

## TWO STATUSES OF THE SYMPTOM

### “Let us turn to Finn again”

Jean-Louis Gault

I wondered about the treatment of psychosis. I asked myself how to define the practice of the psychoanalyst with a psychotic subject, and on what it might, by right, be founded. No doubt, one could speak of the psychoanalysis of psychosis. One could, but we hesitate to do so. When we dealt with this theme, in this same place, we preferred to do it under the title of the psychoanalytic experience of psychosis. In any case, we would have to distinguish it from the psychoanalysis of neurosis, and give a new sense to what we mean when we speak of psychoanalysis in the case of psychosis.

Lacan uses the term ‘treatment’, at least he does so to qualify the objective of the practice with a psychotic subject. There we encounter the symptom, but with psychosis the point is neither to interpret it, nor to decipher it. What the psychotic subject can expect of a psychoanalyst is a treatment by means of the symptom. The experience of psychosis has paved the way for the discovery that the symptom is a mode of treatment, and this is what Lacan develops in the second part of his teaching by encountering a new symptom, different from the Freudian symptom: the Joycean *sinthome*.

Once again Lacan allows himself to be taught by psychosis, and in 1987 Jacques-Alain Miller drew attention to this in emphasising the value of the experience of psychosis. By right, the status of the symptom in psychosis inscribes the psychotic subject in the psychoanalytic experience, in that the psychotic symptom, as *sinthome*, speaks the truth of the neurotic symptom. In his presentation *Interpretation in Reverse*,<sup>1</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller drew conclusions which led him to ask us to start from the *sinthome* in order to orientate ourselves in the treatment of neurotics. He deduced from this a new regime of interpretation, formulated thus: “a practice that sets its sights on the *sinthome* in the subject does not interpret in the manner of the unconscious.” Jacques-Alain Miller brought this to light: in analysis, the stake lies in redirecting the neurotic subject towards his own elementary signifiers, against the grain of the interpretation of these signifiers provided by the unconscious. Since the elementary phenomenon, which manifests the primary state of the subject in relation to *lalangue*, is stripped bare in psychosis, it follows that neurosis can be thought of starting from psychosis. I have leaned on this consideration in order to uncover the status of the psychoanalytic experience of psychosis.

If we take him to the letter of his *écrit*, there is a possible treatment of psychosis for Lacan. During the course of his text, he is more precise and considers the objective of this treatment. It is remarkable that, having placed himself in a psychoanalytic perspective, Lacan should introduce the term ‘treatment’. He does so in connection with the problem of psychosis. He does not use it in the case of the neuroses and never speaks of the treatment of neurosis. That same year, 1958, the year we start from, he wrote two texts. One of them, to which we have already referred, confronts the treatment of psychosis. A few months later, he produced a second text, which bears on the direction of the treatment. *The Direction of the Cure*<sup>2</sup>, as is clear throughout his text, concerns the direction of the treatment of neurosis.

The word ‘cure’ designates a psychoanalysis, with its beginning, its duration and its end. The direction of the cure implies a politics in relation to its end, a strategy of transference and a tactic of interpretation. In this sense, the cure is that of a neurosis. The term ‘cure’ is used classically in the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, and is the one Lacan uses at the beginning of his teaching. Thus in 1955, prior to the 1958 text, he wrote a text entitled: *Variations of the cure-type*. Even though the expression ‘cure-type’ had been imposed on him, and despite his rejection of it, the term ‘cure’ keeps returning in his writings. It is only after 1958 that he abandoned the term and replaced it with that of psychoanalysis pure and simple. And even, the substitution of one word for another takes place in the 1955 text, in the thread of a sentence which I quote: “a psychoanalysis [...] is the cure that one expects from a psychoanalyst”. In this turning point of the text, there is another shift, decisive for what follows, which consists in displacing the accent from a formalist definition of the cure, to an interrogation on the desire of the analyst.

A psychoanalysis, in the case of neurosis, begins when a patient meets a psychoanalyst to complain of a symptom, and the analysis consists in the deciphering of this symptom. At the end, a psychoanalysis claims to go beyond the fantasy which supported the symptom, in order to reach the real of the drive which is lodged at the heart of the *jouissance* of the symptom. Thus the analysis of a neurotic subject goes from the symbolic constituted by the formal envelope of the symptom, to the real of the drive.

In his *Lituraterre*, Lacan derides the advice that was once given to Joyce to go into analysis. He considers that Joyce would have gained nothing from it, since the artist, in a direct way, had achieved the best that can be expected from the end of analysis. Lacan continues in this vein, underlining that Joyce had reached the possibility of testifying to the *jouissance* specific to the symptom, without having to resort to the experience of analysis. This remark takes on its full value if one bears in mind that Lacan is referring to Joyce as a case of psychosis. The conclusion that should be drawn from it is that there is no need for analysis in psychosis.

What is expected of an analysis is that the subject, beyond his identifications, should obtain a glimpse of the real of his being as waste. Lacan shows that Joyce — without any analysis — has reached this point. He illustrates it by playing — following Joyce — on the equivocation *letter/litter*. *Letter*, the letter as a symbol, and *litter*, the letter as waste. The writer, beyond the letter as *semblant*, is in direct relation with the real of the letter as waste. The formidable creative power of Joyce stems from the fact that he is not held back by any of the connections which the letter has with the symbolic and the imaginary. He is in relation with a letter that has severed all its identifications, which is not attached to any stable signification. His work pays the price of this extraordinary freedom by being, for the most part, unreadable.

Joyce described the process of his literary creation. He collects words from boutiques, from posters, on the lips of the crowd that strolls around him. He repeats them to himself over and over again so that in the end they lose their signification for him.

These words read, heard, present themselves in the dimension of the elementary signifier, detached from all signification. The word becomes the thing that it is. Joyce raises this mutation of the letter into litter to the dignity of an epiphany. It is not really an hallucination, unless we reconsider the sense of hallucination. Lacan defines the epiphany as a direct knotting of the unconscious with the real. This formulation is to be compared with 'the irruption of a symbol in the real', which is how he defines the hallucination 'sow' in 1958.

These words are not addressed to Joyce, and he does not attribute them to a subject either. For him, what is in question is a relation to the elementary phenomenon of *lalangue*, prior to any subjective implication, whether it be that of the Other or his own. It is rather *lalangue* as Other, *lalangue* as first partner of the subject, as Jacques-Alain Miller underlined in his *Ironic Clinic*.

Joyce treats this elementary phenomenon, returned to its literal value. He interprets it in a very particular way. After his wandering, once his harvest of epiphanies accomplished, he goes home and assembles the words and phrases which have no meaning. Every day, over many long years, he pursues this *work in progress*, he becomes the Artist.

Lacan proposed considering *Finnegans Wake* as a fundamental language in so far as it does not mean anything, and it does not say anything. It does not speak. It is a language, more exactly a language made up of scattered scraps of the English language, but equally plucked from forty or so other languages. It's the language of a new world, a 'newspeak', that nobody can speak, which is made only to be written and which is made in being written. It is only reached through writing, but it can be used, and Lacan tried it with some success.

Lacan showed that the trans-linguistic homophony used in *Finnegans Wake* is supported by just one letter which conforms to the spelling of the English language. Joyce exploits trans-linguistic homophones of this type: the word written as *who* in English can be heard as the French *où*.<sup>3</sup>

Opposite to that of Joyce, we can situate another use of the letter, that of a French-speaking neurotic subject. This subject uses up his existence in the mute fascination held for him by X-ray images which he scrutinises from morning to night through the necessities of his professional activity. Riveted to the letter on transparent support, he remains frozen in the infinite *jouissance* that fixes him to the old X-ray machine whose modulations covered the sexual frolics of the parents. This professional choice, raised by the subject to the dignity of a symptom which maintains the fiction of the writing of the sexual rapport, enjoys the benefit of an equivocation. The radio-machine can be radiophonic or radiographic. At the end of one of these multiple days which leave him feeling crushed, he says in a session '*je suis avide — à vide*'.<sup>4</sup> Picking up on the equivocation he adds: "I don't know how to write it, in one or two words". Commenting on these two writings, he associates a child present in a dream. He recognises in the young person the child he himself had been, a child avid for knowledge, notably mathematical, scientific or technical knowledge. But this avidity cannot be satisfied, because the child gets tangled up in the use of the mathematical letter. He gets stuck in the writing of algebraic equations which he cannot resolve and encumbers himself with a letter too heavy with the significations of a father who is a brilliant engineer. So

he exhausts himself in the hackneyed reading of specialised works, in vain. He would have to empty this letter of its weight so that, lightened at last, it could serve a new avidity. He will only succeed by way of a new symptomatic relation to knowledge, which will no longer be the aboulia and apathy that weighs him down today.

Let us go back to an example of psychosis, with the manner in which Wolfson deals with the resonant material of the English language. He does it with the aid of a little symptomatic instrument of his own making. The phonetics, lexicon and spelling of four languages are brought in to contribute to the transformation and the defusing of the sounds of English. These four languages are French, Hebrew, German and Russian. This linguistic transmutation relies on the letter. Thus, the sound of 'early' in English can be deactivated by its transposition into the French *sur le champ*. This operation relies on the two letters 'r' and 'l' which can be found in the respective spellings of 'early' in English and *sur le champ* in French. This is a trans-literal operation. The simple translation of 'early' by *de bonne heure*, would not be sufficient because the point is to really attack the word, or more precisely its sonorous substance, whilst nonetheless retaining its literal skeleton. Certain words are very difficult to treat: for example, it took Wolfson forty pages of writing to deal with the word 'believe'.

From then on, the following question arises: since, in psychosis, the subject arrives at this point which is situated beyond a psychoanalysis, what can be expected of an analysis in the case of psychosis? Nothing, said Freud. He thought that analysis was impossible in psychosis, because there is no transference in the sense of transference-love, and because transference-love is the condition for an analysis to be possible.

On this point, Lacan differs from Freud in that he considered that psychoanalysis should not withdraw before psychosis. By the same token, the question is displaced. Freud noted that an analysis which would rely on the subject supposed to know was impossible in psychosis. Lacan adds that in any case it is presumptuous to propose analysis to a psychotic subject, since he has already obtained the best that can be expected of analysis. However, having placed aside the possibility of analysis, Lacan maintains that the analyst must confront psychosis. The question is from then on formulated as follows: what can be expected of an analyst in the case of psychosis if it is not an analysis?

Lacan thought that the psychotic subject could expect something from an analysis, and it is in this respect that he introduced the term 'treatment'. He considered that psychosis called for a treatment, and he considered that this treatment was possible, although subject to a preliminary question which is the following: is psychotic transference manoeuvrable?

Freud noted that there was no transference to the subject supposed to know in psychosis. Lacan added that there nonetheless existed a psychotic transference, no doubt of a particular kind: it is an erotomanic or persecutory transference. In the case-study of his thesis, that of Aimée, aptly named in the event, Lacan had experienced this transference. This transference is an obstacle to the action of the analyst. The analysis is only conceivable if one can manoeuvre the transference and change its nature. Lacan had also experienced that this was possible, precisely in the case of Aimée. When he had to deal with her, he was not for her the agent of a persecutory erotomania, but the reader of her writings, and her secretary. On the basis of this experience, he deduced that it was possible to envisage such a shift in the transference in the case of psychosis, so that a transference can be established which is neither love addressed to knowledge, nor erotomanic transference, but a transference addressed to an Other which opens the possibility of a relation with an analyst that allows his intervention. Lacan was able to define some of these positions of the Other and their transferential form. There are different registers of the imaginary, symbolic or real partner that the analyst can incarnate for the subject, to allow him to operate in psychosis. The notion of partner-symptom introduced by Jacques-Alain Miller leads us to approach the question of knowing what we can be for the psychotic subject in the analytic experience from a new perspective.

Thus a treatment of psychosis would be possible, but what could be expected of such a treatment if the subject in a case of psychosis has already reached the end of the road of analysis? What can be expected is in fact totally different from what one can attain through the analysis of a neurosis. It is even exactly the reverse.

In neurosis the point is to decipher the symptoms, and to go from the symbolic towards the real. It is this deciphering that the very word 'analysis' aims at. In psychosis it is on the contrary a question of going from the real towards the symbolic, and of constructing a symptom. This is where the term 'treatment' is justified. The treatment indicates this kind of action of the symbolic on the real, in which the stake lies in treating the real with the symbolic, through the constitution of a symptom. The dictionary,

besides the medical use of the same word, lists a series of significations of the word 'treatment', which could designate the operation of the symptom. To treat is for example to subject a substance to the action of a physical or chemical agent so as to modify it. Treatment is used to designate the process allowing the modification of a substance. Thus one speaks of the treatment of a mineral, of the thermal treatment of a metal or even of the treatment of radioactive waste to deactivate it. There is also the treatment of information, which involves the application of a logical or mathematical operator to raw data in order to exploit them following a programme. Thus the symptom can be conceived of as a mode of treatment of the enjoying substance by means of the symbol, in order to modify it, deactivate it, and make it possible for the subject to use it.

The only illness from which we suffer as speaking beings is that which is introduced into the living by the parasitism of the signifier. Lacan spoke of language as a cancer and evoked the virulence of *logos*. He defined the unconscious as the effects of speech on the subject, and he showed that the Freudian clinic developed the incidences of the illness of the signifier.

The primordial tear that the symbol inflicts on life is experienced by the subject as an unbearable *jouissance*. The writer Mishima described the burning pain he experienced as a child, and which was due to the corroding effect of language. From then on, what is at stake for the subject is to equip [*appareiller*] this *jouissance*, and this is where the term 'treatment' finds its use. To equip *jouissance* is to treat the effects of language on the living.

Mishima explains how he set about defending himself against this suffering caused by words. He was four years old at the time, and although he already knew how to speak, he did not yet know how to handle writing. It is thus in thought that he forms the habit of composing, in his mind, short fables or brief narrations with the words that made him suffer, and he strives to memorise them by repeating them. These are the fragments which will form the material of his future literary fictions. This is what was for Mishima his own treatment of the *jouissance* of *lalangue*.

The subject obtains the equipment [*appareillage*] of *jouissance* through discourse and fantasy if he is neurotic. He gets there through delusion if he is psychotic — at least, if he is paranoid. For the schizophrenic, for whom the whole of the symbolic is the real, this recourse is excluded. This is a reply made by Lacan to Jean Hippolyte, to whom he specifies: "In the symbolic order, gaps are as significant as the non-void; it would seem [...] that the gap of a void constitutes the first step of all [his] dialectical movement. [...] This is what explains, it seems, the insistence of the schizophrenic on reiterating this step. In vain, since for him all the symbolic is real". Lacan then opposes the paranoid subject, for whom he demonstrated, he says, the possibility of integrating these pre-signifying elements which the elementary phenomena are in the discursive organisation of a delusion.

In the course of his teaching, Lacan explored the different ways of capturing excess *jouissance* in psychosis. They range from Schreber's transsexual practice to Joyce's use of the letter. In all cases of psychosis, it is necessary to elucidate such attempts at treatment, as well as the place and the part which the psychoanalyst is liable to take in it.

It is from then on possible to understand the difference between a psychoanalysis, taken as the cure of neurosis, and the treatment of a psychosis which is expected from an analyst. A neurotic is a subject who has found a solution to defend himself against the real. This solution relies on the Name-of-the-Father and the fundamental identification that goes with it. This response through the paternal *semblant* is never totally satisfying because it ignores the real of the drive. The ideal identification to which the neurotic subject clings always involves a repression of drive-*jouissance*. This is the problem in neurosis, and this is what brings the neurotic subject to analysis. The neurotic solution is noticeably insufficient, in that it leaves the subject prey to, on the one hand, a claim of the drive that he does not want to recognise and which nonetheless continues to want to exercise its rights, and on the other hand an ideal, contaminated by the return of the drive-*jouissance*.

The psychotic subject rejects the solution of the Name-of-the-Father. Consequently, he is defenceless against the real. While the Name-of-the-Father is a valid solution for all, the psychotic subject who, in the name of his irreducible singularity, rejects this universal solution, is led to invent a unique solution. There is no place for an analysis of the symptom in psychosis. The problem is different, it amounts to finding a solution, a solution for the treatment of this excess *jouissance* precisely by means of the symptom. Two paths in the analytic experience are opposed in relation to the symptom. Analysis of the symptom in neurosis, treatment by means of the symptom in psychosis.

Certain subjects find their own solution, on their own. They are, for example, Schreber, Joyce and Wolfson. We meet such subjects who have elaborated similar symptomatic solutions. It can be in the

event of difficulties which may have arisen in some dramatic circumstance of their existence, and which will have revealed the insufficiencies of the equipment which supported them until then. It then becomes necessary for the subject to restore an order to the world. In other cases, we see the subject immediately, at the moment when he is confronted by the immensity of the task of having to defend himself against the real. The analyst can contribute to help the subject to construct a symptom. An analyst has his place in this attempt at treatment because he is supposed to have acquired a knowledge of structure as an analysand. He can therefore occupy a place there which allows the subject to orientate himself. Jacques-Alain Miller brought out something essential in this relation of the subject to structure, which he condensed in this formula: the rights of structure. From this point of view, an analyst is a subject who, through his own analysis, has learned what the rights of structure are. It is only in this way, namely in remembering that he has been an analysand, that he can respond to the demand of a psychotic subject. Here we rejoin the address to the psychoanalyst with which Jacques-Alain Miller concluded his *Ironic Clinic*: 'Remember that you yourself were once analysand.' With the psychotic subject, situated like him on the same side of the wall of language, the analyst has to find a way for structure to see its rights respected. To do so, in every case a certain mutation of the subject must be obtained.

The primordial rejection of the Name-of-the-Father cannot go so far as to ignore the rights of structure. This is where the untenable character of the position of the psychotic subject resides. He begins by rejecting the signifier, then he comes to reject the effect of castration introduced by the signifier, and he ends by believing that he can be master in the city of the signifier.

This position is fallacious, and for the subject it is the source of considerable difficulties. The subject cannot be master of the signifier, he is always an effect of *logos*, and this is one of the rights of structure. Joyce came to concede to this when, in order to qualify his *work in progress*, he declared: 'I obey laws which I have not chosen.' Like the neurotic subject, the psychotic subject has to deal with what he nevertheless pushes away. What he rejects in the symbolic comes back and presents itself to him as a real that persecutes him. The condition of treatment is that the subject should keep account of the effects of his position. Eric Laurent showed that from the moment at which the subject accepts to authentically assume the consequences of his position, he is able to make himself the guarantor of the order of the world. At the beginning, the point is to rectify the subject's relations to the phenomena of psychosis, and this leads him to accept responsibility for what happens to him. The extraordinary work of elaboration accomplished by Schreber on the nervous illness of which he is the patient, is such an example. The great literary creation of Joyce is another, as were the writings of Brisset or Wolfson.

Translated by Heather Menzies

1. J.-A. Miller, *Interpretation in Reverse* in *Psychoanalytical Notebooks* No 2, trans. by V. Voruz and B. Wolf, London, 1999, pp. 9-16.
2. The French title is *Direction de la cure*... This 'cure' is always translated into English as *Direction of the treatment*..., since the word 'cure' in English has specific connotations at odds with the aims of psychoanalysis. However I have had to use the word 'cure' in relation to neurosis in this text in order not to obliterate the distinction that J.-L. Gault is at pains to clarify [TN].
3. In English: 'where' [TN].
4. *Avide* – 'avid'; *à vide* – 'empty' [TN].