his volume II).

The novel will prove that it can paint something other than reality — emotion or thinking directly; the novel will show to what extent it can be composed — that is to say a work of art. It will show that it may be a work of art, completely composed, of a realism not of little facts and contingent, but superior.

Follows a reference to the mathematical triangle, then:

It is necessary that in their very relation each part of a work should prove the truth of each other part, there is no need of another proof. Nothing

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so irritating as the testimony given by Monsieur de Goncourt for everything he advances — he saw! he heard! as if the proof by the real were necessary."

Lacan concludes: "Need it be said that no poet ever thought otherwise . . . but that no one has followed through on this thought." And it is confirmed in the same article that it is a "person" who "brings" the "truth of fiction." This person is the "seducer" of the "young boy" (*Écrits,* p. 753).

Once the distinction has been made, as the whole philosophical tradition does, between truth and reality, it is self-evident that the truth "is confirmed in a structure of fiction." [29] Lacan insists much on the opposition truth/reality which he advances as a paradox. This opposition, as orthodox as can be, facilitates the passage of truth through fiction: common sense will always have made the distinction between reality and fiction.

But once again, why should the (spoken) word be the privileged entity of this truth confirmed *as* fiction, in the mode or in the structure of fiction, of this verified fiction, of what Gide calls "superior realism"?

As soon as truth is determined as adequation (to an original contract: the acquittal of a debt) and as unveiling (of the lack which gives rise to the contracting of the contract in order to reappropriate symbolically what has been detached), the master value is indeed that of propriation, hence of proximity, presence and preserving: the very same provided by the idealizing effect of speech. If this demonstration is granted it will not be surprising to find it confirmed. Were it not so, how would one explain this massive complication, in Lacan's discourse, between the truth, the word [*parole*], the present, full and authentic word? If it is taken into consideration one understands better: 1. that fiction for Lacan should be numbed with truth inasmuch as it is spoken and hence

[29] For example: "Thus it is from elsewhere than the Reality which it concerns that the Truth draws its guarantee: it is from the Word. As it is from the latter that it receives this mark which institutes it in a structure of fiction.

The primal word [*le dit premier*] decrees, legislates, aphorizes, is oracle, it confers upon the reality of the other its obscure reality" (*Écrits,* p. 808).

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as it is non-real. 2. that this should lead to coping no longer, in the text, with whatever remains irreducible to the word [*parole*], to speech [*au dit*] and to meaning [*vouloir-dire*]: the irreducible ill-keeping [or inadvertence, *mé-garde*], the theft without return, the destructibility, the divisibility, the failure [*manque*] to reach destination (definitively rebellious to the destination of failure [or lack, *manque*]: unverifiable non-truth).

When Lacan recalls "this passion to unveil which has one object: the truth,"[30] and that the analyst "remains above all the master of the truth," it is always in order to link the truth to the power of the word [*parole*]. And of communication as contract (pledged faith) between two presents. Even if communication does not communicate anything, it communicates (itself): and even better, in this case, as communication, that is as truth. For example: "Even if it communicates nothing, the discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the obvious, it affirms that the Word constitutes the Truth; even if it is destined to deceive, here the discourse speculates on faith in testimony."[31]

[30] "You have heard me, in order to locate the inquiry, refer with dilection to Descartes and to Hegel. It is somewhat in vogue these days 'to go beyond' the classical philosophers. I might just as well have started from the admirable dialogue with Parmenides. For one cannot 'go beyond' Socrates, nor Descartes, nor Marx, nor Freud, inasmuch as they conducted their inquiry with this passion to unveil which has one object: the truth.

As wrote one of those, princes of the word, and under whose fingers seem to glide of themselves the threads of the mask of the Ego, I have named Max Jacob, poet, saint and novelist, yes, as he wrote in his *Cornet à dés,* if I am not mistaken: the true is always new" ("Propos sur la causalité psychique," in *Écrits,* p. 193). It always is true. How can we not agree?

[31] Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis,* trans. and ed. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1968), p. 13. Hereafter cited as *The Language of the Self* followed by the page number. The "true word" is the word authenticated by the other in the given or pledged faith. The other renders it adequate to itself — and no longer to the object — by returning the message in an inverted form, by making it true, by identifying from then on the subject with himself, by "anouncing that he is the same." Adequation — as authentification — proceeds through intersubjectivity. The word "is therefore an act, and as such, presupposing a subject. But it is not enough to say that, in this act, the subject presupposes another subject, for much rather he founds himself in it as being the other, but in this paradoxical unity of both the one and the other, by means of which, as has been shown above, the one relies on the other in order to become identical to himself.

It may then be said that the word [*la parole*] manifests itself as a communication in which not only the subject, because expecting of the other

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What is neither true nor false is reality. But as soon as there is speech, one is in the order of the unveiling of the truth as of its contract of property: presence, speech and testimony:

The ambiguity of the hysterical revelation of the past does not depend so much on the vacillation of its content between the Imaginary and the Real, for it locates itself in both. Nor is it exactly error or falsehood. The point is that it presents us with the birth of Truth in the Word, and

that he render his message true, will utter it in an inverted form, but in which this message transforms him by anouncing that he is the same. As it appears in any given word, where the declarations of 'you are my wife,' or "you are my master" mean 'I am your husband,' 'I am your disciple.'

The word then appears all the more truly a word as its truth is less founded in what is called adequation to the thing: the true word is thus paradoxically opposed to true discourse, their truth being distinguished in this, that the former constitutes the recognition by subjects of their beings in that they are inter-ested in it, while the latter is constituted by the cognition of the real, inasmuch at it is seen by the subject in objects. But each one of the truths here distinguished is altered by crossing the other in its way" ("Variantes de la cure-type," in *Écrits,* p. 352). In this crossing, the "true word" appears always as truer than "true discourse" which always presupposes its order, that of the intersubjective contract, of symbolic exchange and hence of debt. "But the true word, upon questioning the true discourse about what it signifies, will find therein that signification always refers to signification, no thing being capable of being shown except by a sign, and henceforth will make it appear as destined to error" (*ibid.,* p. 352). The ultimate adequation of the truth as true word therefore has the form of acquittal, "singular adequation" "which finds its answer in the symbolic debt of which the subject is responsible as subject of the word" (p. 434). These are the last words of "*La chose Freudienne.*" The adequation to the thing (true discourse) therefore has its foundation in the adequation of the word to itself (true word) so to the thing itself: that is to say *the Freudian thing to itself:* "The thing speaks of itself" (p. 403) and it says "I, the truth, am speaking." The thing is the truth: as cause, of itself and of the things of which the true discourse speaks. These propositions are less new, particularly in relation to the "Rome Speech," to "Variantes de la cure-type" and to the texts of the same period, than their author says: "It is to reintroduce through a totally different access the incidence of the truth as cause and to force a revision of the process of causality. Hence the first stage would seem to recognize what the heterogeneity of this incidence would have in it that's inherent. [This paragraph re-makes, antedates, a line of thought which we have opened since (1966)" (p. 416).]

The "true word" (adequate to itself, conforming to its essence, destined to acquit itself of a debt which in the last instance binds it only to itself) permits the contract which permits the subject to "become identical to itself." It reconstitutes then the ground of Cartesian certitude: the transformation of the truth into certitude, subjectivization (determination of the Being [*l'être*] of being [*l'étant*] into subject), intersubjectivization (the chain Descartes-Hegel-Husserl). This chain catches incessantly, in the *Écrits,* Heideggerian motions which give themselves out as being, in all rigor, allergic to it, and as having "destructive" effects on it. Let us abandon for the moment this type of questions — the most decisive ones — which are never articulated in Lacan's discourse.

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thereby brings us up against the reality of what is neither true nor false. At any rate, that is the most disturbing aspect of the problem.

For the Truth of this revelation lies in the present Word which testifies to it in contemporary reality and which grounds it in the name of that reality. Yet in that reality, it is only the Word which bears witness to that portion of the powers of the past which has been thrust aside at each crossroads where the event has made its choice *(The Language of the Self).*

This passage has been closely preceded by a reference to Heidegger, and that is not surprising; it carries the *Dasein* back to the subject, and that is more surprising.

From the moment that the "present word" "testifies" to "the truth of this revelation" beyond true and false, beyond what is truthful or mendacious in such and such a statement or such and such a symptom in their relation to such and such a content, the values of adequation or of unveiling no longer even have to await their verification or their accomplishment from the outside of any object. They are intrinsically self-guaranteed. What matters is not what is communicated, be it true or false, but "the existence of communication," the present revelation made therein of the word testifying to the truth. Hence the necessary relay via the values of authenticity, of plenitude, of property, etc. The truth, that which must be recovered, is therefore not an object beyond the subject, the adequation of the word to an object,[32] but the adequation of the full word to itself, its own authenticity, the conformity of its act to its original essence. And the telos of this *Eigentlichkeit,* the proper

[32] This responsibility is defined soon after and since the exchange of the "full word" with Freud, in its "true educational [*formatrice*] value": For in question is nothing less than its (his) adequation to (at) the level of man where he gets hold of it (himself), whatever he may think of it (himself) — at which point he is called upon to respond to him, whatever he may want — and of which he assumes, although he has it, the responsibility" (*Écrits,* p. 382).

Concerning the "level of man" the place is lacking to verify the essential link, in this system, of metaphysics (some of whose typical features we are tracing here) and of humanism. This link is more visible, if not better seen, in the mass of statements on "animality," on the distinction between animal language and human language, etc. This discourse on the animal (in general) no doubt coheres with all the categories and all the oppositions, bi- or tripartitions of the system. It does, nonetheless condense for it the greatest obscurity. The treatment of animality, as of everything which is *submitted* by a hierarchical opposition, has always revealed, in the history of (humanist and phallogocentric) metaphysics the obscurantist resistance. Its interest is evidently capital.

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focus of this authenticity shows the "authentic way" of analysis (*The Language of the Self,* p. 15), of didactic analysis in particular. "But what in fact was this appeal from the subject beyond the void of his speech? It was an appeal to Truth in its ultimate nature, through which other appeals resulting from humbler needs will find faltering expression. But first and foremost it was the appeal of the void..." (*The Language of the Self,* p. 9).

From this very appeal of emptiness towards the accomplishment of the full word, towards its "realization" through the assumption of desire (of castration), such is then the ideal process of analysis:

> I have tackled the function of the Word in analysis from its least rewarding angle, that of the empty Word, where the subject seems to be talking in vain about someone who, even if he were his spitting image, can never become one with the assumption of his desire.... If we now turn to the other extreme of the psychoanalytic experience — if we look into its history, into its casuistry, into the process of the cure — whe shall discover that to the analysis of the *hic et nunc* is to be opposed the value of anamnesis as the index and as the source of the progress of the therapy; that to obsessional intrasubjectivity is to be opposed hysterical intersubjectivity; and that to the analysis of resistance is to be opposed symbolic interpretation. Here it is that the realization of the full Word begins" (*The Language of the Self,* pp. 15-16).

The word here is not full of something which would be, beyond itself, its object: but from that very moment, the more so and the better, (full) of itself, of its presence, of its essence. This presence, as in the contract and the pledged faith, requires irreplaceable property, inalienable uniqueness, living authenticity, all those values whose system we have signaled elsewhere. The double, the repetition, the recording [*enregistrement*], the mimeme in general are excluded therefrom, with all the graphemic structure involved in them, through direct interlocution, and as inauthentic alienation. For example: "But precisely because it comes to him through an alienated form, even a retransmission of his own recorded discourse, be it from the mouth of his own doctor, cannot have the same effects as psychoanalytic interlocution" (*The Language of the Self,* p. 20).

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The disqualification of recording or of repetition in the name of the act of the living and present word folds itself to a well-known pattern. The system of the "true word," of the "word in action" (*Écrits,* p. 353) cannot do without condemning, as has been done from Plato to a certain Freud, the simulacrum and the hypomnesis: in the name of the truth, of that which links *mneme, anamnesis, aletheia.* Etc.

Only a word, with its effects of presence in act [*en acte*] and of authentic life, may keep the "pledged faith" which binds to the desire of the other. If "the phallus is the privileged signifier of this mark where the share of the logos [*la part du logos*] is conjoined to the advent of desire" ("La signification du phallus," *Écrits,* p. 692), the privileged locus of this privileged signifier, its letter then, is the voice: the spokesman [*porte-parole*]. It alone admits, as soon as the point of stability of the signified assures it its repeatable identity, the ideality or the idealization power necessary to safeguard (this is at any rate what it means) the indivisible, unique, living, non-mutilable integrity of the phallus, of the privileged signifier to which it gives rise. The *transcendental* position of the phallus (in the chain of signifiers to which it at once belongs and makes possible)[33] would thus have its proper locus—in

[33] This is the strict definition of the *transcendental position:* the privilege of a term within a series of terms which it makes possible and which presupposes it. In this manner a category is said to be transcendental (transcategorial) when it "transcends any genus" [*transcendit omne genus*] that is the list of categories of which however it makes part while accounting for it. It is therefore also the role of the hole and the lack in their determinable outline: "the phallus of his mother, that is for that eminent failure-to-be the privileged signifier of which Freud has revealed" ("The Insistence of the Letter," in *Structuralism,* p. 131). The transcendental eminence of this privilege is then put in perspective in its height, from horrified viewpoint of the child—more precisely of the little boy and of his sexual theory.

This omnipresence of a condition of possibility, this permanent implication, in every signifier, of the "signifier of signifiers" ("La direction de la cure," *Écrits,* p. 630), of the "peerless signifier" (p. 642) can only have as the element of its presence a milieu of ideality: whence the eminence of the transcendental eminence which has the *effect* of keeping the presence, namely

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Lacanian terms its letter exempt from any partition—in the phonemic structure of language. No protestation against metalanguage is opposed to this phallogocentristic transcendentalism. Especially if in metalanguage language focuses on the voice, that it to say on the ideal locus of the phallus. Had the phallus been per (mal)chance divisible or reduced to the status of a partial object,[34] the whole

the *phonè*. This is what made it possible and necessary, at the cost of certain rearrangements, to integrate the Freudian phallocentrism into a fundamentally phonocentric Saussurian semio-linguistics. The "algorithmic" transformation does not seem to me to break this bond. Here is the best definition of the transcendental phallus, in regard to which all the protestations of anti-transcendentalism keep their value of negation: "For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intrasubjective economy of the analysis, raises perhaps the veil of that which it held in mysteries. For it is the signifier destined to designate as a whole the signified-effects (as the stumbling yet directed work of Mrs. Klein makes obvious enough), but to the pregenital stages inasmuch as they are arrayed in the retroaction of the Oedipus" ("Du traitement possible de la psychose," *Écrits,* p. 554). "In fact what has he [Jones] gained in normalizing the function of the phallus as a partial object, if he needs to invoke its presence in the mother's body as an internal object, which term is a function of the phantasies revealed by Melanie Klein, and if he cannot to that extent separate himself from the doctrine of this latter, assigning these phantasies to the recurrence up to the limits of early childhood, of the Oedipal formation.

One would make no mistake to take up the question again by asking oneself what could have forced upon Freud the evident paradox of his position. For one would be constrained to admit that he was guided better than anyone in his recognition of the order of unconscious phenomena of which he was the inventor, and that, for want of a sufficient articulation of the nature of these phenomena, his followers were destined to go more or less astray in it.

It is from the starting-point of this wager—which we put at the basis of a commentary of Freud's work which we have been pursuing for the last seven years—that we have been led to certain results: chiefly, to promote as necessary to any articulation of the analytical phenomenon the notion of signifier, inasmuch as it is opposed to the notion of signified in modern linguistic analysis" ("La signification du phallus," *Écrits,* p. 688).

It must be retained that Jones in his address to the Vienna Society which seems to have burned the ground for any contribution since then, has already found no more to produce than his rallying pure and simple to the Kleinian concepts in the perfect brutality wherein their author presents them: we mean the neglect in which Melanie Klein persists—the inclusion of the most primal Oedipal phantasies in the maternal body—of their source in the reality which the Name-of-the-Father presupposes" ("Propos directifs pour un Congrès sur la sexualité féminine," *Écrits,* pp. 728-729).

[34] "The meaning of castration takes on its effective import *(clinically manifest)* as to the formation of symptoms, with its discovery as the castration of the mother" (*Écrits,* p. 686), that is of her lack of a penis and not of a clitoris. "That the phallus should be a signifier, imposes that it should be at the Other's place that the subject has access to it. But this signifier being there only as veiled and as reason of the Other's desire, it is this desire of the Other as such which it is imposed upon the subject to recog-

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edification would have crumbled down, and this is what has to be avoided at all cost. This may still occur if its taking-place does not have the ideality of a phonemic letter (which the Seminar so strangely calls "the materiality of the signifier" alleging that it

nize.... If the mother's desire *is* the phallus, the child wants to be the phallus in order to satisfy it... *Clinical work shows us* that this ordeal of the desire of the Other is not decisive inasmuch as the subject learns in it whether or not he himself has a real phallus, but inasmuch as he learns that his mother does not have it... a man finds in effect satisfaction of his love demand in the relation to a woman because the signifier of the phallus constitutes her indeed as giving in love what she does not have..." (*Écrits*, pp. 693-694).

I underline *Clinically manifest, clinical work shows us,* and without the least suspicion as to the truth of these statements. Rather in order to question all the imports of a situation of psychoanalysis in XXXX.

"What she doesn't have..." "heiress of never having had it"; one remembers that it is "the Woman" and the queen who are here in question; the proper place orienting the *proper* course of the letter, its "destination," what it "means to say" and which is deciphered from a situation theorizing about what "clinical work shows us."

This situation (a theoretical discourse and an institution edified on a phase of the experience of the male child and on the corresponding sexual theory) sustains both in Bonaparte and in Lacan the interpretation of "The Purloined Letter." It corresponds rigorously, no unfaithfulness on the part of the legatees here, to the description given of it by Freud in the propositions disputed during the "battle" mentioned a moment ago. But way of a reminder: "the main characteristic of this 'infantile genital organization' is its *difference* from the final genital organization of the adult. The fact is that, for both sexes, only one genital, namely the male one, comes into account. What is present, therefore, is not a primacy of the genitals, but a primacy of the *phallus.*

Unfortunately we can describe this state of things only as it affects the male child; the corresponding processes in the little girl are not known to us.... [Little boys] disavow the fact [of the absence of a penis] and believe that they *do* see a penis, all the same. They gloss [Fr. tr. has *ils jettent un voile,* they throw a veil] over the contradiction between observation and preconception by telling themselves that the penis is still small and will grow bigger presently; and they then slowly come to the emotionally significant conclusion that after all the penis had at least been there before and been taken away afterwards. The lack of a penis is regarded as a result of castration, and so now the child is faced with the task of coming to terms with castration in relation to himself. The further developments are too well known generally to make it necessary to recapitulate them here. But it seems to me that *the significance of the castration complex can only be rightly appreciated if its origin in the phase of phallic primacy is also taken into account....*

At the... stage of infantile genital organization..., *maleness* exists, but not femaleness. The antithesis here is between having *a male genital* and being *castrated*" ("The Infantile Genital Organization" [1923], Standard Edition, vol. XIX, pp. 142-145). One might be tempted to say: Freud, like those who follow him here, does nothing else but *describe* the necessity of phallogocentrism, explain its effects, which are as obvious as they are massive. Phallogocentrism is neither an accident nor a speculative mistake which may be imputed to this or that theoretician. It is an enormous and old root

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survives the burned or torn-up paper, and endures by dint of not letting itself be divided). This always *does* occur but the voice is there to decoy us onto this strange event and to leave us the ideal keeping of what is reduced to the status of a partial or divisible object: a disseminable bit [*mors disséminable*].

The decoy [*leurre*]—but the word no longer suffices—would no longer be that of the imaginary but of the so-called limit between the imaginary and the symbolic. Consequence: to be continued. The systematic and historical link between idealization, sublation [*Aufhebung*] and the voice, if it is now considered as demonstrated, insists then in "La signification du phallus." The raising to the function of a signifier is an *Aufhebung* of the "signifiable" (*Écrits*, p. 692): this is then true by the privilege of the "privileged signifier" (the phallus) and of its literal locality *par excellence* (the voice). Hence the complicity of structure between the motif of the veil and that of the voice, between the truth and phonocentrism, phallocentrism and logocentrism. Which exposes itself thus:

which must also be accounted for. It may then be described, as an object or a course are described, without this description taking part in what it operates the recognition of. To be sure. But this hypothesis, which one would then have to extend to all the texts of the tradition, encounters in these latter, as in Freud, as in those of his heirs who refuse to transform here anything of his legacy, a very strictly determinable limit: the description is a "recipient" when it induces a practice, an ethic and an education hence a politics assuring the tradition of its truth. The point then is not simply to know, to show, to explain, but to stay in it and reproduce. The ethico-educational purpose is declared by Lacan: the motif of authenticity, of the full word, of the pledged faith and of the "signifying convention" showed this sufficiently. It regulates itself systematically by a phallogocentric doctrine of the signifier. "Analysis can have for its goal only the advent of a true Word and the bringing to realization of his history by the subject in his relation to a future" (*The Language of the Self*, p. 65). "Just before the peaks of the path which I have established of its reading [the reading of Freud's work] before reaching transference, then identification, then anxiety, it is not chance, the idea of it would occur to no one, if this year, the fourth before my seminar should come to an end on Saint Anne, I thought it our duty to ascertain the ethic of psychoanalysis.

It seems in effect that we risked forgetting in the field of our function that an ethic is at its basis, and that from then on, whatever he may think [*se dire*], and without my approval as well, about the end of man, our chief torment concerns a formation which may be qualified as human.

Any human formation in essence, and not by accident, curbs pleasure [*refréner la jouissance*]" ("Discours de clôture des Journées sur les psychoses chez l'enfant," *Recherches, spécial Enfance aliénée*, 11, décembre 1968, pp. 145-146).

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All these remarks still do nothing but veil the fact that it cannot play its role except veiled, that is to say as itself sign of the latency with which anything signifiable is stricken as soon as it is raised *(aufgehoben)* to the function of signifier.

"The phallus is the signifier of this *Aufhebung* itself which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance" (*Écrits*, p. 692).

It would appear that the Hegelian movement of *Aufhebung* is here reversed since it sublates [*relève*] the sensory signifier in the ideal signified. But as the best zone defense [*garde locale*] of the phallus (of the privileged signifier) is recognized by Lacan to be *verbal* language (the preconscious, even the conscious for Freud), the excellency of the voice annulls the reversal. It is common to both dialectics and idealizes the signifier.

The same thing always takes (the same) place. The point is still not to abandon the proper place in question.

Phallogocentrism is one thing. And what is called man and what is called woman might be subjected to it. The more so, we are reminded, since the phallus is neither a phantasy ("imaginary effect") nor an object ("partial, internal, good, bad"), even less the organ, penis or clitoris, which it symbolizes" *(Écrits* p. 690). Androcentrism ought therefore to be something else.

Yet what is going on? The entire phallogocentrism is articulated from the starting-point of a determinate *situation* (let us give this word its full impact) in which the phallus *is* the mother's desire inasmuch as she does not have it.[35] An (individual, perceptual, local, cultural, historical, etc.) situation on the basis of which is developed something called a "sexual theory": in it the phallus is not the organ, penis or clitoris, which it symbolizes; but it does to a larger extent and in first place symbolize the penis. The sequel is familiar: phallogocentrism as androcentrism with the whole paradoxical logic and the reversals which it engenders: for example that "in the

[35] *Écrits*, p. 695. As to the system-link between the logic of the signifier and phallogocentrism, everything in the Lacanian discourse responds here —indeed—to the question he poses in "Propos directifs pour un Congrès sur la sexualité féminine": "Is it then this privilege of the signifier which Freud aims at in suggesting that there is perhaps only one libido and that is is marked by the male sign?" (*Écrits*, p. 735).

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phallocentric dialectic, she [the woman] represents the absolute Other" (*Écrits,* p. 732). This consequence had to be traced in order to recognize the meaning [the direction, *sens*] of the purloined letter in the "course *which is proper to it.*" This is the end of "La signification du phallus" and the twice-repeated allegation of profundity:

> In a correlative manner is glimpsed the reason of this never-elucidated stroke [*trait*] in which once again the profundity of Freud's intuition can be measured: namely why he advances that there is only one libido, his text showing that he conceives it as of masculine nature. The function of the phallic signifier opens here [*débouche*] upon its most profound implication: that by which the Ancients embodied the Noùs and the Λόγος. [36]

[36] Culinary questions: when Baudelaire translates "coincidence" as *analogie* at the beginning of the story, at the precise moment of the two other "affairs" ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt"), he misses, with the full force of the word *manque* the fact that "The Purloined Letter" itself is presented in a series of coincidences, as one of them, their network already worked out before this third fiction. One detail among the many that now can be analyzed in an open reading of the trilogy: the epigraph of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," a quotation from Novalis, in German and in English translation, beginning: "There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. . . ." Baudelaire simply omits these last three words. The word "coincidences" then appears three times in two pages, italicized in each case. The last time, with reference to the interconnection [*embranchement*] of the three cases: "The extraordinary details which I am now called upon to make public, will be found to form, as regards sequence of time, the primary branch of a series of scarcely intelligible [*à peine imaginables*] *coincidences,* whose secondary or concluding [*finale*] branch will be recognized by all readers in the late murder of MARY CECILIA ROGERS, at New York." The subtitle of the "Mystery": "a sequel to 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue.'"

These reminders, of which countless other examples could be given, make us aware of the effects of the frame, and of the paradoxes in the parergonal logic. Our purpose is not to prove that "The Purloined Letter" functions within a frame (omitted by the Seminar, which can thus be assured of its triangular interior by an active, surreptitious limitation starting with a metalinguistic overhang), but to prove that the structure of the framing effects is such that no totalization of the border is even possible. The frames are always framed: thus by some of their content. Pieces without a whole, "divisions" without a totality—this is what thwarts the dream of a letter without division, allergic to division. From this point on, the seme "phallus" is errant, begins by dis-seminating, not even by *being* disseminated.

The naturalizing neutralization of the frame permits the Seminar, by imposing or importing an Oedipal outline, by finding it (self there) in truth —and it is there, in fact, but as a piece, even if a precisely central one, within the letter—to constitute a metalanguage and to exclude all of the general text in all of the dimensions we began here by recalling (return to the "first page"). Without even going into greater detail, the trap of metalanguage, which, ultimately, is set up by no one, for the sake of no one,

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Profundity equals height. It opens [*débouche*] upwards, the mouth [*bouche*] precisely in which is "embodied" the *Nous,* the *Logos,* and which says profoundly: there is only *one* libido, hence no difference, even less opposition within it of masculine and feminine, besides it is masculine in nature. The "reason for this never elucidated stroke [*trait*] can be but "glimpsed": it is not the reason for this stroke, it is reason itself. Before Freud, under Freud and since Freud. The drawn line of reason [*le trait tiré de la raison*]. Drawn by it, for it, under it. In the logic known as "kitchen logic" [*logique du "chaudron"*], (bill of exchange of reason) [*traite tirée de la raison*], reason will always outreason. Itself. [La *raison aura toujours raison. D'elle-même.*] It speaks up for itself. "The thing goes without saying" ["La chose parle d'elle-même"]. It speaks up to say what it cannot hear.

Meeting Place: Four of a Kind, Kings—Double

But it (reason) *cannot read* the story which it makes up. Nor the scene of writing—avant la lettre—in which the story is inscribed. Let us return to the "Purloined Letter" to get a "glimpse" there of the disseminal structure, i.e., the no-possible-return of the letter, the other scene of its remnance [*restance*].

Because there is a narrator on the scene, the "general" scene is not limited to a narration, a "tale," or a "story." We have already recognized the effects of the indivisible framing, from frame to frame, *from within which* psychoanalytical interpretations (semantico-biographical or triado-formalist) drew their triangles. By overlooking the narrator's position, the narrator's involvement in the content of what he seems to be recounting, one omits from the scene of writing anything going beyond the two triangular scenes.

involving no one as the result of a mistake or weakness, this trap belongs to writing *avant la lettre* and discloses and conceals itself in the revealed/concealed elements of its affected title: "The Purloined Letter" is the title of the text and not only of its object. But a text never names itself, never writes: I, the text, write or write myself. It has, lets, or rather brings another to say: "I, truth, speak." I am always the letter that never arrives. At the destination itself.

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And first of all (one omits that) in question is a scene of writing —its access or border undeterminable—whose boundaries are blurred [*abîmés*]. From the simulacrum of an overture, of the "first word," the narrator, as he narrates himself, advances a few statements which carry the unity of the "tale" into an endless drifting-off-course: a textual drifting not at all taken into account in the Seminar. But if one were to take it into account, one ought not to turn it into the "*real subject* of the tale." Who would not have done it!

1. Everything begins "in" a library: among books, writing, references. Hence nothing begins. Simply a drifting or a disorientation from which one never moves away.

2. There is explicit reference, moreover, to two other stories to which "this one" is grafted. The "analogy" between the three stories is the core of "The Purloined Letter." The independences of the tale, as presumed in the Seminar, is thus the effect of an ablation, even if it is considered in its totality, with its narrator and narration. This ablation is all the more faint as the "analogy" is recalled from the very first paragraph on. It is true that the word "analogy," or, more precisely, "coincidence," authorizes, invites the ablation, and thus functions as a trap. The work of the Seminar begins only after the arrival of the Prefect of the Parisian police. Before this, however, the title, the epigraph, the first paragraph provided something to read (in silence, the silence).

The Purloined Letter

Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio.

SENECA

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet *au troisième, N°/33 Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain.* For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening;

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I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G—, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

....We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so....

Thus everything "begins" by obscuring this opening in "silence," the "smoke" and the "dark" of this library. The casual observer sees only the smoking meerschaum: in short, a literary setting, the ornamental frame of a story. On this border, negligible for the interpreter interested in the center of the painting and the interior of representation, it was already possible to read that the whole thing was a matter of writing, and of writing off its course, in a writing-space unboundedly open to grafting onto other writing, and that this matter of writing, the third of a series in which the "coincidence" between the first two is noticeable, breaks suddenly into the text with its first word "au troisième, No. 33. Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain": in French in the original.

Fortuitous remarks, eddies of smoke, contingencies of framing? The fact that they go beyond "the author's intention," about which the Seminar is tempted to turn to Dupin for information, the fact that they are even purely accidental "coincidence," chance events, can only render them of greater interest for the reading of a text that makes of chance as writing what we shall be careful not to call "the *real subject* of the tale."

Rather, its remarkable ellipsis. Indeed, if, as we are invited to do even in the internal boundary of the frame, we go back before "The Purloined Letter," the same remarkable elements persist: scene of writing, library, chance events, coincidences. At the beginning of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," what could be called the meeting place between the narrator (narrating-narrated) and Dupin is *already an obscure library,* the *coïncidence* (this is the word, rather than *analogie,* with which Baudelaire translates "accident" [37] of the fact that they are "in search of the same very rare

[37] Before dropping them, as everyone does with prefaces, or holding them up as the properly instructive theoretical concept, the truth of the

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and very remarkable volume." And the relationship formed then in this meeting place will, to say the least, never allow the so-called general narrator the position of a neutral, transparent reporter who does not intervene in the transaction going on. For example—but this time the example, read from the frame, is not at the beginning of the text. The frame describing the "meeting" cuts across the narration, so to speak. The frame is preceded, before Dupin appears in the story, by a feint in the form of an abandoned preface, a false short-treatise on analysis. "I am not now writing a treatise, but simply prefacing a somewhat peculiar narrative by observations very much at random." Not a treatise, a preface (to be dropped, of

story, I should like to draw from them a few statements. These are not necessarily the best of them; one should also recall each word of the title, and again the epithet about Achilles' name when he hid among women. "The mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis.... The analyst [glories] in that moral activity which *disentangles*. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talents into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics.... Yet to calculate is not in itself to analyze. A chess-player, for example, does the one without effort at the other.... I will, therefore, take occasion to assert that the higher powers of the reflective intellect are more decidedly and more usefully tasked by the unostentatious game of draughts [*jeu de dames*] than by all the elaborate frivolity of chess.... To be less abstract—Let us suppose a game of draughts where the pieces are reduced to four kings [*quatre* dames (in the game of draughts, or checkers, the "kings," like the game itself, are called in French "ladies," *dames*)], and where, of course, no oversight is to be expected. It is obvious that here the victory can be decided (the players being at all equal) only by some *recherché* movement, the result of some strong assertion of the intellect. Deprived of ordinary resources, the analyst throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith, and not unfrequently sees thus, at a glance, the sole methods (sometimes indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce into error or hurry into miscalculation ... But it is in matters beyond the limits of mere rule that the skill of the analyst is evinced ... Our player confines himself not at all; nor, because the game is the object, does he reject deductions from things external to the game." Etc. One must read the complete text, in both languages. I have taken some liberties [*Je me suis livré à quelque cuisine*] with Baudelaire's translation, which I do not always follow.

Méryon asked Baudelaire whether he believed "in the real existence of this Edgar Allan Poe"; Méryon attributed Poe's tales "to a group of highly skilled and most powerful men of letters, acutely aware of everything that was going on." The said group, then, does not specify whether the "things external to the game" border on a game recounted in the text or constituted by the text, nor whether *the game* that *is the object* is (in) the story or not. Nor whether the seduction seeks its prey among the characters or among the readers. The question of the narratee, and that of the receiver, which is not the same question.

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course).[38] At the end of the preface, the narrator simulates the Seminar:

> The narrative which follows will appear to the reader in the light of a commentary upon the propositions just advanced.

[38] The Seminar completely disregards the very definite involvement of the narrator in the narrative. Ten years later, in an addition made in 1966, Lacan writes as follows:

"An effect [of the signifier] as obviously graspable here as in the fiction of the purloined letter.

Whose essence is that the letter has been able to carry its effects into the interior—to the actors in the tale, including the narrator—as well as to the exterior—to us readers and also to its author—without anyone ever having been concerned about what it meant. This is the usual outcome of everything that is written" (E, pp. 56f.).

Thus while subscribing up to a certain point, we still must point out that the Seminar said nothing about the effects on the narrator, *neither in fact nor in principle*. The structure of the interpretation excluded it. And about the nature of these effects, about the structure of the involvement of the narrator, the note of repentance still says nothing, limiting itself to the frame constructed by the Seminar. The claim that in this matter everything has happened "without anyone ever having been concerned about what it [the letter] meant," is incorrect for several reasons:

1. Everyone, as the police Prefect reminds us, knows that the letter contains at least something that would "bring into question the honor of a personage of most exalted station" and her "peace": a sturdy semantic mooring rope.

2. This knowledge is repeated by the Seminar and bolsters it on two levels: (a) as for the minimal, active meaning of this letter, the Seminar reports and transcribes the information of the police Prefect:

"But all this tells us nothing of the message it conveys.

Love letter or conspiratorial letter, letter of betrayal or letter of mission, letter of summons or letter of distress, we are assured of but one thing: the Queen must not bring it to the knowledge of her lord and master" (SPL, p. 57). This tells us the essentials of the message it conveys: the variations proposed on this subject are not indifferent, even if they seek to make us believe that they are. In all the imagined hypotheses, the message of the letter (not only the fact that it is sent) must imply the betrayal of a pact, of a "pledge of faith." It was not forbidden for any person to send any letter at all to the Queen, nor for her to receive letters. The Seminar contradicts itself when a few lines later it radicalizes the logic of the signifier and of its literal place while pretending to neutralize the "message," then arrests or anchors this logic in its meaning or its symbolic truth: "It remains that the letter is the symbol of a pact." Contrary to what the Seminar says (an appalling proposition by virtue of the blindness that it could induce, but indispensable for the demonstration), it is indeed necessary that everyone "be concerned about what it (the letter) meant." Ignorance or indifference about this remains minimal and concerns details. Everyone knows, everyone is concerned, the author of the Seminar first of all. And if it did not have a fully determined meaning, no one would care about having a different one palmed off on him, which is what happens to the Queen and then to the Minister. Everyone makes certain, from the Minister to Lacan, including Dupin, that it is the letter in question and

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Residing in Paris during the spring and part of the summer of 18—, I there became acquainted with a Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin. This young gentleman was of an excellent — indeed of an illustrious family, but, by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in the world, or to care for the retrieval of his fortunes. By courtesy of his creditors, there still remained in his possession a small remnant of his patrimony; and, upon the income arising from this, he managed, by means of a rigorous economy, to procure the necessaries of life, without troubling himself about its superfluities. Books, indeed, were his sole luxuries, and in Paris these are easily obtained.

With a remnant of his paternal inheritance, apparently surrendered without calculation to the debtor who knows how, by calculating ("rigorous economy"), to draw from it a *rente,* an income, the surplus-value of a capital that works all alone, Dupin allows himself one extra, one luxury, in which the initial remnant reappears, passing through the restricted economy like a one-way gift. This luxury ("his sole luxuries": this is the word which appear again in the second line of "The Purloined Letter," but this time in the singular: "the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum"), is writing: the books that will structure the locus of the meeting and the *mise en abîme* of the whole so-called general narration. The locus of the meeting for the meeting between the narrator and Dupin is a result of the meeting of their interests in the same book, which they are never said to have found. This is literally the accident:

Our first meeting was at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where the accident of our both being in search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume, brought us into closer communion. We saw each other

that it does indeed say what it says: the betrayal of the pact, and what it says, "the symbol of the pact." Otherwise there would be no "abandoned" letter: abandoned either by the Minister first or by Dupin and finally by Lacan. They all make sure of the content of the letter, of the "right one," they all mime the police Prefect, who, taking the letter from Dupin's hands in exchange for remuneration, checks its content: "This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room . . . ." The exchange of the check and the letter takes place over an *escritoire* (in French in the original) in which Dupin had the document locked up.

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again and again. I was deeply interested in the little family history which he detailed to me with all that candor which a Frenchman indulges whenever more self is the theme.

The narrator thus lets himself be narrated: that he is "deeply interested in [Dupin's] little family history," that particular one which leaves a remnant of income with which to purchase the luxury of books; then, as we shall see, that it is above all else Dupin's capacity for reading which astonishes the narrator, and that the society of such a man is therefore to him "a treasure beyond price." The narrator will thus purchase for himself Dupin's being-without-a-price, who purchases for himself writing's being-without-a-price, which is without-price in that very way. For the narrator, confiding openly in Dupin—or, as Baudelaire puts it, *se livrant* frankly to him, must pay for the privilege. He must rent the analyst's office—and furnish the economic equivalent of what is without-price. The analyst—or rather the narrator's own financial situation, almost the same as Dupin's, merely "somewhat less embarrassed"—authorizes him to do so: "I was permitted to be at the expense of renting. . . ." The narrator is thus the first one to pay Dupin to assure himself the availability of the "letters." Let us then follow the movement of the chain. What the narrator is paying for is also the locus of the narration, the writing in which the entire story will be told and offered for interpretations. And if he pays to write or speak, he also makes Dupin speak, makes him give his letters back and gives him the last word, in the form of a confession. In the economics of this office [*cabinet*], since the narrator himself appears on the scene in a function that is indeed that of a "corporation" *(société anonyme)* of capital and desire, no neutralization is possible, no general point of view, no overhang, no "destruction" of meaning by money. Not only Dupin but also the narrator is a "recipient." As soon as he makes Dupin give up his letters—and not only to the Queen (the other Queen), the letter is divided, it is no longer atomic (atomism, Epicurean atomism, is also, as we know, one of Dupin's topics in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue") and thus loses any assurance of destination. The divisibility of the letter

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—this is why we insisted on this key or theoretical safety bolt [*verrou de sûreté théorique*] of the Seminar: the atomystique of the letter—is what puts in jeopardy and leads astray, with no guarantee of return, the remnant of anything whatever: a letter does *not always* arrive at its destination, and since this belongs to its structure, it can be said that it never really arrives there, that when it arrives, its possibly-not-arriving [*son pouvoir-ne-pas-arriver*], torments it with an internal divergence.

The divisibility of the letter is also the divisibility of the signifier to which it gives rise, and thus of the "subjects," "characters," or "positions" that are subject to them and that "represent" them. Before showing this in the text, let us recall a quotation:

> I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading; and, above all, I felt my soul enkindled within me by the wild fervor, and the vivid freshness of his imagination. Seeking in Paris the objects I then sought, I felt that the society of such a man would be to me a treasure beyond price; and this feeling I frankly confided to him. It was at length arranged that we should live together during my stay in the city; and as my worldly circumstances were somewhat less embarrassed than his own, I was permitted to be at the expense of renting, and furnishing in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper, a time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions into which we did not inquire, and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain.

Thus we have two (gloomy) fantastics, one of whom does not tell us who his "former associates" are, from whom he will now conceal the "secret" of the "locality." The entire space is now enclosed in the speculations of these two "madmen":

> Had the routine of our life at this place been known to the world, we should have been regarded as madmen — although, perhaps, as madmen of a harmless nature. Our seclusion was perfect. We admitted no visitors. Indeed the locality of our retirement had been carefully kept a secret from my own former associates; and it had been many years since Dupin had ceased to know or be known in Paris. We existed within ourselves alone.

From this point on, the narrator lets himself narrate his progressive identification with Dupin. And in the first instance in "loving"

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the night, the "sable divinity" whose "presence" they "counterfeit" when she is not there:

> It was a freak of fancy in my friend (for what else shall I call it?) to be enamored of the Night for her own sake; and into this *bizarrerie,* as into all his others, I quietly fell; giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect *abandon.* The sable divinity would not herself dwell with us always; but we could counterfeit her presence.

Thus the narrator, already positionally double, *identifies* with Dupin, whose "particular analytical ability" he "cannot help remarking and admiring" and who gives him countless proofs of Dupin's "intimate knowledge" of the narrator's own "bosom" [*personne*]. But Dupin himself, at these very moments, appears double. And this time it is a "fantasy" [*une fantastique*] of the narrator which sees Dupin as double:

> His manner at these moments was frigid and abstract his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation. Observing him in these moods, I often dwelt meditatively on the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin — the creative and the resolvent.

The fancy of an identification between two doubles themselves double, the powerful cathexis [*investissement*] of the binding relationship [*liaison*] that involves Dupin *outside* of the "intersubjective triads" of the "real drama" and involves the narrator *in* what he narrates, the circulation of wishes and capital, of signifiers and letters before and beyond the two "primal" and secondary "triangles," the chain-fission of positions, beginning with the position of Dupin, who, like *all* the characters, inside and outside the narrative, occupies *all* the places—all this makes triangular logic a very limited part of the drama [*une pièce très limitée dans la pièce*]. And if the dual relationship between the two doubles (which Lacan would reduce to the imaginary) includes all of the space referred to as "symbolic," surpasses it and simulates it, engulfs it and breaks it down endlessly, then the opposition of the imaginary and the

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symbolic, and above all its implicit hierarchy, seem to be of very limited relevance: at least if it is measured within the scope of [*à la carrure de*] a scene of writing like this one.

We have seen that *all* the characters of "The Purloined Letter," particularly those of the "real drama," including Dupin, occupied successively and structurally *all* the positions, that of the King / dead man / blind man (and that of the police Prefect at the same time), after that of the Queen, and then of the Minister. Each position identifies with the other and is fragmented, even that of the dead man and of a supplementary fourth. The distinction of the three glances proposed by the Seminar to determine the proper course of the circulation is thus compromised. And above all the opening (duplicitous and identificatory) turned aside, toward the narrator (narrating, narrated), makes one letter come back only to send another astray.

And the phenomena of the double, hence of the "Unheimlichkeit," belong not only to the trilogical "context" of "The Purloined Letter." The question is indeed asked, in a conversation between the narrator and Dupin, whether the Minister is himself or his brother ("There are two brothers," "both have attained reputation"; where? "in letters"). Dupin affirms that the Minister is both "poet and mathematician." The two brothers almost indistinguishable in him. Rivals within him, one playing and foiling [*jouant et déjouant*] the other. " 'You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both [*il est les deux*]. As poet *and* mathematican, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect.' "

But at the Minister who " 'is well acquainted with my MS.,' " Dupin strikes a blow signed brother or confrère, twin or younger or older brother (Atreus / Thyestes). This rival and duplicitous identification of the brothers, far from fitting into the symbolic space of the family triangle (the first, the second, or the one after), carries it off infinitely far away in a labyrinth of doubles without originals, of facsimile without an authentic, an indivisible letter, of casual

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counterfeits [*contrefaçons sans façon*], imprinting the purloined letter with an incorrigible indirection.

The text entitled "The Purloined Letter" imprints / is imprinted in these effects of indirection. I have only indicated the most conspicuous of these effects in order to begin to unlock their reading: the game of doubles, the endless divisibility, the textual references from facsimile to facsimile, the framing of frames, the interminable supplementarity of quotation marks, the insertion of "The Purloined Letter" in a purloined letter that begins with it, throughout the narratives of narrative of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the newspaper clippings of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" ("A Sequel to 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' "). Above all else, the *mise en abîme* of the title: "The Purloined Letter" is the text, the text in a text (the purloined letter as a trilogy). The title is the title of the text, it names the text, it names itself and thus includes itself while pretending to name an object described in the text. "The Purloined Letter" functions as a text that escapes all assignable destination and produces, or rather induces by deducing itself, this inassignability at the exact moment in which it narrates the arrival of a letter. It pretends to mean [*vouloir-dire*] and to make one think that "a letter always arrives at its destination," authentic, intact, and undivided, at the moment and the place where the simulation, as writing *avant la lettre,* leaves its path. In order to make another leap—to the side. At this very place, of course.

Who signs? Dupin wants to sign, no matter what. And indeed the narrator, after having made or let him speak, gives him the last word,[39] the last word of the last of the three stories. So it seems.

[39] One can even consider that he is the only one who "speaks" in the story. His discourse dominates with loquacious, didactic braggadocio, truly magisterial, handing out directives, giving directions, righting wrongs, teaching everyone. He spends his own time and that of others making corrections and reminding them of the rules. He assumes his post and speaks up. Only the address matters, the right one, the authentic one. It devolves, according to the law, to the proper quarter. Thanks to the man of the law and the rector of the proper course. All of "The Purloined Letter" is written so that he finally brings it back through the proper course. And since he proves himself to be cleverer than the others, the letter plays one more trick on him just as he spots its locus and its true destination. The letter eludes and deceives him (literature on stage left [*côté cour*] just at the time

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This is not an attempt to put the narrator, in turn, much less the author, in the position of the analyst who knows how to keep silent. There may not be here, measured in terms of [*à la carrure de*] this scene of writing, a possible enclosure for an analytic situation. There may not even be a possible analyst, at least in the situation of psychoanalysis in X—. Only four kings, hence four queens, four police prefects, four ministers, four analysts Dupin, four narrators, four readers, four kings, etc., all more insightful and more foolish than the others, more powerful and more powerless.

Thus Dupin wants to sign, indeed, doubtless, the last word of the last message of the purloined letter. First by being unable to resist leaving his own mark—the seal, at least, with which he must be identified—on the facsimile that he leaves for the Minister. He fears the facsimile and, insisting on his utterly confraternal vengeance, he demands that the Minister know where it came from. Thus he limits the facsimile, the counterfeit exterior of the letter. The interior is authentic and properly identifiable. Indeed: at the moment when the madman (" 'the pretended lunatic' " who is " 'a man in my own pay' ") distracts everyone with his "frantic behavior," what does Dupin do? He adds a note. He leaves the false letter, that is, the one that interests him, *the real one,* which is not a facsimile *except for the exterior.* If there were a man of truth, a lover of the authentic, in all this, Dupin would indeed be the model: " 'In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a *fac-simile,* (so far as regards externals [*quant à l'extérieur*],) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings; imitating the D—cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread.' "

Thus D—will have to decipher, on the inside, what the decipherer meant and whence and why he deciphered, with what end in

when, speaking up, he hears that he deceives while explicating deception, just at the time when he returns the blow and the letter. He agrees to every demand without knowing it; he doubles, or rather replaces the Minister and the Police, and if there were only one dupe—hypothesis not taken up—he would be the most splendid one in the "story" [*de l' "histoire"*]. Yet—what about the lady [*quoi—de la belle*]. *Il l'adresse-la Reine-l'adresse-la-dupe.*

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mind, in the name of whom and what. The initial—the same, D, for the Minister and for Dupin—is a facsimile on the outside *but on the inside it is the thing itself.*

But what is this thing itself on the inside? This signature? This "last word" of a doubly confraternal war?

Again, a quotation by means of which the signer is dispossessed, whatever he may have: "I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words—

> — Un dessein si funeste,
> S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste."

A play on quotation marks. In the French translation, there are no quotation marks, and the lines from Crébillon appear in small type. The sentence that follows ("Vous trouverez cela dans l'*Atrée* de Crébillon," "They are to be found in Crébillon's 'Atrée' ") can be attributed equally well to the author of "The Purloined Letter," or the narrator, or the author of the letter left behind (Dupin). But the American edition at my disposal no longer leaves this doubt. It is, however, faulty in that it appears as follows, leaving interior quotation marks, suspended quotation marks called in French "*guillemets anglais.*"

> "... He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words —
>
> " '— Un dessein si funeste,
> S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.
>
> They are to be found in Crébillon's 'Atrée.' "

Thus it is clear that this final sentence is to be attributed to Dupin, Dupin saying to the Minister: I, the undersigned, Dupin, inform you of the fate of the letter, of what it means, of my purpose in stealing one from you in order to render it to its receiver, and why I am replacing it by this one, remember.

But, beyond the quotation marks that surround the entire story Dupin is obliged to quote this last word in quotation marks, to

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recount his signature: that is what I wrote to him and how I signed it. What is a signature within quotation marks? Then, within these quotation marks, the seal itself is a quotation within quotation marks. This remnant is still literature.

Two times out of three, the author of the Seminar transforms the word "*dessein*" (design) into "*destin*" (destiny), thus perhaps rendering a meaning [*vouloir-dire*] to its destination: deliberately, probably—there is no reason to rule out design anywhere. (These last words are dedicated of their own accord to Father Peter Coppieters de Gibson, who did not overlook the matter: the alteration coming to steal a letter in order to achieve its destiny along the way.)

"Whatever the case, the Minister, when he tries to make use of it, will be able to read these words, written so that he may recognize Dupin's hand: ...*Un dessein si funeste / S'il n'est digne d'Atrée est digne de Thyeste* whose source, Dupin tells us, is Crébillon's *Atrée*" (SPL, p. 43).

Then: "The commonplace of the quotation is fitting for the oracle that face bears in its grimace, as is also its source in tragedy: '...*Un destin si funeste, / S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste*' " (SPL, p. 71).

And finally: "...and I add (p. 52) that there is no chance that the crowing with which this Lecoq would like to waken him [*'un destin si funeste'*] in the little love note [*poulet*] he leaves for him [*qu'il lui destine*]—that there is no chance that that crowing will reach his ears" ("Points" Introduction, p. 8).

Translated by Willis Domingo, James Hulbert,
Moshe Ron and M.-R. L.

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