

## 9 *The Purveyor of Truth*

JACQUES DERRIDA

Translated by Alan Bass

*They thank him for the great truths he has  
just proclaimed—for they have discovered  
(O verifier of that which cannot be  
verified!) that everything he has uttered is  
absolutely true;—although at first, the  
good people confess, they had had the  
suspicion that it might indeed be a simple  
fiction. Poe answers that, for his part, he  
never doubted it.*

—Baudelaire

### DIVESTED PRETEXTS

Psychoanalysis, supposedly, is found.

When one believes one finds it, it is psychoanalysis itself, supposedly, that finds itself.

When it finds, supposedly, it finds itself/is found—something.<sup>1</sup>

To be satisfied, here, with deforming the generative, as it is called, grammar of these three or four statements.

Where then? Where does psychoanalysis, always, already refind itself, where is it to be refund?

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The article by Derrida, "Le facteur de la vérité," originally appeared in *Poétique* (1975). The English translation is from *The Post Card. From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, translated, with an introduction and additional notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). © 1987 by The University of Chicago. Because of its length, we were allowed to reprint almost half of the original. With the permission of the author, we have omitted long quotations from Lacan, Freud, and Bonaparte, some footnotes, and some of the argument. Readers are encouraged to read the entire piece in *The Post Card*.

<sup>TN</sup>The title of this essay, "Le Facteur de la vérité," includes the double meaning of *facteur*: both postman and factor. Thus, the postman/factor of truth, the question of the delivery of truth in psychoanalysis

That in which, finding itself, it is found, if finding itself it is found, let us call text. And let us do so not only in order to recall that the theoretical and practical inscription of psychoanalysis (in the text as "language," "writing," "culture," "mythology," "the history of religions, of philosophy, of literature, of science, of medicine," etc., in the text as a "historical," "economic," "political," "instinctual," etc., field, in the heterogeneous and conflictual weave of *différance*, which is elsewhere defined as *general text* and without border) must have effects that have to be taken into account. But also in order to demarcate the space of a determined question.

Unless we are concerned, here, with a singular logic: the species including the genus.

For example: What happens in the psychoanalytic deciphering of a text when the latter, the deciphered itself, already explicates itself? When it says more about itself than does the deciphering (a debt acknowledged by Freud more than once)? And especially when the deciphered text inscribes in itself *additionally* the scene of the deciphering? When the deciphered text deploys more force in placing onstage and setting adrift the analytic process itself, up to its very last word, for example, the truth?

For example, the truth. But is truth an example? What happens—and what is dispensed with—when a text, for example a so-called literary fiction—but is this still an example?—puts truth onstage? And when in doing so it delimits the analytic reading, assigns the analyst his position, shows him seeking truth, and even finding it, shows him discoursing on the truth of the text, and then in general proffering the discourse on truth, the truth on truth? What happens in a text capable of such a scene? A text confident, in its program, of situating analytic activity grappling with the truth? . . .

[In the *Traumdeutung*,] examining the history of repression between *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*, demolishing all the differences between (1) the "Oedipus complex," (2) the legend, and (3) Sophocles' tragedy, Freud establishes a rule: everything in a text that does not constitute the semantic core of the two "typical dreams" he has just defined (incest with mother and murder of father), everything that is foreign to the absolute *nudity* of this oneiric content, belongs to the "secondary revision of the material" (*sekundären Bearbeitung des Stoffes*). The formal (textual, in the usual sense) differences that come, as if from the outside, to affect the semantic structure, here the "Oedipus complex," thus constitute second-

ary revisions. For example, when one views *Oedipus Rex* as a tragedy of destiny, as a conflict between men and the gods, a theological drama, etc., one has taken as essential what actually remains an after-the-fact construction, a garment, a disguise, a material added to the literal *Stoff* precisely in order to mask its nudity.

The denuding of this *Stoff*, the discovery of the semantic material—such would be the end of analytic deciphering. By denuding the meaning behind the formal disguises, by undoing the work, analytic deciphering exhibits the primary content beneath the secondary revisions.

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Exhibiting, denuding, undressing, unveiling: the familiar acrobatics of the metaphor of the truth. And one just as well could say the metaphor of metaphor, the truth of truth, the truth of metaphor. When Freud intends to denude the original *Stoff* beneath the disguises of secondary fabrication, he is anticipating the truth of the text. The latter, from its original contention, would be coordinated with its naked truth, but also with truth as nakedness.

The subchapter to which Freud refers us is very short: six pages. It deals with certain dreams of shame or embarrassment (*Verlegenheits- Traum*). The dreamer is embarrassed about his nakedness (*Nacktheit*). These six pages contain two to four literary references. Two to four because in question each time is an "initial" text taken up and transformed by a "second" text: Homer by Keller, Andersen by Fulda, which, no more than the *illustrative* recourse to literary material, provokes no question on Freud's part.

Dreams of nakedness, then, provoking a feeling of modesty or shame (*Scham*). They are "typical," precisely, only by virtue of their association with distress, embarrassment, discomfort. This "gist of [their] subject-matter" can then lend itself to all kinds of transformations, elaborations, changes. Nakedness gives rise to substitutes. The lack of clothing, or undress (*Entkleidung*, *Unbekleidung*), is displaced onto other attributes. The same typical core organizes the dream of the former officer pushed into the street without his saber, without his necktie, or wearing civilian check trousers. All the examples proposed by Freud concern men, and men who exhibit the lack of a phallic attribute, or rather who adopt this exhibitionistic activity. Or, more precisely still: nakedness does not exhibit the penis or the absence of the penis, but the absence of the phallus as an attribute supplementing a possible fault, the absence of the colossal double. Already a certain chain is indicated: truth-unveiled-woman-

castration-shame. Schreber: "Besides, we know in our hearts that men'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."

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# THE SURPLUS OF EVIDENCE OR THE LACK IN ITS PLACE\*

*a little too self-evident*

. . . In France, the "literary criticism" marked by psychoanalysis had not asked the question of the text. Its interest was elsewhere, as was its wealth. This can be said without injustice, apparently, of Marie Bonaparte's psychobiography, of the psychoanalyses of material imagination, of existential psychoanalysis, or psychocriticism, of the thematist phenomenology tinted with psychoanalysis, etc.

It is entirely otherwise in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.'" Or so it appears. Although Lacan has never directly and systematically been interested in the so-called literary text, and although the problematic of *Das Unheimliche* ["The Uncanny"] does not intervene in his discourse to my knowledge, the *general* question of the text is at work unceasingly in his writings, where the logic of the signifier disrupts naive semanticism. And Lacan's "style" was constructed so as to check almost permanently any access to an isolatable content, to an unequivocal, determinable meaning beyond writing.

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If the critique of a certain semanticism constitutes an indispensable phase in the elaboration of a theory of the text, then one may discern in the Seminar a very distinct advance in relation to an entire kind of post-Freudian psychoanalytic criticism. Without precipitation toward the semantic, that is, thematic, content of a text, the organization of the signifier is taken into account. In its materiality as well as its formality.

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\*Editor's note. The French text published in *Poétique* has "Le trop d'évidence—où le manque a sa place," which we translate as "the surplus of evidence—where lack has its place."

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Question of the letter, question of the materiality of the signifier: perhaps it will suffice to change a letter, perhaps even less than a letter, in the expression "*manque à sa place*" (Lacan 1972b, 55) [lack in its place, missing from its place], perhaps it will suffice to introduce into this expression a written *a*, that is, an *a* without an accent mark, in order to make apparent that if the lack has its place [*manque a sa place*] in this atomistic topology of the signifier, if it occupies a determined place with defined contours, then the existing order will not have been upset: the letter will always refind its proper place, a circumvented lack (certainly not an empirical, but a transcendental one, which is better yet, and more certain), the letter will be where it always will have been, always should have been, intangible and indestructible via the detour of a *proper*, and properly *circular*, itinerary. But we are not there yet.

Lacan, then, is attentive to the letter, that is, to the materiality of the signifier. To its formality also, which determines the subject as much as does the site of the literal atom: "Subjectivity originally is of no relation to the real, but of a syntax which engenders in the real the signifying mark" [Lacan 1966a, 50].

A break with naive semanticism and psychobiographism, an elaboration of a logic of the signifier (in its literal materiality and syntactic formality), an assumption of the problematic of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: such are the most general forms of an advance legible in the Seminar at first glance. But the excess of evidence always demands the supplement of inquiry.

Now we must come closer, reread, question.

From the outset, we recognize the classical landscape of applied psychoanalysis. Here applied to literature, Poe's text, whose status is never examined—Lacan simply calls it "fiction"—finds itself invoked as an "example." An example destined to "illustrate," in a didactic procedure, a law and a truth forming the proper object of a seminar. Literary writing, here, is brought into an *illustrative* position: "to illustrate" here meaning to read the general law in the example, to make clear the meaning of a law or of a truth, to bring them to light in striking or exemplary fashion. The text is in the service of the truth, and of a truth that is taught, moreover: "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" (Lacan 1972b, 40).

Again, illustration, and the illustration of instruction, Freud's instruction: "What Freud teaches us in the text that 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. . ." (1972b, 60).

The "truth which may be drawn from that moment in Freud's thought under study," the truth with which the most decorative and pedagogical literary illustration is coordinated, is not, as we will see, this or that truth, but is the truth itself, the truth of the truth. It provides the Seminar with its rigorously philosophical import.

One can identify, then, the most classical practice. Not only the practice of philosophical "literary criticism," but also Freud's practice each time that he demands of literature examples, illustrations, testimony, and confirmation in relation to knowledge, truth, and laws that he treats elsewhere in another mode. Moreover, if Lacan's statements on the relation between fiction and truth are less clear and less unequivocal elsewhere, here there is no doubt about the order. "Truth inhabits fiction" cannot be understood in the somewhat perverse sense of a fiction more powerful than the truth which inhabits it, the truth that fiction inscribes within itself. In truth, the truth inhabits fiction as the master of the house, as the law of the house, as the economy of fiction. The truth executes the economy of fiction, directs, organizes, and makes possible fiction: "It is that truth, let us note, which makes the very existence of fiction possible" (1972b, 40).

The issue then is to ground fiction in truth, to guarantee fiction its conditions of possibility in truth, and to do so without even indicating, as does *Das Unheimliche*, literary fiction's eternally renewed resistance to the general law of psychoanalytic knowledge. Additionally, Lacan never asks what distinguishes one literary fiction from another. Even if every fiction were founded in or made possible by the truth, perhaps one would have to ask from what kind of fiction something like literature, here "The Purloined Letter," derives, and what effects this might have on that very thing which appears to make it possible.

This first limit contains the entire Seminar, and it reprints its marks indefinitely on it: what the literary example yields is a *message*. Which will have to be deciphered on the basis of Freud's teaching. Reprint: "The Opening of This Collection" (October 1966, ten years after the Seminar)

speaks of "Poe's message deciphered and coming back from him, the reader, in that to read it, it says itself to be no more feigned than the truth when it inhabits fiction" (Lacan 1969, 16).

What Lacan analyzes, decomposing it into its elements, its origin, and its destination, uncovering it in its truth, is a *story* [*histoire*] (1972b, 40-41).

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This story is certainly that of a letter, of the theft and displacement of a signifier. But what the Seminar treats is only the content of this story, what is justifiably called its history, what is recounted in the account, the internal and narrated face of the narration. Not the narration itself. The Seminar's interest in the agency of the signifier in its letter seizes upon this agency to the extent that it constitutes, precisely, on the first approach, the exemplary content, the meaning, the written of Poe's fiction, as opposed to its writing, its signifier, and its narrating form. The displacement of the signifier, therefore, is analyzed as a signified, as the recounted object of a short story.

One might be led to believe, at a given moment, that Lacan is preparing to take into account the (narrating) narration, the complex structure of the scene of writing played out within it, the very curious place of the narrator. But once it is glimpsed, the analytic deciphering excludes this place, neutralizes it, or, more precisely, along lines we will follow, allows the narrator to dictate an effect of neutralizing exclusion (the "narration" as "commentary") that transforms the entire Seminar into an analysis fascinated by a content. Which makes it miss a scene. When it sees two ("There are two scenes" [1972b, 41]), there are three. At least. And when it sees one or two "triads," there is always the supplement of a square whose opening complicates the calculations.

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To what does this neutralization of the narrator commit the Seminar?

1. The narrator (himself doubled into a narrating narrator and a narrated narrator, not limiting himself to reporting the two dialogues) is evidently neither the author himself (to be called Poe), nor, less evidently, the inscriber of a text which recounts something for us, or rather which makes a narrator speak, who himself, in all kinds of ways, makes many people speak. The inscriber and the inscribing are original functions that are not to be confused with either the author and his actions, or with the narrator and his narration, and even less with the particular object, the narrated content, the so-called real drama which the psychoanalyst hastens to recognize as "Poe's message deciphered." That the inscribing

in its entirety—the fiction named “The Purloined Letter”—is covered, over its entire surface, by a narration whose narrator says “I” does not permit us to confuse the fiction with a narration. And even less, of course, with any given narrated section, however lengthy and apparent. There is here a problem of framing, of bordering and delimitation, whose analysis must be very finely detailed if it wishes to ascertain the effects of fiction. Without ever saying a word about it, Lacan excludes the textual fiction from within which he has extracted the so-called general narration. An operation made that much easier, and all too self-evidently easier, by the fact that the narration does not surpass by a word the 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 “At Paris, just after dark . . .”? The question is even more complicated than that—we will come back to it—and this complication even now suffices to indicate everything about the structure of the text that is misconstrued in overlooking the frame. Within this neutralized or naturalized frame, Lacan takes up the narration without border and operates another extraction, again by dropping the frame. From within the narration he lifts out two dialogues which form the narrated history, that is, the content of a representation, the internal meaning of a story, the all-enframed, which demands all the attention, mobilizes all the psychoanalytic schemas (Oedipal ones here), and pulls toward its center the entire deciphering enterprise. There is missing here an elaboration of the problem of the frame, the signature, and the *parergon*. This lack permits the scene of the signifier to be reconstructed into a signified (a process always inevitable in the logic of the sign), permits writing to be reconstructed into the written, the text into discourse, and more precisely into an “intersubjective” dialogue (and it is not fortuitous that the Seminar’s commentary concerns only the two dialogued parts of “The Purloined Letter”).

2. There is here, first of all, a *formal* limit of the analysis. The formal structure of the text is overlooked, in very classical fashion, at the very moment when, and perhaps in the extent to which, its “truth,” its exemplary message, allegedly is “deciphered.” The structure of fiction is reduced at the very moment when it is related to its condition of truth. This leads to poor formalism. Formalism is practiced because one is not interested in the subject-author, something which might, in certain theoretical situations, constitute progress, or even a legitimate demand. But this formalism is rigidly illogical once, on the pretext of excluding

the author, one no longer takes into account either the "scription-fiction" and the "scriptor-fictor," or the narrating narration and the narrator. This formalism guarantees, as always, the surreptitious extraction of a semantic content, within which psychoanalysis applies its entire interpretive work. Formalism and hermeneutic semanticism always support one another: question of the frame.

3. The limit, then, is not only a formal one, and for the moment it does not concern a science of poetic fiction or of narrative structure. The issue here is not—quite to the contrary—one of rescuing something like literature or literary form from the grasp of psychoanalysis. There is a deep historical and theoretical complicity between psychoanalysis *applied* to literature and the formalist withdrawal which would pretend to escape this application. We have just seen how this works in principle. What is important here is that the formal deficiency implies a semantic and psychoanalytic decision. Once the narrator is distinguished from the author and then the "scriptor," he is no longer the formal condition of the narration that might symmetrically be opposed to the content, as the narrating to the narrated, for example. He intervenes in a specific fashion, is simultaneously *too self-evident* and invisible in a triangle, and therefore in a triangle that touches the other triangle at one of its "angles," touching both "intersubjective" triangles. Which singularly complicates the "intersubjective" structure, and this time from within the framed, the twice-framed, scenes, from within the represented content. Not to take into account this complication is not a failure of "formalist" literary criticism; it is an operation of the semanticist psychoanalyst. The narrator is not effaced as the "general narrator," or rather, in effacing himself within the homogeneous generality, he puts himself forward as a very singular character within the narrated narration, within the en-framed. He constitutes an agency, a "position" with which the triangle, through the intermediary of Dupin (who in turn himself represents all the positions), maintains a very determined, very invested relation. By framing in this violent way, by cutting the narrated figure itself from a fourth side in order to see only triangles, one evades perhaps a certain complication, perhaps of the Oedipal structure, which is announced in the scene of writing.

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Lacan leads us back to the truth, to a truth which itself cannot be lost. He brings back the letter, shows that the letter brings itself back toward its *proper* place via a *proper* itinerary, and, as he overtly notes, it is this destination which interests him, destiny as destination. The signifier has

its place in the letter, and the letter refinds its proper meaning in its proper place. A certain reappropriation and a certain readequation will reconstitute the proper, the place, meaning, and truth that have become distant from themselves for the time of a detour or of a non-delivery. The time of an algorithm. Once more a hole will be stopped: and to do so one does not have to fill it, but only to see and to delimit its contour.

We have read: the signifier (in the letter, in the note) has no place identical to itself, it *is missing from its place*. Its meaning counts for little, it cannot be reduced to its meaning. But what the Seminar insists upon showing, finally, is that there is a single *proper* itinerary of the letter which returns to a determinable place that is always the same and that *is its own*; and that if its meaning (what is written in the note in circulation) is indifferent or unknown for our purposes (according to the hypothesis whose fragility nevertheless supports the entire logic of the Seminar), the meaning of the letter and the sense of its itinerary are necessary, unique, and determinable in truth, that is, as truth.

Certainly the place and meaning of the letter are not at the disposition of the subjects. Certainly the latter are subjected to the movement of the signifier. But when Lacan says that the letter has no proper place, this must be understood henceforth as objective place, a place determinable in an empirical and naive topology. When he says that it has no proper meaning, this must henceforth be understood as the exhaustible content of what is written in the note. For the signifier-letter, in the topology and psychoanalytico-transcendental 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.

*The proper place, first of all.* The letter has a place of emission and of destination. This is not a subject, but a hole, the lack on the basis of which the subject is constituted. The contour of this hole is determinable, and it magnetizes the entire itinerary of the detour which leads from hole to hole, from the hole to itself, and which therefore has a *circular* form. In question is indeed a regulated *circulation* which organizes a return from the detour toward the hole. A transcendental reappropriation and a transcendental readequation fulfilling an authentic contract. That the itinerary is proper and circular is what Lacan literally says [1972b, 59–60].

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*The proper meaning, next.* The letter having a (single) place of origin and destination, and remaining what it is *en route* (What guarantees this?), it

has a proper meaning: the law of its itinerary first of all, if not its content, although the latter gains from the deciphering a minimal determination which says enough about it. The letter must have a relation to whatever constitutes the contract or the "pact," that is, a relation with the subjection of the subject, and therefore somewhere with the hole as the proper place of the letter. Its place has an essential relation with its meaning, and the latter must be such that it makes the letter come back to its place. In fact, we know what is in the note. Lacan indeed is obliged to speak of and hold onto its meaning, at very least as that which threatens the pact which constitutes the letter's meaning: the phallic law represented by the King and guarded by the Queen, the law that she should share with him according to the pact, and that she threatens to divide, to dissociate, and to betray [1972b, 57–60].

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Therefore the letter has a proper meaning, its own proper itinerary and location. What are they? In the triangle, only Dupin seems to know. For the moment, let us set aside the question of this knowing, and let us concern ourselves first with what is known. What does Dupin know? He knows that finally the letter *is found*, and knows where it must *be found* in order to return circularly, adequately to its proper place. This proper place, known to Dupin, and to the psychoanalyst, who in oscillating fashion, as we shall see, occupies Dupin's position, is the place of castration: woman as the unveiled site of the lack of a penis, as the truth of the phallus, that is of castration. The truth of the purloined letter is the truth, its meaning is meaning, its law is the law, the contract of truth with itself in logos. Beneath this notion of the pact (and therefore of adequation), the notion of veiling/unveiling tunes the entire Seminar to the Heideggerian discourse on the truth. Veiling/unveiling here concerns a hole, a non-being: the truth of Being as non-being. The truth is "woman" as veiled/unveiled castration. This is where the signifier (its inadequation with the signified) gets under way, this is the site of the signifier, the letter. But this is also where the trial begins, the promise of reappropriation, of return, of readequation: "the search for and restitution of the object" (1972b, 45). The singular *unity* of the letter is the site of the contract of the truth with itself. This is why the letter *comes back to*, *amounts to* [*revient à*] woman (at least in the extent to which she wishes to save the pact and, therefore, that which is the King's, the phallus that is in her guardianship); this is why, as Lacan says elsewhere, the letter amounts to, comes back to Being [*la lettre revient à l'être*], that is, to the

nothing that would be opening itself as the hole between woman's legs. Such is the proper place in which the letter is found, where its meaning is found, where the Minister believes it to be in the shadows and where it is, in its very hiding place, the most exposed. Possessing the letter in the shadows, the Minister begins to identify himself with the Queen (but must not Dupin, and the psychoanalyst within him, do so in turn? We are not there yet) [1972b, 66].

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The letter—place of the signifier—is found in the place where Dupin and the psychoanalyst expect to find it: on the immense body of a woman, between the “legs” of the fireplace. Such is its proper place, the terminus of its circular itinerary. It is returned to the sender, who is not the signer of the note, but the place where it began to *detach* itself from its possessor or feminine legatee. The Queen, seeking to reappropriate for herself that which, by virtue of the pact which subjects her to the King, that is, by virtue of the Law, guaranteed her the disposition of a phallus of which she would otherwise be deprived, of which she has taken the risk of depriving herself, that she has taken the risk of dividing, that is, of multiplying—the Queen, then, undertakes to reform, to reclose the circle of the restricted economy, the circulatory pact. She wants the letter-fetish brought back to her, and therefore begins by replacing, by exchanging one fetish for another: she emits—without really spending it, since there is an equivalence here—a quantity of money which is exchanged for the letter and assures its circular return. Dupin, as (the) analyst, is found [*se trouve*] on the circuit, in the circle of the restricted economy, in what I call elsewhere the stricture of the ring which the Seminar analyzes as the truth of fiction. We will come back to this problem of economics.

This determination of the proper, of the law of the proper, of *economy*, therefore leads back to castration as truth, to the figure of woman as the figure of castration *and* of truth. Of castration as truth. Which above all does not mean, as one might tend to believe, to truth as essential dislocation and irreducible fragmentation. Castration-truth, on the contrary, is that which contracts itself (stricture of the ring) in order to bring the phallus, the signifier, the letter, or the fetish back into their *oikos*,<sup>2</sup> their familiar dwelling, their proper place. In this sense castration-truth is the opposite of fragmentation, the very antidote for fragmentation: that which is missing from its place has in castration a fixed, central place, freed from all substitution. Something is missing from its place, but the lack is never missing from it [*Quelque chose manque à sa place, mais le manque*

*n'y manque jamais*]. The phallus, thanks to castration, always remains in its place, in the transcendental topology of which we were speaking above. In castration, the phallus is indivisible, and therefore indestructible, like the letter which *takes its place*. And this is why the motivated, never demonstrated presupposition of the materiality of the letter as *indivisibility* is indispensable for this restricted economy, this circulation of the proper.

The difference which interests me here is that—a formula to be understood as one will—the lack does not have its place in dissemination.

By determining the place of the lack, the topos of that which is lacking from its place, and in constituting it as a fixed center, Lacan is indeed proposing, at the same time as a truth-discourse, a discourse on the truth of the purloined letter as the truth of "The Purloined Letter." In question is a hermeneutic deciphering, despite any appearances or denegation. The link of Femininity and Truth is the ultimate signified of this deciphering. Fourteen years later, reintroducing the Seminar at the head of the *Écrits* with an "Unpublished Presentation," Lacan insists above all on this link and this meaning. He gives to Woman or to Femininity a capital letter that elsewhere he often reserves for Truth: "What Poe's tale demonstrates through my efforts is that the signifier's effect of subjection, in this instance the purloined letter's, bears above all on whoever wields it after the theft, and that along its itinerary what it conveys is the very Femininity that it has taken into its shadows . . ." [1969, 1]. Femininity is the Truth (of) castration, is the best figure of castration, because in the logic of the signifier it has always already been castrated; and Femininity "leaves" something in circulation (here the letter), something detached from itself in order to have it brought back to itself, because she has "never had it: whence truth comes out of the well, but only half-way."

This first castration (pre-castration) afterward affects with castration, and with femininity therefore, whoever holds the letter that signifies the phallus and castration: "This is why the Minister comes to be castrated, castrated, the very word of that which he still believes he has: the letter that Dupin was able to pick out between the legs of his very smooth fireplace.

"Here is but completed that which initially feminizes him [the Minister] as in a dream. . . . To which extent our Dupin shows himself equal in his success to the success of the psychoanalyst" [1969, 8].

# POINT DE VUE:<sup>3</sup> TRUTH IN (THE) PLACE OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

What about this success? In order to answer, let us await reconsideration, in all its complexity, of the relationship between Dupin's position and the analyst's position, and then the relation between the analyst and he who says Freud and myself in the Seminar and in the introductions to the Seminar. This requires a long detour.

Until now, our questions have led us to suspect that if there is something like a purloined letter, perhaps it has a supplementary trap: it would have no fixed location, not even that of a definable hole or assignable lack. The letter might not be found, or could always possibly not be found, or would be found less in the sealed writing whose "story" is recounted by the narrator and deciphered by the Seminar, less in the content of the story, than "in" the text which escapes, from a fourth side, the eyes of both Dupin and the psychoanalyst. The remainder, what is left unclaimed, would be "The Purloined Letter," that is, the text bearing this title whose location, like the large letters once more become invisible, is not where one would expect to find it, in the framed content of the "real drama" or in the hidden and sealed interior of Poe's tale, but rather in and as the open, the very open, letter that is fiction. The latter, because it is written, at very least implies a self-divesting fourth agency, which at the same time divests the letter of the text from whoever deciphers it, from the *facteur* of truth who puts the letter back into the circle of its own, proper itinerary: which is what the Seminar does in repeating Dupin's operation, for he, in accord with the circularity of the "proper itinerary," "has succeeded in returning the letter to its proper course" (1972b, 69), according to the desire of the Queen. To return the letter to its proper course, supposing that its trajectory is a line, is to correct a deviation, to rectify a departure, to recall, for the sake of the rule, that is, the norm, an orientation, an authentic line. Dupin is adroit, knows his address, and knows the law. At the very moment one believes that by drawing triangles and circles, and by wielding the opposition imaginary/symbolic, one grasps "The Purloined Letter," at the very moment one reconstitutes the truth, the proper adequation, "The Purloined Letter" escapes through a too self-evident opening. As Baudelaire bluntly reminds us. The purloined letter is in the text: not only as an object whose proper itinerary is described, contained in the text, a signifier become the theme or signified of the text, but also as the text producing the effects of the frame. At the very moment when Dupin and the Seminar find it, when

they determine its proper location and itinerary, when they believe that it is here or there as on a map, a place on a map as on the body of a woman, they no longer see the map itself: not the map that the text describes at one moment or another, but the map [*carte*] that the text "is," that it describes, "itself," as the deviation of the four [*l'écart du quatre*] with no promise of topos or truth. The remaining<sup>4</sup> structure of the letter is that—contrary to what the Seminar says in its last words ("what the 'purloined letter,' that is, the not delivered letter [*lettre en souffrance*] means is that a letter always arrives at its destination" [1972b, 72])—a letter can always not arrive at its destination. Its "materiality" and "topology" are due to its divisibility, its always possible partition. It can always be fragmented without return, and the system of the symbolic, of castration, of the signifier, of the truth, of the contract, etc., always attempt to protect the letter from this fragmentation: this is the point of view of the King or the Queen, which are the same here; they are bound by contract to reappropriate the bit. Not that the letter never arrives at its destination, but that it belongs to the structure of the letter to be capable, always, of not arriving. And without this threat (breach of contract, division or multiplication, the separation without return from the phallus which was begun for a moment by the Queen, that is, by every "subject"), the circuit of the letter would not even have begun. But with this threat, the circuit can always not finish. Here dissemination threatens the law of the signifier and of castration as the contract of truth. It *broaches, breaches* [*entamer*] the unity of the signifier, that is, of the phallus.

At the moment when the Seminar, like Dupin, finds the letter where it is found [*se trouve*], between the legs of woman, the deciphering of the enigma is anchored in truth. The sense of the tale, the meaning of the purloined letter ("what the 'purloined letter,' that is, the not delivered letter [*lettre en souffrance*], means is that a letter always arrives at its destination") is uncovered. The deciphering (Dupin's, the Seminar's), uncovered via a meaning (the truth), as a hermeneutic process, itself arrives at its destination.

Why then does the Seminar re-find, along with the truth, the same meaning and the same topos as did Marie Bonaparte when, skipping over the text, she proposed a psychobiographical analysis of "The Purloined Letter" in 1933? Is this a coincidence?

Is it a coincidence if, in allegedly breaking with psychobiographical criticism (see Lacan 1966a, 860), one rejoins it in its ultimate semantic anchorage? And after a perhaps more simplifying textual analysis?

For Bonaparte too, the castration of the woman (of the mother) is the final sense, what "The Purloined Letter" means. And truth means a readequation or reappropriation as the desire to stop up the hole. But Bonaparte does what Lacan does not: she relates "The Purloined Letter" to other texts by Poe. And she analyzes the gesture of doing so. Further on we will comprehend the *internal* necessity of this operation.

For example, "The Black Cat," in which "the castration fear, embodied in the woman as the castrated being, lies at the core of the tale" (Bonaparte 1971, 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" (481). Within this quadrifurcum, named absentmindedly, omitted like a frame, there is 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" (1972b, 60). Bonaparte continues with a page of generalizations about castration anxiety that could be summarized by a statement of Freud's that she does not cite here: the assertion that the mother's lack of a penis is "the greatest trauma"; or of Lacan's: "Division of the subject? This point is a knot."

"Let us recall where Freud spells it out: on the mother's lack of a penis in which the nature of the phallus is revealed" (Lacan 1966a, 877).

After treating the Law and fetishism as a process of rephallicizing the mother (what has been stolen or detached from her is to be returned to her), Bonaparte writes the following, in which the knot of the Lacanian interpretation is to be found, along with several other things:

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. [Bonaparte 1971, 483].

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[Bonaparte's] note [see above, chap. 5, Notes, 48f/36b] is not without importance. First, it shows that Lacan had read Bonaparte, although the Seminar never names her. As an author so scrupulous about debts and priorities, he could have acknowledged an exploration which orients his

entire interpretation, to wit the process of rephallization as the proper itinerary of the letter, the "return of the letter" to its "destination" after having been rebound between the legs of the fireplace. Or could have silenced it. But since footnotes are, if not the truth, the appendix in which is shown that which must not be said, or that which, as Schelling cited in *Das Unheimliche* says, "should remain hidden," the Seminar lets fall a footnote in response: "Look! between the jambs of the fireplace, there is the object already within reach of the hand the ravisher 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 cooking<sup>38</sup>" [Lacan's note reads: "38. And even to the cook herself" (1972b, 67)].

Without harm? On the contrary, the damage would be irreparable, within the Seminar itself: *on* the mantelpiece of the fireplace, the letter could not have been "between the jambs of the fireplace," "between the legs of the fireplace." What is at stake, then, is something major, even if one sets aside, imagining it not relevant, the Seminar's disdainful nervousness as concerns a psychoanalyst and her legacy.<sup>5</sup> Why relegate the question to the kitchen, as if to an outbuilding, and the woman who answers it to the status of cook? Certain "masters of the truth" in Greece knew how to keep the kitchen a place for thinking.

Just before this note, it will be recalled, the Seminar had invoked the "toponymical inscriptions," the "geographical map" of the "immense body," and the location of that which Dupin "expects to find," since he is repeating the gesture of the Minister, who himself is identified with the Queen whose letter still, properly, occupies the same place: the place of detachment and reattachment.

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After [a] brief allusion to the knob [1971, 483] (which the Seminar does not pick up), Bonaparte reattaches her interpretation to an Oedipal typology and clinical practice. Her interest in "the-author's-life" no more simplifies her reading of the text than the Seminar's lack of interest suffices to guarantee a reading. The accent is placed on a "pre-genital, phallic and archaic" Oedipal struggle for the possession of the maternal penis, which is here determined as a part object. Bonaparte is never tempted to grant Dupin the position of the analyst, even if to watch over him with an other kind of mastery. Dupin's lucidity comes to him from the war in which he is engaged, and this has motivated him throughout. As it has situated him on the circuit of the debt, of the phallus, of the signifier in its letter, and of the money which, unlike Lacan, Bonaparte

does not consider as neutralizing or as "destructive of" "all signification" [see 484]. . . .

The circle of this restitution indeed forms the "proper course" of the Seminar. What, then, of the Seminar's attempted thrust to identify Dupin's position with the analyst's position? This idea never tempts Bonaparte. And it is strangely divided or suspended in the Seminar.

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In beginning by identifying Dupin with the psychoanalyst, a double profit is prepared: 1. The lucidity of the one who is able to see what no one else has seen: the place of the thing, between the legs (and the author of the Seminar says then: we-psychoanalysts, we withdraw ourselves from the symbolic circuit and we neutralize the scene in which we are not participants). 2. The possibility—by emphasizing that Dupin remains a participant (and how), by maintaining the identification Dupin-psychoanalyst—of denouncing the naïveté of the analytic community, of saying: you-psychoanalysts, you are deluding yourselves at precisely the moment when like Dupin you believe yourselves to be masters.

In effect. After the paragraph whose indecision we have delineated [1972b, 68] ("perhaps," "the signifier the most destructive," etc.), a very clever game is played, but in order to demonstrate how Dupin's ruse—the biggest of all in the Oedipal scene—bears within its own trap a *motivation*, the game will go to the point of getting carried away with itself.

In question are the last pages of the Seminar, pages punctuated by a "But that's not all" (1972b, 68) and an "Is that all . . ." (1972b, 72). As soon as one interprets the retribution demanded by Dupin as an analytic procedure in order to withdraw from the circuit thanks to "the signifier most destructive of all signification, namely: money," it is difficult to account for all the signs of non-neutrality multiplied at the end of "The Purloined Letter." Is this not a shocking paradox? . . . And Dupin's "explosion of feeling at the end of the story" (1972b, 68), his "rage of manifestly feminine nature" (1972b, 71) when he claims to be settling his account with the Minister by signing his own maneuver, must be pointed out. Dupin, then, reproduces the process called feminization: he subjects himself to the (desire of the) Minister, whose place he occupies as soon as he possesses the letter—the place of the signifier—and conforms to the Queen's desire. Here, by virtue of the pact, one can no longer distinguish between the place of the King (which is marked by blindness) and the place of the Queen, the place to which the letter, in its "right

course" and following its "proper itinerary," must return in circular fashion. As the signifier has but one proper place, fundamentally there is but one place for the letter, and this place is occupied successively by all those who possess it. It must be recognized, then, that Dupin, once he has entered into the circuit, having identified with the Minister in order to take the letter back from him and to put it back on its "proper course," can no longer depart from this course. He must go through it in its entirety. The Seminar asks a strange question on this topic: "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*" (1972b, 69).

If Dupin now occupies the "median position," has he not always done so? And is there any other position in the circuit? Is it only at this moment of the narrative, when he has the letter in hand, that he once more finds himself in this position? We cannot stop here: from the outset Dupin acts with his sights set on the letter, on possessing it in order to return it to its rightful owner (neither the King, nor the Queen, but the Law which binds them), and thus finds himself preferable to his (brother) enemy, his younger or twin brother (Atreus/Thyestes), to the Minister who fundamentally pursues the same aims, with the same gestures. Therefore, if he is in a "median position," the differentiation of the three glances given above is no longer pertinent. There are only ostriches, no one can avoid being plucked, and the more one is the master, the more one presents one's rear. Which will be the case for whoever identifies with Dupin.

Concerning Dupin, a strange question, as we said: "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" (see also 1972b, 41). Its form implies that the author, in his intention, is in a situation of general mastery, his *superiority* as concerns the triangles

placed on stage (supposing that he is staging only triangles) being representable only by the superiority of an actor, to wit, Dupin. Let us abandon this implication here: an entire conception of "literature."

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# FIRST SECOND: THE TRUTH OF THE LETTER FROM FREUD'S HAND

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What about the truth according to Lacan then? Is there *a* doctrine, a Lacanian *doctrine* of the truth? We might doubt this for two reasons. The first is a general one, and has to do with the terms of the question. That a purely homogeneous system is structurally impossible we have seen elsewhere. The second reason has to do with the mobility of the discourse which concerns us here. In the publications subsequent to the *Écrits*, in their indications of a continuing oral instruction, one perceives a certain withdrawal [*retrait*] that muffles the incantations on *aletheia*, *logos*, speech, the word, etc. And one perceives an even more palpable erasure of the postwar existentialist connotations, if not concepts. It remains that a certain type of statement on the truth has been made, and enlarged, at a specific moment, in the form of a system. And it bears all the characteristics necessary for this effect. Since the Seminar belongs to this system (such, at least, is my hypothesis), as do a certain number of other essays to which I will refer (in order not, in turn, to enclose the *Écrits* in the Seminar), it must be demarcated if one wishes to understand the reading of "The Purloined Letter." One can and must do this, even if after 1966, in a transformed theoretical field, the Lacanian discourse on the truth, the text, and literature lent itself to a certain number of major rearrangements or decisive reworkings, although this is not certain.<sup>6</sup> The chronological and theoretical outline of this system would always be subject to caution, moreover, given the distant aftereffects of publications.

Whatever may have happened after 1965–66, all the texts situated, or more precisely published, between 1953 (the Discourse said to be of Rome) and 1960 appear to belong to the same system of the truth. Or, quantitatively, almost the entirety of the *Écrits*, including, therefore, the Seminar (1955–57): works of the young Lacan, as will perhaps be said one day, and once more, by the academics who are always in a hurry to cut to the quick that which does not bear partition.

We are not going to give an exposition of this system of the truth,

which is the condition for a logic of the signifier. Moreover, it consists of what is *non-exposable* in the exposition. We will only attempt to recognize those characteristics of it which are pertinent to the Seminar, to its possibility and its limits.

First of all, what is at issue is an *emphasis* [*emphase*], as could equally be said in English, on the authentic excellence of the spoken, of speech, and of the word: of *logos* as *phonē*. This emphasis must be explained, and its necessary link to the theory of the signifier, the letter, and the truth must be accounted for. It must be explained why the author of *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious* and of the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" ceaselessly subordinates the letter, writing, and the text. Even when he repeats Freud on rebuses, hieroglyphics, engravings, etc., in the last analysis his recourse is always to a writing spiritualized [*relevé*] by the voice. This would be easy to show. One example, among many others: "A writing, like the dream itself, may be figurative, it is like language always articulated symbolically, that is, it is like language *phonematic*, and in fact phonetic, as soon as it may be read."<sup>7</sup> This *fact* has the stature of a *fact* only within the limits of the so-called phonetic systems of writing. At the very most, for there are non-phonetic elements in such systems. As for the non-phonetic field of writing, its factual enormity no longer has to be demonstrated. But small matter. What does count here, and even more than the relation of the *de facto* to the *de jure*, is the implied equivalence ("that is") between symbolic articulation and phonematicity. The symbolic occurs through the voice, and the law of the signifier takes place only within vocalizable letters. Why? And what relation does this phonematism (which cannot be attributed to Freud, and thus is lost in the unfolding of the return to Freud) maintain with a certain value of truth?

Both imports of the value of truth are represented in the Seminar, as we have seen. 1. *Adequation*, in the circular return and proper course, from the origin to the end, from the signifier's place of detachment to its place of reattachment. This circuit of adequation guards and regards [*garde et regarde*] the circuit of the pact, of the contract, of sworn faith. It restores the pact in the face of what threatens it, as the symbolic order. And it is constituted at the moment when the *guardianship* [*la garde*] of the phallus is confided as guardianship of the lack. Confided by the King to the Queen, but thereby in an endless play of alternations. 2. *Veiling-unveiling* as the structure of the lack: castration, the *proper* site of the signifier, origin and destination of its letter, shows nothing in unveiling itself. Therefore, it veils itself in its unveiling. But this operation of the

truth has a proper place: its contours *being* [étant] the place of the lack of Being [manque à être] on the basis of which the signifier detaches itself for its literal circuit. These two values of truth lean on and support each other [s'étaient]. They are indissociable. They need speech or the phonetization of the letter as soon as the phallus has to be kept [gardé], has to return to its point of departure, has not to be disseminated en route. Now, for the signifier to be kept [pour que le signifiant se garde] in its letter and thus to make its return, it is necessary that in its letter it does not admit "partition," that one cannot say *some* letter [de la lettre], but only a letter, letters, the letter (1972b, 53–54). If it were divisible, it could always be lost en route. It is against this possible loss that the statement of the "materiality of the signifier," that is, about the signifier's indivisible singularity, is constructed. *This "materiality," deduced from an indivisibility found nowhere, in fact corresponds 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" (1972b, 53): since this cannot be said of empirical materiality, it must imply an ideality (the intangibility of a self-identity displacing itself without alteration). This alone permits the singularity of the letter to be maintained [se garder]. If this ideality is not the content of meaning, it must be either a certain ideality of the signifier (what is identifiable in its form to the extent that it can be distinguished from its empirical events and re-editions), or the "*point de capiton*"<sup>8</sup> which staples the signifier to the signified. The latter hypothesis conforms more closely to the system. This system is in fact the system of the ideality of the signifier. The idealism lodged within it is not a theoretical position of the analyst; it is a structural effect of *signification* in general, to whatever transformations or adjustments one subjects the space of *semiosis*. One can understand that Lacan finds this "materiality" "odd" ["singulière"]: he retains only its ideality. He considers the letter only at the point at which it is determined (no matter what he says) by its content of meaning, by the ideality of the message that it "vehiculates," by the speech whose meaning remains out of the reach of partition, so that it can circulate, intact, from its place of detachment to its place of reattachment, that is, to the same place. In fact, this letter does not only escape partition, it escapes movement, it does not change its place.

Aside from a phonematic limitation of the letter, this supposes an interpretation of *phonē* which also spares it divisibility. The voice occasions such an interpretation in and of itself: it has the phenomenal characteristics of spontaneity, of self-presence, of the circular return to itself. And the voice retains [garde] all the more in that one believes one

can retain [*garder*] it without external accessory, without paper and without envelope: it finds itself [*se trouve*], it tells us, always available wherever it is found [*se trouve*]. This is why it is believed that the voice remains more than do writings: "May it but please heaven that writings remain, as is rather the case with spoken words" (1972b, 56). Things would be quite otherwise if one were attentive to the writing within the voice, that is, before the letter. For the same problem is reproduced concerning the voice, concerning what one might still call its "letter," if one wished to conserve the Lacanian definition of this concept (indivisible locality or materiality of the signifier). This vocal "letter" therefore also would be indivisible, always identical to itself, whatever the fragmentations of its body. It can be assured of this integrity only by virtue of its link to the ideality of a meaning, in the unity of a speech. We are always led back, from stage to stage, to the contract of contracts which guarantees the unity of the signifier with the signified through all the "*points de capiton*," thanks to the "presence" (see below) of the *same* signifier (the phallus), of the "signifier of signifiers" beneath all the effects of the signified. This transcendental signifier is therefore also the signified of all signifieds, and this is what finds itself sheltered within the indivisibility of the (graphic or oral) letter. Sheltered from this threat, but also from the disseminating power that in *Of Grammatology* I proposed to call *Writing before the Letter* (title of the first part): the privilege of "full speech" is examined there. The agency of the Lacanian letter is the *relève* of writing in the system of speech.

"The drama" of the purloined letter begins at the moment—which is not a moment—when the letter is *retained* [*se garde*]. With the movement of the Minister who acts in order to conserve it (for he could have torn it up, and this is indeed an ideality which then would have remained available and effective for a time),<sup>9</sup> certainly, but well before this, when the Queen wishes to retain it or refind it [*la garder ou la retrouver*]: as a double of the pact which binds her to the King, a threatening double, but one which in her guardianship [*sous sa garde*] cannot betray the "sworn faith." The Queen wishes to be able to play on two contracts. We cannot develop this analysis here; it is to be read elsewhere.

What counts here is that the indestructibility of the letter has to do with its elevation toward the ideality of a meaning. However little we know of its content, the content must be in relation to the original contract that it simultaneously signifies and subverts. And it is this knowledge, this memory, this (conscious or unconscious) retention which form its properness [*propriété*] and ensure its proper course toward

the proper place. Since its ultimate content is that of a pact binding two "singularities," it implies an irreplaceability and excludes, as uncontrollable threat and anxiety, all double simulacra. It is the effect of living and present speech which in the last analysis guarantees the indestructible and unforgettable singularity of the letter, the taking-place of a signifier which never is lost, goes astray, or is divided. The subject is very divided, but the phallus is not to be cut. Fragmentation is an accident which does not concern it. At least according to the certainty constructed by the symbolic. And by a discourse on the assumption of castration which edifies an ideal philosophy against fragmentation.<sup>10</sup>

In principle this is how the logic of the signifier is articulated with a phonocentric interpretation of the letter. The two values of the truth (adequation and movement of the veil) henceforth cannot be dissociated from the word, from present, living, authentic speech. The final word is that when all is said and done, there is, at the origin or the end (proper course, circular destination), a word which is not feigned, a meaning which, through all imaginable fictional complications, does not trick, or which at that point tricks *truly*, again teaching us the truth of the lure. At this point, the truth permits the analyst to treat fictional characters as real, and to resolve, at the depth of the Heideggerian meditation on truth, the problem of the literary text which sometimes led Freud (more naively, but more surely than Heidegger and Lacan) to confess his confusion.

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But once again, why would speech be the privileged element of this truth declared *as* fiction, in the mode of structure of fiction, of verified fiction, of what Gide calls "superior realism"?

As soon as the truth is determined as adequation (with an original contract: the acquitting of a debt) and as unveiling (of the lack on the basis of which the contract is contracted in order to reappropriate symbolically what has been detached), the guiding value is indeed that of appropriation, and therefore of proximity, of presence, and of maintaining [*garde*]: the very value procured by the idealizing effect of speech. If one grants this demonstration, it will not be surprising to find it confirmed. If one does not, then how is one to explain the massive co-implication, in Lacanian discourse, of truth and speech, "present," "full," and "authentic" speech? And if it is taken into account, one better understands: 1. That fiction for Lacan is permeated by truth as something spoken, and therefore as something non-real. 2. That this leads to no longer reckoning, in the text, with everything that remains irreducible to speech, the

spoken [*le dit*], and meaning [*vouloir-dire*]: that is, irreducible dis-regard, theft without return, destructibility, divisibility, the failure to reach a destination [*le manque à destination*] (which definitively rebels against the destination of the lack [*la destination du manque*]: an unverifiable non-truth).

When Lacan recalls "the passion for unveiling which has one object: the truth"<sup>11</sup> and recalls that the analyst "above all remains the master of the truth" [1977, 98], it is always in order to link the truth to the power of speech. And to the power of communication as a contract (sworn faith) between two present things. Even if communication communicates nothing, it communicates to itself: and in this case better yet as communication, that is, truth. For example: "Even if it communicates nothing, the discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the evidence, it affirms that speech constitutes truth; even if it is intended to deceive, the discourse speculates on faith in testimony."<sup>12</sup>

What is neither true nor false is reality. But as soon as speech is inaugurated, one is in the register of the unveiling of the truth as of its contract of properness [*propriété*]: presence, speech, testimony: "The ambiguity of the hysterical revelation of the past is due not so much to the vacillation of its content between the imaginary and the real, for it is situated in both. Nor is it because it is made up of lies. The reason is that it presents us with the birth of truth in speech, and thereby brings us up against the reality of what is neither true nor false. At any rate, that is the most disquieting aspect of the problem.

"For it is present speech that bears witness to the truth of this revelation in present reality, and which grounds it in the name of that reality. Yet in that reality, only speech bears witness to that portion of the powers of the past that has been thrust aside at each crossroads where the event has made its choice" [1977, 47]. Just before this passage there is a reference to Heidegger, which is not surprising; the reference resituates *Dasein* in the subject, which is more so.

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## MEETING PLACE: THE DOUBLE SQUARE OF KINGS

. . . Let us return to "The Purloined Letter" in order "to glimpse" its disseminal structure, that is, the without-possible-return of the letter, the other scene of its remaining [*restance*].

Because there is a narrator on stage, the "general" scene is not ex-

hausted in a narration, a "tale" or a "story." We have already recognized the effects of invisible framing, of the frame within the frame, *from within which* the psychoanalytic interpretations (semantico-biographical or triado-formalist) lifted out their triangles. In missing the position of the narrator, his engagement in the content of what he seems to recount, one omits everything in the scene of writing that overflows the two triangles.

For the issue first of all, and with no possible approach or bordering, is one of a scene of writing with ruined [*abîm*] limits. Right from the simulacrum of the opening, from the "first word," the narrator advances by narrating to himself several propositions which engage the unity of the "tale" in an interminable drift: a textual drift of which the Seminar takes not the slightest account. But in taking it into account here, above all the question is not one of making of this drift the "*real subject* of the tale." Which therefore would not have one.

I. Everything begins "in" a library: in books, writings, references. Therefore nothing begins. Only a drifting or disorientation from which one does not emerge.

II. Additionally, an explicit reference is made in the direction of two other narratives onto which "this one" is grafted. The "analogy" between the three accounts is the milieu of "The Purloined Letter." The independence of this tale, as presumed by the Seminar, is therefore the effect of an ablation, even if one takes the tale in its totality, with its narrator and his narration. This ablation is all the more absentminded in that the "analogy" is recalled from the very first paragraph. It is true that the word "analogy," "coincidence" more precisely, authorizes the ablation, invites it, and therefore acts as a trap. The work of the Seminar begins only after the entry of the Prefect of the Parisian police. But before this, the title, the epigraph, the first paragraph gave us to read (silence in 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. . . .

Everything "begins," then, by obscuring this beginning in the "silence," "smoke," and "dark" of this library. The casual observer sees only the smoking meerschaum: a literary decor in sum, the ornamental frame of a narrative. On this border, which is negligible for the hermeneut

interested in the center of the picture and in what is within the representation, one could already read that all of this was an affair of writing, and of writing adrift, in a place of writing open without end to its grafting onto other writings, and that this affair of writing (the third of a series in which the "coincidence" with the two preceding ones already caused itself to be remarked upon) suddenly breaks into its first word "*au troisième, No. 33 Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain.*" In French in the text.

Fortuitous notations, curling eddies of smoke, contingencies of framing? That they go beyond the "author's intention," about which the Seminar is tempted to question Dupin, that they are even pure accidental "coincidence," an event of fortune, can only recommend them all the more to the reading of a text which makes of chance as writing what we will indeed refrain from calling "the *real subject* of the tale."

Its remarkable ellipsis, rather. In effect, if we do as we are invited, and go back from the internal bordering of the frame to what is before "The Purloined Letter," the remarkable insists: scene of writing, library, events of chance, coincidences. At the beginning of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" what might be called the meeting place between the (narrating-narrated) narrator and Dupin is already an "obscure library," the "accident" (which Baudelaire this time translates as "*coincidence*," and not as "*analogie*")<sup>13</sup> "of our both being in search of the same very rare and remarkable volume." And the least one might say about the relationship formed in this meeting place is that it will never leave the so-called general narrator in the position of a neutral and transparent reporter who does not intervene in the narration in progress. For example (But this time the example read on the frame is not at the beginning of the text. The frame describing the "meeting" cuts through the narration, if you will. Before the appearance of Dupin in the narrative, the frame is preceded by a feint in the guise 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<sup>14</sup> as usual], and random observations. At the end of the preface the narrator feigns the Seminar):

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

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 necessities of life, without troubling himself about its superfluities. Books, indeed, were his sole luxuries, and in Paris these are easily obtained. (Poe 1956, 142)

By means of a *remnant* of the paternal inheritance, apparently left out of account for the debtor, who by calculating (*rigorous economy*) can draw an *income*, a revenue from it, the surplus-value of a capital which works by itself, Dupin permits himself to pay for a single superfluity, a sole luxury in which the initial remnant is relocated [*se retrouve*] therefore, and which cuts across the space of the restricted economy like a gift without return. This sole luxury (*sole luxuries*: the very word found for the second time on the second line of "The Purloined Letter," but this time as a singular *double luxury*, the *twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschauum*) is writing: the books which will organize the meeting place and the ruination [*mise en abîme*] of the entire so-called general narration. The meeting place of the meeting between the narrator and Dupin is due to the meeting of their interest in the same book; it is never said whether they find it. Such is the literal 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 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 mere self is the theme. (1956, 142)

Thus the narrator permits himself to narrate: that he is interested in Dupin's family history ("I was deeply interested in the little family history . . ."), the very history which leaves a remnant of income with which to pay for the luxury of books; and then, as we shall see, that Dupin's capacity for reading astonishes him above all, and that the society of such a man is without a price for him, beyond all evaluation ("a treasure beyond price"). The narrator, therefore, will permit himself to pay for the priceless Dupin, who permits himself to pay for priceless writing, which is without a price for this very reason. For the narrator, in confiding—in yielding [*se livrant*] as Baudelaire says—frankly to Dupin must pay for doing so. He must rent the analyst's office. And provide the economic equivalent of the priceless. The analyst—or his own fortune,

more or less equivalent to Dupin's, simply "somewhat less embarrassed"—authorizes him to do so: "I was permitted to be at the expense of renting. . . ." The narrator is therefore the first to pay Dupin in order to be certain of the availability of letters. Let us then follow the movement of this chain. But what he pays for is also the place of the narration, the writing within which the entire story will be recounted and offered to interpretations. And if he is paying in order to write or to speak, he is also making Dupin speak, making him return his letters, and leaving him the last word in the form of a confession. In the economy of this office, as soon as the narrator is placed on stage by a function which is indeed that of a public corporation [*société anonyme*] of capital and desire, no neutralization is possible, nor is any general point of view, any view from above, any "destruction" of signification by money. It is not only Dupin, but the narrator who is a "participant." As soon as the narrator makes Dupin return his letters, and not only to the Queen (the other Queen), the letter divides itself, is no longer atomistic (atomism, Epicurus's atomism is also one of Dupin's propositions in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"), and therefore loses any certain destination. The divisibility of the letter—this is why we have insisted on this key or theoretical safety lock of the Seminar—is what chances and sets off course, without guarantee of return, the remaining [*restance*] of anything whatsoever: a letter does *not always* arrive at its destination, and from the moment that this possibility belongs to its structure one can say that it never truly arrives, that when it does arrive its capacity not to arrive torments it with an internal drifting.

The divisibility of the letter is also the divisibility of the signifier to which it gives rise, and therefore also of the "subjects," "characters," or "positions" which are subjected to it and which "represent" them. Before showing this in the text, a citation as reminder:

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. (1956, 142-43)

Thus we have two gloomy (melancholic) fantastics, one of whom does not tell us what objects he previously was seeking in Paris, or who are the "former associates" from whom he now is going to hide the secret of the locality. The entire space is now one of the speculation 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. (1956, 143)

From here on, the narrator permits himself to narrate his progressive identification with Dupin. And first of all with the love of 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 *bizarverie*, 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. (1956, 143)

Himself doubled in this position, the narrator thus *identifies* with Dupin, whose "peculiar analytic ability" he cannot help "remarking and admiring"; and Dupin gives him multiple proofs of his "intimate knowledge" of his own, the narrator's, personality. But Dupin himself, precisely at these moments, appears double. And this time it is a "fancy" of the narrator, who 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 upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin—the creative and the resolvent" (1956, 144).

The fancy of an identification between two doubled doubles, the major investment in a relationship which engages Dupin *outside* of the "intersubjective triads" of the "real drama" and the narrator *inside* what he narrates;<sup>15</sup> the circulation of desires and capital, of signifiers and letters, before and beyond the "two triangles," the "primal" and second-

ary ones, the consecutive fissioning of the positions, starting with the position of Dupin, who like *all* the characters, inside and outside the narration, successively occupies *all* the places—all of this makes of triangular logic a very limited play within the play. And if the dual relation between two doubles (which Lacan would reduce to the imaginary) includes and envelops the entire space said to be of the symbolic, overflows and simulates it, ceaselessly ruining and disorganizing it, then the opposition of the imaginary and the symbolic, and above all its implicit hierarchy, appears to be of very limited pertinence: that is, if one measures it against the squaring of such a scene of writing.

We have seen that *all* the characters of "The Purloined Letter," and those of the "real drama" in particular, Dupin included, successively and structurally occupied *all* the positions, the position of the dead-blind King (and of the Prefect of Police thereby), then the positions of the Queen and of the Minister. Each position identifies itself with the other and divides itself, even the position of the dummy and of a supplementary fourth. This compromises the distinction of the three glances proposed by the Seminar in order to determine the proper course of the circulation. And above all the (duplicitous and identificatory) opening set off to the side, in the direction of the (narrating-narrated) narrator, brings back one letter only to set another adrift.

And the phenomena of the double, and therefore of *Unheimlichkeit*, do not belong only to the trilogic "context" of "The Purloined Letter." In effect, the question arises, between the narrator and Dupin, of knowing whether the Minister is himself or his brother ("There are two brothers . . . both have attained reputation"; Where? "in letters" [1956 219]). Dupin affirms that the Minister is both "poet and mathematician." The two brothers are almost indistinguishable in him. In rivalry within him, the one playing and checking the other. "You are mistaken," says Dupin, "I know him well; he is both. As poet *and* mathematician, 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" (1956, 219).

But Dupin strikes a blow against the Minister, who is "well acquainted with my MS.," a blow signed by a brother or confrere, a twin, younger, or elder brother (Atreus/Thyestes). This rivalrous and duplicitous identification of the two brothers, far from entering into the symbolic space of the familial triangle (the first, second, or next triangle), endlessly carries off the triangle into a labyrinth of doubles without

originals, of *fac-similes* without an authentic and indivisible letter, of forgeries without something forged, thereby imprinting on the purloined letter an incorrigible indirection.

The text entitled "The Purloined Letter" imprints (itself in) these effects of indirection. I have indicated only the most salient ones in order to begin to unlock a reading: the play of doubles, divisibility without end, textual references from *fac-simile* to *fac-simile*, the framing of the frames, the interminable supplementarity of the quotation marks, the insertion of "The Purloined Letter" into a purloined letter beginning before it, through the narratives of narratives in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and the newspaper clippings in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt (A Sequel to 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue')." The *mise en abîme* of the title above all: "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 by pretending to name an object described in the text. "The Purloined Letter" operates as a text which evades every assignable destination, and produces, or rather induces by deducing itself, this unassignableness at the precise moment when it narrates the arrival of a letter. It feigns meaning to say something, and letting one think that "a letter always arrives at its destination," authentic, intact, and undivided, at the moment when and in the place where the feint, written before the letter, by itself separates from itself. In order to take another jump to the side.

Who signs? Dupin absolutely wants to sign. And in fact the narrator, after having made or let him speak, leaves him the last word,<sup>16</sup> the last word of the last of the three stories. It seems. I am not remarking this in order to place the narrator in turn, and even less the author, in the position of the analyst who knows how to keep silent. Measured against the squaring of this scene of writing, perhaps there is here no possible enclosure for an analytic situation. Perhaps there is no possible analyst here, at least in the situation of psychoanalysis in X. . . . Only four kings, and therefore four queens, four prefects of police, four ministers, four analysts-Dupins, four narrators, four readers, four kings, etc., each of them more lucid and more stupid than the others, more powerful and more disarmed.

Yes, without a doubt, Dupin wants to sign the last word of the last message of the purloined letter. First by not being able to prevent himself from leaving his own imprimatur—or at least the seal with which he will have to be identified—beneath the *fac-simile* which he leaves for the minister. He is afraid of the *fac-simile*, and insisting upon his very con-

fraternal vengeance, he absolutely wants the minister to know where it is coming from. Thus he limits the *fac-simile*, the counterfeit, to the outside of the letter. The inside is authentic and properly identifiable. In effect: at the moment when the madman (who is a false madman paid by him: "the pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay") distracts everyone with his "frantic behavior," what does Dupin do? He adds a note. He sets in place the false letter, that is, the one concerning his own interests, the *true one* which is an *ersatz only on its outside*. If there were a man of truth in all this, a lover of the authentic, Dupin would indeed be his 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), which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings; imitating the D— cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread" (1956, 224).

Thus will D. have to decipher, internally, what the decipherer will have meant and from whence and why he has deciphered, with what aim, in the name of whom and of what. The initial—which is the same, D, for the minister and for Dupin—is a *fac-simile* on the outside, *but a proper on the inside*.

But what is this proper on the inside? This signature? This "last word" in a doubly confraternal war?

Again, a citation by means of which the signer is dispossessed, no matter what he says: ". . . 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." (1956, 225)

Play of quotation marks. In the French translation, there are no quotation marks—Crébillon's text is in small type. The sentence that follows ("They are to be found in Crébillon's 'Atrée'") thus can equally be attributed to the author of "The Purloined Letter," to the narrator, to the author of the avenging letter (Dupin). But the American edition<sup>17</sup> that I am using leaves no doubt:

"'. . . 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 the last sentence is Dupin's, Dupin saying to the Minister: I the undersigned, Dupin, inform you of the fate of the letter, of what it means, with what aim I am filching one from you in order to return it to its addressee, and why I am replacing it with this one, remember.

But this last word, aside from the invisible quotation marks that border the entire story, Dupin is obliged to cite between quotation marks, to recount his signature: this is what I wrote to him and this is how I signed. What is a signature between quotation marks? And then, within these quotation marks, the imprimatur itself is a citation between quotation marks. This remainder is (again) still (from) literature.

Two out of three times, the author of the Seminar will have forced *dessein* (design) into *destin* (destiny), perhaps, thereby, bringing a meaning to its destination: expressly, no doubt, for in any case nothing permits one to exclude a design (*dessein*) somewhere. (This coda dedicates itself to Abbé D. Coppieters de Gibson. The thing in truth—an alteration subtracting one letter and substituting another, in order to achieve its destiny while *en route*—did not escape him.)

"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*" (1972b, 43). Then, after a lapse of time: "The commonplace of the quotation is fitting for the oracle that this 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*'" (1972b, 71). And finally, ("Points" [1969, 8]): ". . . and I add (52) that the song with which this Lecoq, in the love note that he destines for him, would like to awaken him ('*un destin si funeste . . .*'), has no chance of being heard by him."

## NOTES

1. TN. *La psychanalyse, à supposer, se trouve. Quand on croit la trouver, c'est elle, à supposer, qui se trouve. Quand elle trouve, à supposer, elle se trouve—quelque chose.* The double meaning of reflexive verbs in French is being played on here. *Se trouver* can mean both to find itself and to be found. Thus, these are three or four statements, since the third sentence must be read in two ways. The passage from three to four via irreducible doubleness is a constant theme in Derrida's works. Throughout this essay, I have given *se trouver* in brackets whenever this wordplay occurs.

2. TN. The Greek *oikos* means the house, the dwelling, and is also the root from which the word *economy* is derived.

3. TN. *Point de* means both "point of" and "no, none at all." Thus, point of view/no view, blindness.

4. TN. "*La structure restante de la lettre. . .*" For Derrida, writing is always that which is an excess remainder, *un reste*. Further, in French, mail delivered to a post office box is called *poste restante*, making the dead letter office the ultimate *poste restante*, literally "remaining mail." Thus, Derrida is saying that Lacan's notion that the non-delivered letter, *la lettre en souffrance*, always arrives at its destination overlooks the structural possibility that a letter can always *remain* in the dead letter office, and that without this possibility of deviation and remaining—the entire postal system—there would be no delivery of letters to any address at all.

5. Legacy [*legs*] and rephallization: 1. "Could it be the letter which brings Woman to be that subject, simultaneously all-powerful and enslaved, such that every hand to which Woman leaves the letter, takes back along with it, that which in receiving it, she herself has legated [*fait lais*]?" 'Legacy' [*lais*] means that which Woman bequeaths in never having had it: whence truth emerges from the well, but only halfway" (Presentation of the *Ecrits*, "Points," 1969, 7–8). 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 1971, 475).

Further on we will come back to the question of the "part object" that is implied here. As for the well, in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin, after the discovery of the "fearfully mutilated" "body of the mother," recalls: "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." *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Edward Davidson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), 153. All further references to Poe will be to this edition. Also note that the French for legacy is *legs*; Derrida constantly plays on the *leg* in *legacy*. Moreover, the older form of *legs* is *lais*, which is the homonym of *lait*, milk. Thus the question of legacy, rephallization, and relactification.

6. The doctrine of the truth as cause (*Ursache*), as well as the expression "effects of truth," can be aligned with the system we are about to examine. The effects of truth are the effects of the truth, as "The Direction of the Treatment" (in which it is a question of "directing the subject towards 'full' speech," or in any event of leaving him "free to try it," *Ecrits* [1977, 275], has already said: "it is a question of truth, of the only truth, of the truth about the effects of truth" (ibid.). Circulation will always be circulation of the truth: toward the truth. Cause and effect of the circle, *causa sui*, proper course and destiny of the letter.

7. *Situation de la psychanalyse en 1956* (Lacan 1966a, 470).

8. TN. *Capitonner* means to quilt; *point de capiton* is Lacan's term for the "quilted stitch" that links signifier to signified.

9. For a time only: until the moment when, unable to return a "material," divisible letter, a letter subject to partition, an effectively "odd" letter, he would have to release the hold over the Queen that only a destructible document could have assured him.

10. What we are analyzing here is the most rigorous philosophy of psychoanalysis today, more precisely the most rigorous Freudian philosophy, doubtless more rigorous than Freud's philosophy, and more scrupulous in its exchanges with the history of philosophy.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the import of the proposition about the indivisibility of the letter, or rather about the letter's self-identity that is inaccessible to fragmentation ("Cut a letter in small pieces, it remains the letter it is"), or of the proposition about the so-called materiality of the signifier (the letter) which does not bear partition. Where does this come from? A fragmented letter can purely and simply be destroyed, this happens (and if one considers that the unconscious effect here named letter is never lost, that repression maintains everything and never permits any degradation of insistence, this hypothesis—nothing is ever lost or goes astray—must still be aligned with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, or other letters must be produced, whether characters or messages).

11. "You have heard me, in order to situate its place in the investigation, refer with brotherly love to Descartes and to Hegel. These days, it is rather fashionable to 'surpass' the classical philosophers. I equally could have taken the admirable dialogue with Parmenides as my point of departure. For neither Socrates, nor Descartes, nor Marx, nor Freud can be 'surpassed' to the extent that they have conducted their investigations with that passion for unveiling which has a single object: the truth.

"As one of those, princes of the verb, and through whose fingers the strings of the mask of the Ego seem to slip by themselves, has written—I have named Max Jacob, poet, saint, and novelist—yes, as he has written in his *Dice Cup*, if I am not mistaken: the true is always new," *Ecrits* [1966a, 193]. This is true, always. How not to subscribe to it?

12. TN. "Empty and full speech in the psychoanalytic realization of the subject" in the Rome Report (*Function and Field of Speech . . .*), *Ecrits* [1977, 43].

13. Kitchen questions: in translating "coincidence" by "*analogie*" at the beginning of the tale, at the very moment of the reference to the two other "affairs" (the "Rue Morgue" and "Marie Rogêt"), Baudelaire misses not only the insistence of this word but also the fact that "The Purloined Letter" itself is presented in a series of these coincidences, as one of them, the coincidences whose network is elaborated before this third fiction. One detail from among all of those that now can be analyzed in an open reading of the trilogy: the epigraph to the "Mystery of Marie Rogêt," a citation from Novalis both in German and in

English translation, which begins: "There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. . . ." Baudelaire purely and simply omits the last three words. The word *coincidences* then appears three times in two pages, always underlined. And the last time it has to do with the intersection of the three affairs: "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 *coincidences*, whose secondary or concluding branch will be recognized by all readers in the late murder of MARY CECELIA ROGERS at New York." The subtitle of the "Mystery of Marie Rogêt": "A Sequel to 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue.'"

These reminders, which could be multiplied endlessly, are to make us attentive to the effects of the frame and to the paradoxes of parergonal logic. The point is not to show that "The Purloined Letter" functions within a frame (a frame that is omitted by the Seminar which thereby can assure itself of the tale's triangular interior by means of an active and subreptitious limitation on the basis of a metalinguistic overlay), but that the structure of the effects of framing is such that no totalization of the bordering can even occur. The frames are always enframed: and therefore enframed by a given piece of what they contain. Parts without a whole, "partitions" without unification: this is what checks the dream of a letter without partition, a letter allergic to partition. On the basis of which the linguistic unit phallus [*le sème "phallus"*] wanders, begins by disseminating, and not even by disseminating *itself*.

The naturalizing neutralization of the frame permits the Seminar, by virtue of its imposition or importation of an Oedipal contour, finding (itself within) this contour in truth—and, in effect, it is there, but as one part, even if a precisely central part, within the letter—to constitute a metalanguage and to exclude the text in general in all the dimensions that we began here by recalling (return to the "first page"). Without even going further into details, the trap of metalanguage—which in the last analysis is used by no one, is at the disposition of no one, involves no one in the consequences of an error or a weakness—is a trap belonging to writing before the letter, and shows and hides itself in the shown-hidden of the feigned title: "The Purloined Letter" is the title of the text and not only of its object. But a text never entitles itself, never writes: I, the text, write, or write myself. It causes to be said, it lets be said, or rather it leads to being said, "I, the truth, speak." I am always (I am still following) [*Je suis toujours*] the letter that never arrives at itself [*s'arrive*]. And right up to its destination.

14. Before dropping them, as everyone drops a preface, or before exalting them as the properly instructive theoretical concepts, the truth of the story, I will lift out, somewhat at random, several propositions. Which are not necessarily the best ones. One also would have to recall each word of the title, and again the epigraph on the name of Achilles when he hid himself 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* [dont le fonction est de débrouiller]. 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 games of draughts than by all the elaborate frivolity of chess [*la laborieuse futilité des échecs*]. . . . To be less abstract—Let us suppose a game of draughts where the pieces are reduced to four kings ["draughts" in French is *le jeu de dames*, and Baudelaire's translation here speaks of four "*dames*," not kings], 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 [*tactique habile*], the result of some strong exertion 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 [*les cas situés au-delà de la règle*] that the skill of the analyst is evinced [*se manifeste*]. . . . Our player confines himself not at all; nor, because the game is the object, does he reject deductions from things external to the game . . ." (Poe 1956, 139–41 *passim*). Etc. The entire passage must be read, and in both languages. I have allowed myself to do some cooking based on Baudelaire's translation, which I do not always respect.

Meryon had asked Baudelaire if he believed "in the reality of this Edgar Poe," and had attributed his stories "to a society of very adept, very powerful literateurs, up to date on everything." This society does not specify, therefore, if the "things external to the game" border a game recounted in the text or constituted by the text, nor whether *the game* which is *the object* is or is not (in) the story. Nor whether seduction seeks its prey among the characters or the readers. The question of the "narratee," and then of the addressee, which is not the same thing, never arrives at itself [*ne s'arrive jamais*].

15. The Seminar never takes into account the very determined involvement of the narrator in the narration. Ten years later, in a 1966 addition, Lacan writes the following: "An effect (of the signifier) so manifest as to be grasped here as it is in the fiction of the purloined letter.

"Whose essence is that the letter could import its effects within: on the actors of the tale, including the narrator, as well as without: on us, readers, and equally on its author, without anyone ever having to be concerned with what it meant. Which of everything that is written is the ordinary fate" (*Écrits* [1966a, 56–57]).

Although we subscribe to this up to a certain point, we again must specify that the Seminar said nothing about the effects on the narrator, *neither in fact nor in principle*. The structure of the interpretation would exclude it. And as for the

nature of these effects, the structure of the narrator's involvement, the repentance still says nothing, limiting itself to the framing operated by the Seminar. As for the allegation that in this affair everything occurs "without anyone ever having to be concerned with what it [the letter] meant," *it is false* for several reasons.

1st: Everyone, as the Prefect of Police reminds us, knows that the letter contains enough to "bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station," and therefore also that person's "peace": a solid semantic bond.

2d: This knowledge is repeated by the Seminar, and supports the Seminar, at two levels:

a) As concerns the minimal and active meaning of the letter, the Seminar reports or transcribes the Prefect's information: "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" (1972b, 57). This tells us the essentials of the message that the letter vehiculates: and the variations just proposed are not indifferent to this message, no matter what they would have us believe. In each of the possible hypotheses, the letter's message (not only its being-sent, its emission, but the content of what is emitted within it) necessarily implies the betrayal of a pact of a "sworn faith." It was not forbidden for just anyone to send just any kind of letter to the Queen, nor for her to receive it. The Seminar contradicts itself when, several lines later, it radicalizes the logic of the signifier and of its literal place by allegedly neutralizing the "message," and then brings to rest or anchors this logic in its meaning or symbolic truth: ". . . it remains that the letter is the symbol of a pact" (1972b, 58). Contrary to what the Seminar says (an enormous proposition, by virtue of the blindness it could induce, but indispensable to the demonstration), everyone had "to be concerned with what it [the letter] meant." On the subject of this meaning, ignorance or indifference remains minimal and provisional. Everyone is aware of it, everyone is preoccupied with it, starting with the author of the Seminar. And if it did not have a very determined meaning, no one would be so worried about having another one palmed off on him, which happens to the Queen, and then to the Minister. At least. All of them assure themselves, starting with the Minister and including Lacan, passing through Dupin, that it is indeed a question of the letter which indeed says what it says: the betrayal of the pact, and what it says, "the symbol of a pact." Otherwise there would be no "abandoned" letter: whether by the Minister first of all, or then by Dupin, or finally by Lacan. They all verify the contents of the letter, of the "right" letter, and they all do what the Prefect of Police does at the moment when, in exchange for a retribution, he takes the letter from Dupin's hands, and checks its tenor: "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 . . ." (Poe 1956, 216). The exchange of the check and the letter takes place across an *escritoire* (in French in the text) where Dupin had the document locked up.

b) As for the law of the meaning of the purloined letter in its exemplary generality, such, once again, are the last words of the Seminar. ("Thus it is that what the 'purloined letter,' nay the 'non-delivered letter' means is that a letter always arrives at its destination" [1972b, 72]).

16. One might even consider that he is the only one "to speak" in the tale. His is the dominant discourse which, with a loquacious and didactic braggadocio that is magisterial in truth, dispenses directives, controls directions, redresses wrongs, and gives lessons to everyone. He spends his time, and everyone else's, inflicting punishments and recalling the rules. He posts himself and addresses himself. Only the address counts, the right and authentic one. Which comes back, according to the law, to its rightful owner. Thanks to the man of law, the guide and rector of the proper way. The entire "Purloined Letter" is written in order for him to bring it back, finally, while giving a lecture. And since he shows himself more clever than all the others, the letter plays one more trick on him at the moment when he recognizes its place and true destination. It escapes and entraps him (literature stage-left) at the moment when, at his most authoritatively arrogant, he hears himself say that he entraps while explaining the trap, at the moment when he strikes his blow and returns the letter. Unwittingly he gives in to all the demands, and doubles, that is replaces, the Minister and the police; if there were only one, a hypothesis to be dismissed, he would be the greatest dupe of the "story." It remains to be seen—what about the lady. He addresses-her-the-Queen-the-address-dupes-her. [. . . *s'il n'y en avait qu'une, hypothèse en conge, ce serait la plus belle dupe de l'"bistoire."* Reste à savoir—quoi de la belle. Il-l'adresse-la-Reine-l'adresse-la-dupe.]

17. In the first publication of this text, the following remark concerning the quotation marks could be read: "It is incorrect, however, in presenting itself thus, and in leaving the internal quotation marks, the so-called 'English' quotation marks, suspended." I was wrong: the last quotation marks signal the end of Dupin's discourse, which is what was important to me, and there is no error in the edition to which I am referring. The deletion of this phrase (which is inconsequential) is the only modification of this essay since its first publication.