

*Joyce the Symptom (I)*. Conference given by J. Lacan in the large auditorium of the Sorbonne on the 16th of June, 1975, at the opening of the 5th International James Joyce Symposium. The text was established by Jacques-Alain Miller, partially from the notes of Eric Laurent. Published in *L'Âne*, 1982, no. 6. Translated by Aaron Benanav.

I am not in top form today, for all sorts of reasons. With the approval of Jacques Aubert - you see me here at his insistence - Jacques Aubert is an eminent Joycean, and his theses on Joyce's aesthetics are eminently recommendable - with his approval I took the title *Joyce the Symptom*. Pardon my [pour]pastiche for a moment - it won't last - Joyce, the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake* - it's a dream, a dream in which Joyce takes us to a limit - what limit? This is what I want to try to say. This dream, *Finnegans*, does something that could not be done any better. I begin again, why would one want to spoil [pourriture] what man *pourspère* - which sounds like "to spoil in hoping" [also: for father] - why would we want the *journalité*, which gives us the news, to correctly transmit my title? Jacques Lacan - they don't even know who he is - Jules Lacue would do just as well - it's the English pronunciation of what we call, in our language, the tail [*la queue*]. Why would they print *Joyce the Symptom*? Jacques Aurbert told them, and so they did *Joyce the Symbol*. Its good enough for them; it's all the same. From the sym that ptoms to the sym that bols - what does it have to do with the bosom of Abraham - where everything spoiled finds itself, in its nature, as the *bonneriche* for etournity? However, I will set it right: *ptom*, *p'titom*, *p'titbonhomme* [little guy] - see again, in language, what we believed was necessary, between languages: to ptom the coincident bits. Because that's what they mean. Have a look at Bloch and von Warburg, the etymological dictionary, which is a mouthful, you will read there that symptom was formerly written *sinthome*. Joyce the *sinthome*, homophonic with *sainteté* [holiness] - some people perhaps remember that I televised it. If one continues to read the reference in Bloch and von Warburg, one realizes that Rabelais was the one who turned *sinthome* into *symptomate*. It's not so surprising: he was a doctor, and symptom already had its place in a medical language, though it is not certain. If I continue in the same vein, I would say that he *sympraumatized* something. The point is not to pastiche *Finnegans Wake* - one would never live up to Joyce - it is to say what I gave Joyce, in formulating this title, *Joyce the Symptom*: nothing less than his proper name, that in which I believe he would have recognized himself: the dimension of nomination. It is an assumption - he would have recognized himself in this, if I could still speak to him today. He would be 100 years old, and it is not useful to continue life so long; it would be funny to add any more.

### *Story-telling*

Leaving a rather sordid environment, Stanislas to name it, the child of a priest, like Joyce, but priests less serious than his - Jesuits - and God knows what he did with them - emerging from this sordid environment, at seventeen years old - thanks to the fact that I attended Adrienne Monnier - I met Joyce - just as I attended, when I was twenty years old, the first reading of the French translation of *Ulysses*. In fact, chances push us left and right, and we make of them - because it is we who braid it - our destiny. We make of these chances our destiny, because we speak. We believe that we say what we want, but really, it is what the others wanted, more particularly our family, that speaks us - take this 'us' as a direct object. We are spoken, and because of that, we make, of the chances that push us around, a sort of weave. And indeed, there is a weft - we call that our destiny. So that it is surely not by chance, though it is difficult to find the thread of it,

that I met James Joyce in Paris, whereas he was there for some time. Excuse this personal history. But I think that I do it only in homage to James Joyce.

### *University and Analysis*

I always lug around, in my life, wandering like everyone, an enormous quantity - there are so many - an enormous quantity of books, and Joyce's are on top - the others are about Joyce. I read them from time to time, but I applied myself in reading them, Jacques Aubert will be my witness, loads of them. I could see more than differences - I noticed a singular prevarication in how Joyce is received, and some of the prejudices with which he is used. In accordance with what Joyce knew would happen after his death, university professors dominate. It is almost exclusively academics who deal with Joyce. It is striking, Joyce said: 'What I write will not cease to give work to the academics'. He wanted nothing less than to occupy them until the extinction of the university. That clearly marks a path. It is evident that this is possible only because Joyce's text abounds with completely captivating problems, fascinating problems, to be put under the teeth of the academics. I am not an academic, contrary to how some take me: as professor, as master, or whatever else. I am an analyst - which immediately gives us a homophony with the four master analysts, of whom Joyce makes a great show in *Finnegans*, and who layed the foundation of the annals of Ireland. I am another species of analyst. Of the analysts who later emerged - one cannot say Joyce was smitten with them. Some authors, worth believing, who knew Joyce well, friends of his - and me, I foresaw it - readily attested that Joyce was freudened - if he was freudened of this humming [fredonnement], it was with aversion. I believe it's true. I find evidence in the fact that, in the constellation of the dream - from which there was no waking, in spite of the last word, *Wake* - in the weft of the characters in *Finnegans*, there are these two twins: Shem - allow me to call him Shemptom - and Shaun. I hope I am pronouncing this right, because I did not consult Jacques Aubert, on whom I relied terribly for this concoction. There are, anyway, Shemptom and Shaun. They are knotted, no more than twins often are. It is the other - not Shen, whom he calls, by adding a pin, the penman, the pen-pusher - it is to Shaun that Joyce pins Doctor Jones - that analyst whom Freud, the latter knew what he was doing, charged with writing his biography. Freud knew well enough, that is to say, he was sure that Jones would not put the least fantasy into it, that he would not permit himself, among other things, to push Freud's buttons - to bite, the agenbite of inwit. Somewhere in *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus speaks of the agenbite of inwit - the bite - it is translated, I don't know why - *la morsure de l'ensoi*; whereas what it means is the witticism, the internal witticism, the bite of a joke, the bite of the unconscious. With Jones, Freud was quiet - he knew his biography would be a hagiography. Obviously, if Joyce Shaunized, if I can say, the Jones in question - it gives us some sense of the importance, as someone said, of being Ernest. Moreso than Joyce, Jones - I tell you because I met him - made no small thing of being named Ernest. It was certainly a piece with that astonishing title of Wilde's, of which Jones made quite a show. More than once in *Finnegans*, this reference emerges - of the importance of being named Ernest.

### *Unsubscribed from the unconscious ...*

All of that serves only to bring us close to this point: it is not the same thing to say Joyce the sinthome and Joyce the symbol. I say Joyce the symptom: the symptom *abolishes* the symbol, if I can continue in this vein. And not only Joyce the symptom: Joyce insofar as, if I may say so, he unsubscribed from the unconscious. Read *Finnegans Wake*. You will

realize something plays, not with each line, but with each word: a very peculiar pun. Read it, there is not a word that does not do what - I tried to give you a taste of it with *'pourspère'*: made of three or four words that are, by their use, made to sparkle. It is astonishing, even though, in truth, in the sense we typically give it, something is lost. Clive Hart, in *Structure and Motif of Finnegans Wake*, speaks of his disappointment in the use Joyce made of this type of pun. Atherton, in his *Books at the Wake*, refers it to 'the unforeseen'. This pun, it's really a portmanteau in the sense of Lewis Carroll, who was his precursor - and having found Carroll rather late, Joyce must have been, says Atherton, somewhat bothered. Read a few pages of *Finnegans Wake*, without trying to understand: *it* reads itself. It reads itself, but as someone remarked, someone in my vicinity, it reads itself because one can sense the presence of the jouissance of he who wrote it. We may wonder - or at least what the person in question wondered - is this why Joyce published it? *This Work* that was for 17 years *in Progress*, why in the end did it come out black on white? It is lucky that there is only one edition, which permits us to designate, when we cite, the good page, that is, the page that will never carry but the same number. If it were necessary, as happens to other books, for it to have been edited with different paginations - how would one find anything! But that he published it - I wish, were he here, that I could convince him that he wanted to be Joyce the symptom, insofar as he gives the symptom its apparatus, its essence, its abstraction. Because if, as Clive Hart notes - one finds that, if one follows in Joyce's footsteps, one is, in the end, tired out - it only proves that your own symptoms are the only ones that carry interest for you. *The* symptom of Joyce is a symptom that does not concern you at all. It is the symptom insofar as there is no chance it will catch something of your unconscious. I believe that is the meaning of what that person said, who asked me about the reason for Joyce's publication.

*... though enjoying only the language*

We should continue questioning this great and final work, the work which, for Joyce, functioned as a stepping-stool. Because he was leaving, he wanted his name, very precisely his name, to survive forever. Forever means that it marks a date. No one ever made literature like this. And for this word 'literature' - to underline its weight - I would say the equivocation on which Joyce often puns - letter, litter. The letter is a bit of waste. However, were it not for this special sort of orthography of the English language, three quarters of the effect of *Finnegans* would be lost. The most extreme one, I can tell you, care of Jacques Aubert: 'Who ails tongue coddeau a space of dumbillsilly?'. If I had encountered this text in writing, would I or not perceive: 'Où est ton cadeau, espèce d'imbécile?' [where is your gift, you imbecile?] The amazing thing is that this trans-linguistic homophony is supported by only one letter in conformity with the English language. You would not know that who can change into *où* if you did not know that who in the interrogative sense is pronounced that way. There is a sort of ambiguity in this phonetic usage, which I would write f.a.u.n.e ['phon'-etic]. The faunesque of the thing rests entirely on the letter, that is, on something that is inessential to language, something woven by the accidents of history. That somebody makes an extraordinary use of the letter questions how much it has to do with language. I said that the unconscious is structured like a language. It is strange that I can also say 'unsubscribed from the unconscious' of someone who plays only with language - even if he uses a language which is not his own - precisely because his is an effaced language, to wit Gaelic, of which he knew a few small bits, enough to orient himself, but not much more - a language that is not his own but that of the invaders, the oppressors. Joyce said that Ireland has a master and a mistress, the master being the British Empire and the mistress the Catholic Church - apostolic and Roman

– both being the same sort of plague. That is what makes itself heard, in what makes Joyce the symptom, the pure symptom of the relation to language, insofar as one reduces it to a symptom – reduces it to that which it has for an effect, when one does not analyze that effect – I would say more, that one is forbidden from playing with any of the equivocations that would move one's own unconscious.

#### *Jouissance, not the unconscious*

If the reader is fascinated, in accordance with a name that echoes Freud's own (*Freude* = joy), it is because Joyce has a relation to joy, to jouissance, if he is written in the English language. This joy'ed, this jouissance is the only thing we can catch of his text. *There* is the symptom, the symptom insofar as nothing ties it to what makes language, for which the symptom acts as this screen, these scratches, this braiding of ground and air with which Joyce opens *Chamber Music*, his first published book, a book of poems. The symptom is, purely, that which conditions language, but in a certain way, Joyce takes the symptom to the very power of language - without making any of it analyzable. It is what strikes and literally forbids [*interdit*], in the sense that one says, I am dumbfounded [*je reste interdit*] - one uses this word forbidden to say dumbfounded in all its range. That is the substance of what Joyce does, and due to which, in some sense, literature can no longer be what it was before. It is not for nothing that Ulysses aspires, aspires to something Homeric, although there is not the least relation: Joyce led the commentators in this direction - between what happens in Ulysses and what happens in the Odyssey. To compare Dedalus to Telemachus, one would break one's back carrying the stack of commentaries on the Odyssey. And how to say that Bloom would be for Stephen, who does not have anything to do with him, except to cross him from time to time in Dublin, his father? It is only that Joyce already points out, and so indicates, that all psychic reality – that is, the symptom itself – depends in the end on a structure in which the Name-of-the-Father is an unconditional element.

#### *The borromean father*

The father – as a name and he who names – is not the same thing. The father is that fourth element – I evoke something which only some of my audience can have considered – that fourth element without which nothing is possible in the knot of the symbolic, imaginary and real. But there is another way to name it, and that is where I will stop today, in order to show you what all this has to do with the Name-of-the-Father to which Joyce testifies, what we can call the sinthome. It is insofar as the unconscious knots itself into a sinthome, which is what there is singularly in each individual, that one can say that Joyce, as it is written somewhere, identifies with the *individual*. He has made himself privileged enough to have, at the extreme point, incarnated in himself the symptom, that by which he escapes any possible death, by reducing himself to a structure that is precisely that of LOM [*l'homme*, man], if you will permit me to write it quite simply as l.o.m. Thus he carries himself, like something that puts a final point to a certain number of exercises. He puts a limit. But how should one hear the meaning of this limit? It is striking that Clive Hart emphasizes the cyclic and the cross as that to which Joyce substantially attaches himself. Some among you know that with this circle and cross, I draw the borromean knot. To interrogate Joyce on this, what this knot produces, namely the ambiguity of three and four, namely that to which he remains stuck: to the interrogation of Vico, to worse things, to conversations with spirits, what Atherton throws together under the general title of spiritualism, which surprises me, since I had called it spiritism. It is certainly

surprising to see that, this time, it contributes in *Finnegans* to the title of the symptom, I believe. That's not all, because it is difficult not to take account of this fiction: one can put it under the rubric of initiation. In what does that which carries itself under this register and under this limit consist? How many associations arm themselves with flags whose meanings they do not understand? That Joyce delighted in the *Isis Unveiled* of Mrs Blavatski is something I learned from Atherton, which strikes me. The form of mental debility that any initiation entails is something that I perhaps underestimate. It should be said that, shortly after I had, thank heavens, met Joyce, I was going to find a certain Rene Guenon, who was not worth more than the worst initiation. '*Hi ban a pas*' [*il y en a pas*: there's none], to write like the ass to which Joyce refers as a central point of these four limits: North, South, East and West, as a point of the crossing of the cross – an ass supports it, God knows Joyce stresses it in *Finnegans*. But nevertheless, *Finnegans*, this dream, how can one call it finished, since already its last word cannot but rejoin to its first, the 'the' on which it ends connects to the 'riverrun' with which it begins – which indicates that it is circular? All this is to say, how was Joyce able to miss this point, which I currently introduce, of the knot? By doing this I introduce something new, which gives an account not only of the limitation of the symptom, but also of that which knots itself to a body, so to speak, to the imaginary, which knots itself as well to the real, and like a third to the unconscious – the symptom has its limits. It is because it meets its limits that one can speak of the knot, which is something that undoubtedly crumples, that can be rolled into a ball, but that once unfolded, keeps its form, the form of the knot, and at the same time, the form of its ex-sistence. This is what I will allow myself to introduce in my path of next year, by taking Joyce, among others, as my support.