

Editorial

Lacan's *Siberlethic*

Knottings

The Couch

The letter! The litter! And the soother the bitter...

The Real in the 21st Century

Hypermodern Times

Jacques Lacan

Lituraterre

THIS word derives its legitimacy from the *Ernout & Meillet: lino, litura, and liturarius*. It occurred to me, however, as a result of the kind of wordplay that is sometimes transformed into wit: the spoonerism falling to the lips, the upset back to the ear.

This dictionary (just have a look) provides me with the auspice of being founded on the departure point that I took (here, to part is to give re-part-ee) from equivocation, for instance Joyce (James Joyce, that is), slips from "letter" to "litter"¹, from *une lettre* (I translate) to *une ordure*.

You will recall that a certain well-meaning "mass-in-hate"² offered him a psychoanalysis, as one might a shower. And what's more, with Jung...

From the play we are referring to he would have stood to gain nothing, making straight thither for the best that can be expected from psychoanalysis at its end.

In littering the letter about, is it Saint Thomas who comes back to him once more, as his work bears out from start to finish?

Or else psychoanalysis attests here to its convergence with that to which our era testifies of the slackening of the ancient bond by which pollution is contained in culture.

1 [TN, In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce writes, "the letter, the litter". The French text of "Lituraterre" has "a letter [...] a litter", thus repeating what Lacan had used in his "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" in echo of Vladimir Dixon's "A Litter to Mr. James Joyce". Introducing the indefinite article alters the signification of "litter", but clearly Lacan does not intend "a mammal's newborn offspring" but "a piece of litter". The text has been modified here accordingly.]

2 [TN, As in "Maecenate". The French has *une messe-haine*.]

I elaborated on this theme, as it happens, shortly before the May of '68 so as not to fail the lost souls in throngs I have been drawing wherever I pay a visit of late; on that day it was Bordeaux. As I began by reminding them there, civilisation is a sewer.

It doubtless has to be said that I was weary of the dustbin to which I have clinched my fate. As you know, I am not alone, for having shared it, in admitting it.

L'avouer, admitting it or, employing a former pronunciation, *l'avoïr*, the credit³, with which Beckett balances out the debit that forms the refuse of our Being, salvages the honour of literature and releases me from the privilege that I might believe I draw from my position.⁴

The question is whether what the textbooks seem to make a great show of, namely, the fact that literature is a rehashing of leftovers, really is a matter of collocating in written form what initially would have been song, spoken myth, and dramatic procession.

For psychoanalysis, the fact that it is appended to the Oedipus complex does not qualify it in the least to make head or tail of Sophocles' text. Freud's mention of a text by Dostoyevsky does not suffice for us to say that textual criticism, sole preserve up till now of the university discourse, has been given an airing by psychoanalysis.

My teaching has a place here in a change of configuration that boasts a slogan promoting the written, but of which further evidence, for instance the fact that it is only today that Rabelais is finally being read, reveals a shift of interests which suits me better.

I am less implicated in this as an author than people imagine, and my *Écrits* bears a title that is more ironic than people believe: since it comprises either reports, which are a function of Congresses, or, let us say, "open letters" in which I address as a question one particular facet of my teaching.

In any case, far from compromising myself in the literary smoochy-woochy that denotes the psychoanalyst wanting for inventiveness, I deplore in it the unmistakable striving in demonstrating the unevenness of his practice in motivating the faintest literary judgement.

It is none the less striking that I open this collection with an article that I have removed from its place in chronological order, and that it concerns a tale, itself very odd in not being able to enter the ordered list of dramatic situations: the tale of what becomes of the posting of a letter missive, of who is aware of its conveyance, and of which terms support my being able to say that it has reached its destination once the recounting and its account have found support in the detours it has undergone without turning in the slightest to its content. It is all the

3 [TN, In the seventeenth century, the sound *oir* was pronounced *ouère*, thus: *avouère*.]

4 [TN, Reading *tenir de ma place* instead of *tenir ma place*, thus preferring the original 1971 publication over the 2001 reprint. The latter could be rendered as "...the privilege that I might believe ensures my position.]

more remarkable that the effect it has on those who each in turn have it in their possession, everything arguing in favour of the power it confers, should they stake a claim on it, may be interpreted, which I do, as a feminising effect.

There you have it for a well-delivered account of what distinguishes the letter from the signifier itself that it conveys. Which does not make the epistle a metaphor. Since the tale consists in the vanishing act of the message, whose letter goes wending off without it.

My criticism, if it can rightly be held to be literary, can only bear, this is what I am attempting to do, on what Poe makes of being a writer in forming this message on the letter. It is quite plain that by not spelling it out as such it is not *insufficiently*, but all the more *rigorously* that he reveals it.

Nevertheless, its elision cannot be elucidated by means of some feature or other from his psychobiography: which would on the contrary block it up.

(So it is that the psychoanalyst who scoured so hard at Poe's other texts throws in her towel here).

No more than my text could be resolved by mine: for example, the wish I might form finally to be read as befits. Because for that one would have to develop what I understand that the letter carries for arriving *always* at its destination.

It is certain that here, as usual, psychoanalysis receives, from literature, if it assumes from the latter a less psychobiographical idea of the functioning of repression that characterises it.

For my part, when I propose to psychoanalyse the letter as pending it is because it shows itself to fail therein. And it is in this way that I shed light on it: when I call upon the enlightenment in this way it is to demonstrate where psychoanalysis forms a *hole*. It has been known for a long while: nothing is more important in optics, and the latest physics, with the photon, arms itself with this.

A method by which psychoanalysis better justifies its intrusion: because if literary criticism could effectively renew itself, this would be as a result of psychoanalysis being there for texts to pit themselves against it, the enigma residing on the side of the latter.

But those whom it is not to malign to assert that, rather than practising psychoanalysis, they are well-practised in it, at the very least when taken as a body – have trouble hearing what I say.

Contra their deftness I contrast truth with knowledge: in the first they instantly recognise their office, whilst in the dock, it is their truth I await. I insist, thus correcting my aim with a knowledge that is *en echec*, in check: as one speaks of a figure that is *en abyme*; this is not a failure of knowledge. Whereupon I learn that people thereby believe themselves exempt from having to show evidence of any knowledge at all.

Would it then be a dead letter that I put as the title of one of those pieces I called *Écrits*, ..., of the letter the instance, as the reason behind the unconscious?

Does this not sufficiently designate that which in the letter, in having to insist, is not there by rights however imbued with reason it is ventured? To say this reason is in mean or else extreme ratio is to show the bifidity to which all measure commits, but is there nothing in the real that foregoes this mediation? Certainly the border, by separating two territories, symbolises that they are the same for whomsoever crosses it, that they have a common measure. This is the principle of the *Umwelt* that is the reflection of the *Innenwelt*. What a nuisance this biology is which presents itself from the start entirely as a principle: notably the fact of adaptation; not to mention selection, which is openly an ideology for rejoicing as it does in being natural.

Isn't the letter... more specifically littoral, that is, in figuring how an entire domain forms a frontier for the other, by dint of their being foreign to each other, to the extent of not being reciprocal?⁵

The rim of the hole in knowledge, isn't this what the letter outlines?⁶ And how could psychoanalysis, if precisely it was crucial not to misrecognise what the letter says "to the letter" from its mouth, how could it deny that this hole exists – in that by filling it in, it resorts to invoking *jouissance* there?⁷

It remains to be seen how the unconscious, which I say is an effect of language, presupposing as it does its structure as necessary and sufficient, commands this function of the letter.

The fact that the letter is the proper instrument for the writing of discourse does not make it improper for designating a word that is taken for another, or indeed by another, in the sentence, and thus for symbolising certain signifier-effects, but that the letter should be primary within these effects is not a must.

An examination of this primarity is not a must and ought not even to be envisaged, but of that which in language summons the littoral to the literal.

What I have inscribed, with the help of letters, of the formations of the unconscious so as to retrieve them from what Freud formulates them with, being what they are, signifier-effects, does not authorise the letter to be turned into a signifier, nor moreover to assign to it a primarity with regard to the signifier.

A confusional discourse such as this can only have arisen from the one that holds import for me. But I am its import in another discourse that I pinpoint, the time having come, as the university discourse, namely knowledge put to use on the basis of semblance.

5 [TN, In the 2001 reprint this sentence carries a question mark, but not in the 1971 original. This sentence might also be rendered: "The letter is surely a step... a littoral step more specifically, that is, a bit player that one entire domain forms for the other frontier, by dint of their being foreign to each other, to the extent of not being reciprocal steps." The unusual form *jusqu'à n'être* is homophonic with *jusqu'à naître*...: "to the extent of giving birth/rise to..."]

6 [TN, There is no question mark to the sentence in the French, nor any *ne* to complement the *pas*, and thus this sentence might also be rendered, albeit more explicitly than in the French: "The rim of the hole in knowledge, here we have a step, which the letter outlines."]

7 [TN, Reading *ce trou – de ce qu'à*... instead of *ce trou, de ce qu'à*, thus preferring the original 1971 publication over the 2001 reprint.]

The slightest feeling that the experience which I am dealing with, can only be situated in relation to another discourse, ought to have kept it from being produced, without admitting it as mine. That I should be spared this, thank heavens, does not prevent the fact that in importing me in the sense I have just mentioned, I am importuned.

Had I found acceptable the models that Freud articulates in an *Entwurf* on boring impressing routes, I would not for all that have reckoned metaphor of writing. Writing is not impression, whether the Printator likes it or not.

When I draw upon his letter 52 to Fliess, it is to read therein what Freud formulated with the term he forges, *WZ*, *Wahrnehmungszeichen*, as the closest thing to the signifier at a date when Saussure had not yet reproduced it (from the *signans* of the Stoics).

That Freud writes it with two letters proves no more than I do that the letter is primary.

I shall now therefore try to indicate the crux of what seems to me to produce the letter as a consequence, and of language, precisely of what I am saying: that whosoever speaks inhabits it.⁸

I shall borrow its traits from what through an economy of language enables an outlining of what promotes to my way of thinking that literature is perhaps fetching to lituraterrain.

It will surprise no one to see me proceed in so doing from a literary demonstration since this amounts to falling in with the step⁹ by which the question is produced. Whereby, however, can be affirmed just what such a demonstration is.

I'm just back from a trip I had been waiting to make to Japan given how on a first one I had felt experience... littorally. Hear me out between the lines of what earlier I repudiated of the *Umwelt* as rendering the voyage impossible: on one side therefore, according to my formula, ensuring the real thereof, but prematurely, simply in rendering, but through a misdeal, the departure impossible, that is, at the very most singing "*Partons*"¹⁰.

I shall note only the moment that I gleaned from a new route, taken on account of its no longer being off-limits like the first time. I admit however that it was not on the way there along the length of the Arctic Circle by aircraft, that what I could see of the Siberian plain provided me with a reading.

My current essay, in so far as it could be entitled a Siberiethic, would not therefore have seen light of day had the wariness of the Soviets let me see the

8 [TN, *que l'habite qui parle* foreshadows a similar pun the following year in "*L'étourdit*": *labiter* (*Autres écrits*, Seuil, Paris, 2001, p. 474), where the reader can also hear *la bite*, a vulgar term for "penis".]

9 [TN, *le pas*, as in the above question where *pas* can be read as both "step" and "not".]

10 [TN, An allusion to a refrain sung by the choir in Act 1, Scene XIII of Offenbach's *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*. *Partons* is the first person imperative of *partir*, and contains the same range of signification as "to part" in the second paragraph on the first page.]

towns, not to mention the industries and military complexes that for them seal the worth of Siberia, but this is merely an accidental condition, albeit perhaps less so in naming it *occidental*¹¹, indicating thereby the accident of a pile-up of occasion.

The sole decisive condition is the littoral one, and this condition only played a role on the way back in being, literally, what Japan with its letter had¹² doubtless done to me that little bit too much which is just what it takes for me to feel it, since after all I had already said that this is what its language is eminently affected with.

Doubtless this too much stems from what their art conveys of it: I will say thereof the fact of what painting therein demonstrates in its wedding the letter, very precisely in the form of calligraphy.

How can I express what fascinates me in these things that hang, *kakemono* as common chatter has it, hang on the walls of every museum over there, bearing the registered characters that are Chinese in their formation, which I know a little, but which, little though I know of them, allow me to measure what is being elided from them in the cursive, where the singular quality of the hand overrides the universal, that is to say, specifically what I am teaching you acquires validity only from the signifier: I can no longer find it in there, but that's because I'm a novice. Besides, this was not the important thing, for even with the singular upbearing a firmer shape, and adding to it the dimension, the demansion, as I said before, the demansion of the *nomorenwon*¹³, from which is evoked what I establish of the subject in the Cuddly-Hun-to-Boot¹⁴, filling out as it does the anxiety of th'Athing, namely, what I connote with a little *a* here acts as the object by virtue of being the stake in what wager is it that is won with ink and brush?

So appeared to me, invincibly, this circumstance is no small matter: through parting clouds, the streaming of waters, the only trace to appear, effectuating more than indicating its relief at that latitude, on what of Siberia forms the plain, a plain desolate of any vegetation but luminous shine, which pushes into the shade whatever doesn't glisten back.

This streaming is a cluster [*bouquet*] of the first trait and what effaces it. I've said it before: it is from their conjunction that a subject is constituted, but from

11 [TN, Reading *occidentelle* instead of *accidentelle*, thus preferring the original 1971 publication over the 2001 reprint.]

12 [TN, Reading *m'avait fait* instead of *n'avait fait*, thus preferring the original 1971 publication over the 2001 reprint.]

13 [TN, *Papeludun* is loosely homophonic with *pas plus d'un*, "not more than one", but is also evocative of *papelard*, an informal term for "paper" that incorporates the Catalan word *papel*.]

14 [TN, *Hun-en-Peluce*, is loosely homophonic with *un en plus*, "one more", or "an extra one". As in English, *hun* in French evokes an aggressive invader, but is also reminiscent of the *Hún* cloud-soul in Chinese thought ("Hun and Po" soul duality). *En-Peluce* resembles *en-peluche*, the suffix added to an animal name or character to indicate that it is a stuffed "cuddly" toy. A further connotation is *pelure*, a "skin" or "peel", as in *papier pelure*, a fine "onionskin" type of paper.]

two temporal moments being marked out therein. Therefore the blotting-out needs to be distinguished in it.

The blotting-out of no trace whatsoever that might be beforehand, this is what turns the littoral to terrain. *Litura pure* is the literal. To produce this blotting-out is to reproduce the peerless other half through which the subject subsists. Such is the exploit of calligraphy. Try your hand at forming the horizontal bar that is traced from left to right to figure in one stroke the unary One as a character, it will take you a good while to find the point of pressure by which to broach it, the suspension by which to halt it. Truth be told, there isn't a hope in occident & emergency.

It requires a pace that is only picked up on detaching yourself from whatever might be striking you out.¹⁵

Between centre and absence, between knowledge and jouissance, there lies the littoral that only fetches to the literal provided that you are able to take this very same bend at all times. It alone allows you to hold yourself to be the agent that supports it.

What is revealed from my vision of the streaming, in that the blotting-out dominates therein, is that in being produced through parting clouds, it is conjugated at its source, that it is veritably unto *The Clouds* that Aristophanes hails me for finding what the signifier is about: namely, the semblant, *par excellence*, if it is from its bursting that comes raining down, an effect in being precipitated therefrom, what was formerly suspended matter.

This bursting which dissolves what constituted form, phenomenon and meteor, and of which I have said that science operates in cracking their aspect, is it not also the case that it is by dismissing therefrom what from this bursting would constitute jouissance in that *le monde*, the world, or even *l'immonde*, filth, has a drive therein to figure life?

What is evoked of jouissance on the breaking of a semblant, this is what presents itself in the real as a gullying.

It is by the same effect that writing is in the real the gullying of the signified, that which has rained down¹⁶ from the semblant in so far as it constitutes the signifier. Writing does not reproduce the latter, but its language-effects, what is wrought of a language by whomsoever speaks it. Writing only returns to it on taking a name therefrom, just as happens to these effects amongst those things that the signifying battery denominates for having enumerated them.

Later from the airplane other traces were beheld, for being sustained in isobars, even if caused to veer by embankments, which were in line with those whose supreme relief gradient was watercoursed.

Did I not see in Osaka how the motorways settle one atop the other like gliders come down from the sky? Aside from the fact that over there the most

15 [TN, This sentence might also be translated: "It requires a train that you only catch by detaching yourself...".]

16 [TN, *ce qui a plu du semblant*, might also be translated as "what was pleasing in the semblant".]

modern architecture is reunited with the ancient for becoming a wing for beating down from a bird.

How might the shortest path from one point to another ever have made an appearance if not by the windblown cloud so long as it doesn't change course? Neither amoeba, nor man, nor bough, nor fly, nor ant could have served as an example prior to light turning out to be integral with a universal curve, in which the straight line is sustained only by inscribing distance with the effective factors of a cascade dynamics.

There can be no straight line except by dint of writing, nor metes and bounds except by dint of skyfall.

But writing like surveying are artefacts for inhabiting only language. How could we forget this when our science is only operative by dint of a streaming of devised little letters and graphics?

Sous le pont Mirabeau, certainly, just like under the bridge which a journal that once was mine made its ensign, borrowing this ear-bridge from Horapollo, 'neath the Mirabeau bridge, yes indeed, flows the primal Seine, and it's a *scène* such that the Roman V of the fifth hour can beat therein (*cf. The Wolf man*). But still, one only derives *jouissance* from it when the word of interpretation rains upon it.

The fact that the symptom establishes the order to which our politics shows itself to belong implies on the other hand that everything that is expressed of this order is liable to interpretation.

This is why one is quite right to put psychoanalysis to the forefront of politics [*au chef de la politique*]. And this might prove not to be very comfortable for what has served as a model in terms of politics up till now, if psychoanalysis turned out to be aware of it.

It would perhaps be enough, no doubt this is what people are saying to themselves, for us to turn writing to another account [*parti*] than tribune or tribunal, so that other words might be at play therein, at the cost of our constituting the tribute.

There is no such thing as metalanguage, but the writing that is fabricated from language is material perhaps for forcing our utterances to change therein.

Is it possible to constitute from the littoral a discourse that is characterised by not being emitted from semblance? Here lies the question that is raised solely of the literature known as *avant-garde*, which is itself made up of the littoral: and is therefore not supported by semblance, but for all that substantiates nothing but the break, which only a discourse can produce, with an effect of production.

That to which a literature in its ambition to land on *litturaterrain* seems to aspire is to be ordained by a movement that it calls scientific.

It is a fact that writing has worked wonders here and that everything marks that these wonders are not about to run dry.

And yet physical science finds itself, is going to find itself¹⁷ brought back to considering the symptom in the very facts, by the pollution of what in terms of the terrestrial, without additional critique of the *Umwelt*, has been called the environment: this is Uexküll's idea behaviourised, that is to say, cretinised.

In landing on lituraterain myself, let me point out that I have made no metaphors in the gullying that images it. Writing is this very gullying, and when I speak of *jouissance*, I legitimately invoke what I accumulate by way of an audience: no less in doing so those I deprive myself of, for this keeps me busy.

I would like to testify to what is produced of a fact indicated above: namely, that of a language, Japanese, in as much as writing works it.

That there should be included in the Japanese language a writing-effect, the import lies in the fact that this effect remains attached to writing and that what conveys the writing-effect in it is a specialised kind of writing in so far as in Japanese the latter can be read with two different pronunciations: in *on'yomi* its character pronunciation¹⁸, the character is pronounced distinctly as such, in *kun'yomi* the way in which what it means in Japanese is said.

It would be comical to see designating therein, on the pretext that the character is a letter, the flotsam of the signifier coursing downstream to the rivers of the signified. It is the letter as such that provides support for the signifier in keeping with its law of metaphor. It's from elsewhere: from discourse, that the signifier ensnares the letter in the net of semblance.¹⁹

The letter is nonetheless promoted from there as a referent that is as essential as every which thing, and this changes the status of the subject. That the latter draws on a constellated sky, and not only on the unary trait, for his fundamental identification, explains that he can rely only on the *Thou*, that is to say, in all the grammatical forms of which the least statement varies according to the relations of courtesy that it implies in what is signified.

Truth reinforces therein the structure of fiction I denote within it, in that this fiction is subject to the laws of courtesy.

Oddly enough, this seems to bear the result that there is nothing of the repressed to forbid, since the repressed succeeds in housing itself in the reference to the letter.

In other terms, the subject is divided as he is everywhere by language, but one of its registers can have its fill of the reference to writing and the other of speech.

17 [TN, *se trouve, va se trouver*, is loosely homophonic with *se trouve à se trouver*: thus, "finds itself having to find itself".]

18 [TN, Reading *prononciation en caractère* instead of *prononciation en caractères*, thus preferring the original 1971 publication over the 2001 reprint.]

19 [TN, *filet* is at once "trickle", "net" and, as in English, "fillet". Derived from the Latin *filum*, the feature common to the various significations is the finely delineated contour.]

No doubt this is what gave Roland Barthes the inebriating feeling that in his every manner the Japanese subject constitutes an envelope for nothing. *Empire of Signs*²⁰, he entitles his essay meaning: empire of semblants.

I was told the Japanese find this envelope poor. For nothing is more distinct from the void hollowed out by writing than the semblant. The former is a crock ever ready to accommodate jouissance, or at the very least to invoke it through its artifice.

According to our customs, nothing communicates less of oneself than a subject such as this who ultimately conceals nothing. He has only to manipulate you: you are one element amongst others of the ceremonial in which the subject is composed precisely through being able to decompose himself. *Bunraku*, puppet theatre, makes its altogether ordinary structure visible for those to whom the latter imparts their very mores.

Likewise, as in *bunraku* everything that is said could be read out by a reciter. This is what must have relieved Barthes. Japan is the place where it is utterly natural to support oneself with an interpreter or interpretes, precisely in that it does not necessitate interpretation.

'Tis perpetual translation made language.

What I like is that the only communication that occurred there for me (besides the Europeans with whom I know how to handle our cultural misunderstanding) is also the only kind that over there as elsewhere can be communication, in not being dialogue: namely, scientific communication.

The latter prompted an eminent biologist to demonstrate his work to me, naturally on the blackboard. The fact that, for want of information, I understood nothing of it does not prevent what remained written up there from being valid. Valid for the molecules of which my descendants will make themselves subjects, without my ever having had to know how I transmitted to them what made it plausible for me to classify them with myself, through pure logic, amongst living beings.

An asceticism of writing seems to me to be admissible only in joining up with a *'tis written* by which the sexual relation might be established.

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Translated from the French by Beatrice Khiara-Foxton and Adrian Price

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20 [TN, The 2001 reprint modifies the 1971 publication by italicising and capitalising the title of the book. We have retained this modification here.]