

## Episodic - or what Lacan's teachings are not.

Alicia Arenas



I saw Lacan for the first time, in person, in Caracas, 1980, at the first International Encounter of the Freudian Field. He came to meet his Latin-American readers and we had the privilege of listening to his last seminar, the *Seminar of Caracas*. It was also the occasion when he said: "You may call yourselves Lacanians, I am Freudian". He then added: "My three aren't the same as Freud's three, my three are the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real", referring to his topology of the speaking subject, the structure where he includes the signifying function on the experience of the subject of the unconscious, thus differentiating it from Freud's topic.

To hear Lacan in person had the quality of an unforgettable event, however, at the same time, it confirmed, as he himself had mentioned before his trip to Caracas, that our relationship was with his texts.

A few years before 1980, we had initiated a study group and the *Ecrits* was Lacan's only publication translated into Spanish. We were reading *The Agency of the Letter* without understanding a single word. However, something makes you read a text despite not understanding, while becoming so deeply involved with it, you are convinced that *the* answer you have always been looking for, is there.

Lacan's texts confront everyone with a 'beyond the text itself', they face us with the un-understandable. In the *Postface to Seminar XI, (Autres écrits)*, he says about this: "A writing is written not to be read" and, "Interpreting writings is a must, because writings are as railroads, a way of transportation". What he is referring to is the transportation of the object, being what makes the experience of encountering a text, something so particularly personal. In that encounter, we interpret Lacan, we interpret with Lacan, and, most of the time, we end up being interpreted by and with Lacan.

As an example, you can see this in the precious Borges' tale called *Episode*. A man spends his life trying to escape from his enemy, while at the same time keeps waiting for him everyday. Finally, when the enemy arrives, both of them are very old. The enemy has a gun and shows no compassion for the man, who says: "It is true that a long time ago I maltreated a child, but you are not a child anymore and I am not the same fool". The enemy answers: "That is exactly the reason why I have to kill you, for this is not a revenge but an act of justice, there is nothing you can do". "Oh, there is something I can do", says the man. "What can you do?" asks the enemy. "Wake up", said the man, and so he did.

The text is a kind of paradigm of the *fantasies* that haunt us, with an absolutely true ending, because it is what we really do, which is to wake up when the dream turns unbearable. To read the text with Lacan allows you to immediately detect the dimen-

sion of the real involved, the repetition, the awakening as a way to continue sleeping. The text expands, grows up, the veil drops, and we read what was always there. Nevertheless, in the same movement we are trapped, because it is now the text that is the one that interprets us, we become the subjects of the action, the analysands. It is an interpretation that sends you towards the analyst's couch, towards the encounter with the Other text. That was the approach followed by all the participants of that study group reading *The Agency of the Letter*.

As in Heraclitus, Lacan's word has an oracular aspect. That is why I believe you cannot just study his text, Lacan obliges you to develop a method of deciphering it, not to produce a series of meanings, but to discover its intrinsic logic. That is why he does not allow his teachings to become a knowledge we simply own and repeat, but a 'know how' (*savoir faire*), which includes the emergence of the unexpected.

There seems to be a direct link between this work of deciphering, interpreting, methodology, and the analytic training. Jacques-Alain Miller, in his recent article about the *Training Effect*, says that training is an activity 'without a first time'. Does this not have to do with the particular exercise to which Lacan guides us while we read his texts? The cause does not have a 'first time', signifiers are the only ones that start a series, establishing a mark that tends to call on other signifiers to represent the subject; the result being the automaton, the episodic repetition.

This could be another reason for Lacan's texts being 'written not to be read', because they are not placed as master signifiers, they point to the cause of desire and its consequences.

The task Lacan makes us face with his texts is not separated from the fact that to be an analyst you have to first become an analysand, to situate yourself in relation to the analytic discourse, and install this as the operator of training. The structure of the text is in solidarity with his concept of an unconscious, 'inaccessible to a conscious deepening' (*Psycho-analyst and his Teaching*), and also in solidarity with a psychic reality that speaks, demanding a logical approach. This can also be seen in the example he gives, of the *Purloined Letter*, as a demonstration of how repression is exposed, and we just cannot see it.

In the 1960's, a Mexican anthropologist, Carlos Castaneda, wrote a number of books relating his experiences with a shaman, a Yaqui Indian of the Sonora desert in Mexico. With the purpose of producing an illumination for him in order to truly see reality, the shaman gave him a training that included taking a Mexican drug called 'peyote'. Nevertheless, Castaneda says that the drug was not the reason for his *seeing*, but the alternate frame of reference the magic gave him. It was about suspending his certitudes and entering in to what he called a 'separate reality'. For him, it was the equivalent of having the capability to observe ordinary reality with 'perplexed eyes'.

This 'suspension of certitudes' is a direction that psychoanalysis takes, however, in a very different way. The subject of psychoanalysis is the one of the *Wo Es war, Soll Ich werden*, from which Lacan, in *The Subversion of the Subject*, gives us the following translation: "I [je] can only come to be, by disappearing from my own saying". Here the interrogation of reality is surpassed by the question of *who* speaks; perplexity appears then in a very different dimension, that of the subject of language divided between enunciate and enunciation.

## Episodic or what Lacan's Teachings are not

In *Psychoanalysis and its Relation with Reality*, Lacan states that psychoanalysis excludes the worlds that open up to a mutation of conscience, to an asceticism of knowledge or to an effusive communication. On the contrary, what is played out in psychoanalysis is unpreparedness and an almost bureaucratic regularity. Lacan also says that 'psychoanalysis *is* reality', that it does not assume 'a mystic position with a meaning beyond reality'; and reality for psychoanalysis has to do with the symptom.

In the seminar of *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, we read that 'the limit of our ethics is the limit of our praxis', which underlines the fact that psychoanalysis as a practice needs always to be referred to and tested with reality in order for psychoanalysis to expand its theoretical developments. The symptom is not only the bottom line that guides us in furthering theoretical developments but also provides access to contemporary discourse as well.

In Jacques-Alain Miller's work about *The Paradigms of Jouissance*, we learned about the long road Lacan had to take in the development of the relationship between language and the Real. He explored different approaches to expose the problem, to the point that in his last seminars, a whole new perspective emerges in which the signifiers do not form a chain, but a *swarm* (of bees). This is a theoretical turn that demands a rethinking, with direct implications for clinical work. The Real dimension of the signifier itself, points out the topological torsion Lacan presents us with at the end of his teachings.

Nevertheless, language is the vehicle of the analytic experience. So is it that of the teachings?

It is ironic some people saw the work of Lacan as being closer to literature than to the clinic, while his intention was precisely to actually point out what — in the clinical work — is not literature, but *jouissance*. That is why the reading of his texts, although having solidarity with the training, does not free us from visiting the psychoanalyst, since the way to face *jouissance* is with desire, the *desire of the analyst*, which, before emerging in each one of us, has to be borrowed from the place of the Other, which, besides, is the place of the cause.

Lacan thought it was necessary for psychoanalysis to have an incidence in civilization, to produce a work that was not the work of a sect; that is the reason why he opens his seminar to everyone and invites non-analysts to his school, demanding that the psychoanalyst be on a level with his era. New forms of the expression of *jouissance* are developing continuously, it is the task of the psychoanalyst to interpret them, but it also implies the need to develop new approaches to interpretation.

In the United States, for instance, there is the presence of an enormous apparatus of profit called the Mental Health Manage Care System, where the disappearance of the symptom has been established by decree. Carefully examining this apparatus allows you to understand why the persistence of the politics of psychoanalysis as a politics of the symptom is a clinical must. The formulation of the real is not a theoretical entelechy but a raw clinical reality we have to deal with everyday, faced with it, you cannot decree from the point of view of the Ideal.

Just as an example of the subjects of discussion this decree brings about, I will cite two of the titles of the main articles in a recent issue of a Mental Health Newsletter:

Article 1: *Can therapists be sued for recovered memories?*

Article 2: *Prescriptions, a new task for psychologists.*

# Alicia Arenas

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