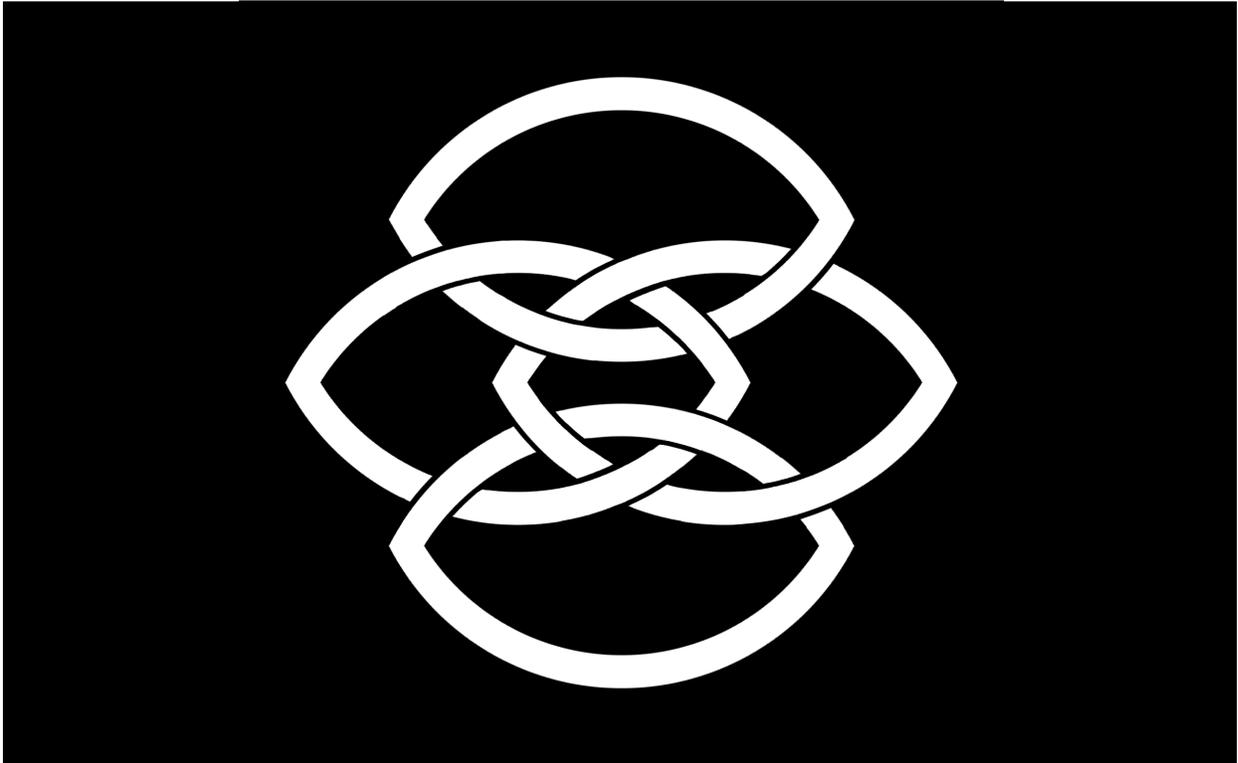

LC EXPRESS



In the Neighborhood of Joyce and Lacan

Adrian Price

Précis

While well known, Lacan's work on Joyce remains among the most difficult parts of his teaching. There are many aspects to this work to challenge us, including the complex linguistic formations that echo Joyce's own. Also, there are the challenges that we face unraveling the knot theory that Lacan is developing at this point in his career. In this text, Adrian Price provides for us a precise placement of this work with clear points of orientation that allow us to approach the Joyce seminar.

Thomas Svolos

In the Neighborhood of Joyce and Lacan

The following paper was delivered at the University of Costa Rica on November 7th 2014 at the invitation of Dr Néfer Muñoz.

On the Bloomsday of 1975, Jacques Lacan was invited by Jacques Aubert to open the fifth International Joyce Symposium at the Sorbonne. Lacan entitled his lecture “Joyce le symptôme”. His Seminar of the following academic year (since transcribed as Book XXIII: *Le sinthome*) was dedicated to the same theme¹. When Aubert asked Lacan for the text of his lecture for publication in the proceedings of the Symposium, Lacan gave him a considerably modified version: this is the text that appeared in the 1979 volume *Joyce & Paris*.²

This evening, I would like to rewind to the Seminar itself and the first version of “Joyce le symptôme”, the lecture version, transcribed by Éric Laurent and published by Jacques-Alain Miller in 1982.³ What is striking on reading this lecture alongside the Seminar is how the principal themes alter very little during the course of the year. Lacan makes a number of discoveries that lead him to shift his position very slightly, but the touchstones that he draws from Joyce’s work remain essentially the same from start to finish. Indeed, I would like to begin by noting that Lacan had already set out two key assertions in relation to Joyce in the years leading up to the Joyce Seminar that oriented his research through to the end.

Firstly, in his 1971 text “Lituraterre” Lacan speculates that, were Joyce to have accepted the invitation that was extended to him of a psychoanalysis with Jung (to be financed by his then benefactor, Edith Rockefeller McCormick), he would surely have “stood to gain nothing”, since in the wordplay that his writing exploits he was already in close touch with “the best that can be expected from psychoanalysis at its end.”⁴ This is an assertion that we find echoed seven years later, in Lacan’s last word on Joyce at the close of “Joyce the Symptom (II)”: Joyce pulled off the extraordinary feat of producing the “awakening” effect proper to jouissance when it has been stripped of meaning, when it becomes “opaque”; and this he managed “without resorting to the experience of analysis (which might have lured him

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¹ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII, Le sinthome, 1975-1976*, Paris: Seuil, 2005.

² Later included in the 2001 collection *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil, pp. 565-570.

³ Reprinted, with some minor editorial modification, in the appendix to Book XXIII, pp. 161-169.

⁴ Lacan, J., “Lituraterre” in *Hurly-Burly*, Issue 9, 2013, p. 29.

to some dull end).”⁵ From this first assertion, I would like to underscore the bond between opacity of jouissance and the symptom. Not just any symptom: the symptom such as we meet it at the end of the analytic process: divested of meaning and reduced to a residual kernel of satisfaction.

The second assertion that predates Lacan’s Sorbonne lecture is to be found in the Seminar *Encore*. At the end of the lesson from January 9th 1973, Lacan offers a formula for the precise nature of the wordplay at issue in Joyce: “the signifier comes to stuff the signified.” Lacan uses the word *truffer*⁶; literally “to garnish with truffles.”

To unpack this formula we need to recall that Lacan is employing a vocabulary, borrowed from Ferdinand de Saussure, which he had been using since the early 1950s: a signifier is any element capable of functioning as a bearer of meaning through its contradistinction with other such elements; the signified completes the linguistic sign by indicating the concomitant element that secures signification and the possibility of a meaning-effect. The distance between the purely symbolic entity (the signifier) and the signification to which it can give rise (the signified) is marked by a separating bar to underscore the fundamental distinction between them.

Recall too that Saussure held that the relationship between signifier and signified was entirely arbitrary. A number of commentators have contested the precise nature of this arbitrariness. Lacan himself in the Seminar *Encore* indicates that qualifying this link as arbitrary is surely not the most appropriate term, and that it would be better to speak in terms of the “contingency” of the link between what lies above and below the bar. In saying that the link was “arbitrary”, Saussure meant that nothing in the signifier predestines it to be linked to any particular signified, as is clear from the seemingly infinite variation displayed across the different words that indicate the same objects in different languages. This was why the linguistic science instituted by Saussure went hand in hand with the prohibition to go hunting in the diachronic dimension for primordial links between signifier and signified, a search that can ultimately lead in the direction of speculations about the Adamic language purported to predate the confusion of tongues described in Genesis chapter 11. Jacob Boehme’s *Natursprache* is one example of such esoteric speculation; Leibniz too succumbed to this brand of mysticism. Behind this speculation stands a belief that language is designed primarily for making meaning that can be communicated: the model of language as code. Lacan’s view is utterly different: what constitutes a language is the “collection of equivocations that its history has allowed to persist.”⁷ Thus, on the one hand there are no intrinsic or natural signs

⁵ Lacan, J., “Joyce le symptôme (II)”, *op. cit.*, p. 570.

⁶ Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book XX, Encore*, New York: Norton, 1998, p. 37.

⁷ Lacan, J., “L’étourdit” in *Autres écrits*, *op. cit.*, p. 490.

for the objects of the world (cf. the *Cratylus*), and on the other, any seeming unity of the linguistic sign is ultimately a false unity.

So, given this radical non-relation between signifier and signified, Lacan employs the structural model of the linguistic sign to give an account of Joyce's operation on language. He observes that in *Finnegans Wake* we meet a kind of "telescoping" of the signifier where words jumble together in a concertinaed fashion; the signified meanwhile does not fulfil the conventional function of producing coherent meaning effects. The signified is enigmatic. Lacan likens the signifier in *Finnegans Wake* to the *lapsus* in psychoanalysis: above all else, it calls upon a reader to unpack and unfold the jumble of signifiers. However, this *reading* stops short of a full *decoding* to the extent that the meaning that may be arrived at invariably pales in contrast to the powerful effect of the signifiers' interlocking. As Lacan observes, this interlocking produces an economic effect akin to the satisfaction that Freud identifies in the short-circuit produced by witticisms and puns.⁸

This is what Lacan is targeting by saying that the signifier stuffs the signified. The signified no longer denotes discrete and meaningful objects, propositions or concepts, it simply harkens back to an opaque satisfaction that it draws from the signifier. In a sense, we may translate Lacan's *truffer* by saying that the signified is *riddled* with the signifier. The signified remains a riddle.

So, these are two assertions that Lacan puts forward in the early seventies, but which form the essential backbone of his approach to Joyce right through to the end. What I would like to show this evening is how Lacan's labour throughout the academic year 1975-1976 seeks to work through this initial insight, to an extent that the various developments and discoveries will never stray far from these initial assertions.

Deciphering the Unconscious or Reading a Symptom

Before we delve into the text, we should take some measure of the care that Lacan displays when approaching Joyce so as to steer away from a psychobiographical reading. What is psychobiography? In a sense, it may be reduced to the following formula: it sets out an interpretation of a subject on the basis of textual material that the subject has left behind. This implies two things: that the subject is absent as a speaking subject, since he is present only through written or inscribed traces; and that the subject has somehow betrayed in these written or inscribed traces some knowledge of which he was not consciously aware. In other

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97. Cf. Freud, S., *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, PFL, pp. 168-9: "The pleasure in a joke arising from a short-circuit [...] seems to be greater the more alien the two circles of ideas that are brought together by the same word – the further apart they are, and thus the greater the economy which the joke's technical method provides in the train of thought."

words, the texts would ostensibly harbour something of the subject's unconscious. Now, there is something contradictory in this notion of an unconscious that would be legible in the absence of a speaking subject. Psychoanalysis is fundamentally a practice that allows the subject to speak, that prompts the subject to speak in a particular way, indeed, to develop an ethic of speaking. Without this speaking subject, analysis as such has no purpose.

Psychobiography divorces – or seeks to divorce – the subject's unconscious from the subject's act of uttering. And in so doing, it externalises a knowledge of the subject in a locus that is inaccessible to the subject. It assumes that it is possible to know more about a subject than the subject himself knows. Thus, it runs entirely counter to the psychoanalytic discourse, where any knowledge that does lie on the side of the analyst is kept “in check” by the fact that it cannot bear directly on the subject. The analyst's knowledge is essentially a supposed knowledge that allows the subject to say what he knows. Ultimately, however, when psychoanalysis is made to serve psychobiography, the disservice is not to the subject – who tends to emerge unscathed with his full dignity – but to psychoanalysis itself, which takes on the appearance of a method, or an indiscriminate theory that can be applied wholesale to anything and everything.

Joyce precludes an approach to decoding in the way of the classical Freudian decoding of the unconscious. Even with the wealth of biographical details that texts like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *Ulysses* supply, the reworking of the material of his life into the material of his art is of such considerable intricacy that tracing back the threads to coherent narrative accounts that isolate their initial strands in his concrete existence would be a pure nonsense. Arguably, this is the case for any artist worthy of the name, but it has to be said that Joyce did cultivate a particular relationship with his readers, interpreters and decipherers that sometimes sends them down this false path. Lacan alludes often to Joyce's admission that he wanted to keep the academics busy for three-hundred years, and certainly Lacan was himself wary of being drawn into this vortex by doing little more than contribute his own meagre slice to the already mountainous heap of studies available on the writer. But this vortex effect is not one that would amount to being drawn into the unconscious. On the contrary, his work “stands no chance whatsoever of hooking anything of your unconscious”. If one appreciates anything at all in Joyce's writing, then it is at the level of the symptom, and not at the level of the unconscious.

A Lapsed Imaginary

Lacan's chief inroad to Joyce in 1975 is via his ongoing enquiry into the nature of naming and proper names. Rather than simply considering what Joyce says about himself

through the character of Stephen Dedalus, Lacan is alert above all else to the names Joyce chooses.

The name “Dedalus” is of course borrowed from the cunning artificer of Greek mythology, but at the end of *A Portrait*, Joyce identifies more strongly with the son, Icarus, than the father. More precisely, it is the son who has met his misfortune by straying from the father’s course and aiming too high. Icarus “comes unstuck” by flying too close to the sun. Joyce produces another curious auto-nomination in this passage from the close of *A Portrait*. He calls himself a “lapwing”. A lapwing is a bird that flies in an irregular manner, but which will also flap its wings when on the ground in a way that suggests it has a broken wing, thereby luring egg-hunters away from its nest. The lap is the same lap that we meet in “lapse” or “lapsus”, from the Latin *labi*, “to slip” or “to fall”.

A Portrait is Joyce’s account of how he became, so to speak, a lapsed Catholic. There is one particular episode at the end of the book that Lacan highlights, where Stephen’s classmates give him a beating for being a “heretic”. Joyce notes that he was “pinioned”, which literally means he had his hands bound behind him, but the term also refers to the clipping of a bird’s wings. At the metaphorical level, Stephen is a lapwing whose wings were clipped as a result of straying from the conventional course.

Lacan is particularly alert to the nature of this lapse, this clipping. He underscores how Joyce mentions that after the episode of the beating, he no longer feels any anger towards the perpetrators, and expressly refers to his anger slipping away from him, “as easily as a fruit is divested of its soft ripe peel”. Joyce’s metaphor condenses affect and the outer shell of a body. Given that affects are essentially phenomena that belong to the imaginary register, that is to say, when the body is affected by virtue of its imaginary composition, Lacan understands the divesting that Joyce describes as nothing less than the shedding of the body as such.⁹ We might add the fact that when Joyce gave his friend Stuart Gilbert the explanatory table for the chapters of *Ulysses*, where each chapter corresponds to an organ of the body, the first three chapters – Stephen’s chapters – have no allotted organs because Stephen “does not yet bear a body.”

The ego too is composed as a projective surface, with contours provided by the mirror image of the body. This, at least, is the classical version of the ego, of the Freudian *Ich* that is built on the narcissistic model of mirror identification. Lacan’s thesis is that Joyce was not particularly attached to this form of ego, that he could allow it to fall away, that he would let it drop, as something that is not indispensable to him. Indeed, one can say that the world of affects, sentiments, rivalries, and so on, carries little weight in Joyce’s writing. This classical

⁹ G. Morel has drawn up a list of related occurrences in *A Portrait* where affects of anger or resentment are discarded in the manner of an outer layer falling away from a body. See “A young man without an ego: a study on Joyce and the mirror stage”, in Adams, P. (ed.), *Art: Sublimation or Symptom*, 2003, pp. 137-8.

version of the *Ich* translates into French as *le moi*. The “me.” This *moi* is entirely absent from *Seminar XXIII*.

Lacan doesn't read this lapse, this faltering, this clipping, as a metaphor. He takes it literally, and in this respect he goes beyond the psychologising approach which could easily suppose that Joyce had undergone some kind of trauma or narcissistic wound at the time of the beating. Lacan's thesis is more radical: there was no narcissistic wound because narcissism as such was allowed to slip away. To use the Lacanian vocabulary, the imaginary register was allowed to slip away. The question, then, for Lacan, is what was Joyce left with? What was left to him by which to maintain a psychical reality? What was the precise nature of the fault that occasioned this lapse? And how could the lapse be mended or put right?

The Borromean Knot: A Misnomer

To tackle these questions we need to consider the other two registers that Lacan foregrounds: the symbolic and the real; or more precisely, the fashion in which these registers interlink.

From the early 1970s, Lacan gave a place of growing importance in his teaching to what he initially calls the Borromean knot. Whereas Lacan had previously sought to form some grasp of the architecture of what Freud called “psychical reality” by means of geometry and topology – precisely the topology of surfaces and planes – from the seventies onwards, he turned to a new kind of im-ply-cation that bore no longer on the “ply” of the plane but the “ply” of the *pli*, the fold.

When a subject arrives in analysis, he lays out his story as a tangle of threads, much like the mass of twisted coils heaped on the floor in Jeff Wall's photograph “Untangling”, and it takes some time to start to ascertain the sites at which one can set about tugging and threading in order to unravel things a little. But more precisely, it's a matter of ascertaining the points at which, occasionally, things are best left in a tangle, because an over-eager untangling could easily unwind the strands to the point that the subject falls apart. This can happen. The tact of the analyst is to form an idea of what can be trimmed and sliced, and what is best left in a tangle. The analyst approaches this tangle like the mathematician, by trying to see what the minimum number of essential *crossing points* are. This gives what mathematicians call the “minimal projection” of a knot or a link, the pared-down version devoid of nugatory loops.

This figure shows a set of three rings that feature on the coat of arms of the Borromeo family. The rings are bound together in a “Brunnian link” (after the German mathematician Hermann Brunn). The Brunnian property is that the components of a link are tied together in such a way that should one sever any one of the components, the rest will come free. A

Borromean link is the simplest form of Brunnian link, with the fewest components (3) and the lowest number of crossings (6).

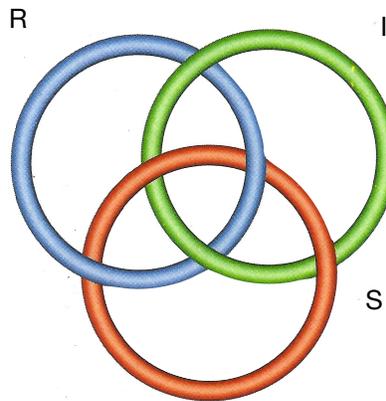


Figure 1 (L6a4/Rolfsen 6³₂)

The number of components and crossings allow the links to be classified. There are different systems for notating, tabulating, and depicting the knots and links. For example, the Borromean rings feature in the Thistlethwaite notation as L6a4. “L” means that the components form a Link, “6” means that there are six crossing points, “a” means that the crossings alternate, over and under. Only the number “4” is arbitrary in the sense that this link is one of several that have 6 alternating crossings. Another commonly used notation system is the Alexander-Briggs notation which was expanded into the Rolfsen tabulation. In this system, the Borromean link features as 6 superscript 3 subscript 2. Once again, “6” denotes the number of crossing points, but this time the number of components features in the notation: “3”. The subscript number is the arbitrary number, simply denoting that there is at least one other link with six crossings and three components.

Lacan doesn’t use these notations, and indeed his vocabulary at the start of the seminar is a little imprecise, in as much as he refers to the Borromean rings as a “knot”. Strictly speaking, “Borromean knot” is a misnomer, as Lacan apparently came to realise sometime over the 1975 Christmas break. In the first lesson of 1976 he admits that, “a link is not the same thing as a knot”. A knot consists of just one component. A link implies two or more components. The Borromean rings have three components, and thus they are a link, not a knot. In *Seminar XXIII*, Lacan never fully adopts the new reflex of systematically calling multi-component sets “links” instead of “knots”, with the result that much of the analytic community who have ventured on this terrain over the past forty years have fallen into the same trap by

failing to heed those few moments in the Seminar when Lacan does manage to correct himself by adamantly reiterating the correct terminology.

A second sense in which “Borromean knot” is, strictly speaking, a misnomer, at least when Lacan employs it to speak of the links with four or more components, is that what Lacan calls “the Borromean property” corresponds more conventionally to the aforementioned Brunnian property. When Lacan speaks of a link tied “in Borromean fashion”, it equates with the criterion of a Brunnian link, which holds that both the minimum cutting number, μ , (i.e. the smallest number of cuts that suffice to unlink all the remaining rings) and the maximum cutting number, M , (i.e. the largest number of cuts that can be applied to unlink all the remaining rings) of a given link are equal to 1. It has been shown, for example, using the more conventional definition of the Borromean property ($\mu = 1, M > 1$), that a four-component Borromean chain exists where $M = 2$. Lacan’s definition coincides with the conventional definition only in that $\mu = 1$.

Nevertheless, with Lacan and Joyce we enter a realm in which the very term “misnomer” carries little sense. There is naming *tout court*, and who is to lay down the law that stipulates whether any given name is correctly used or not? Indeed, Lacan’s use of the name “Borromean knot” appears to bring with it one surprising consequence. As Lacan notes on a few occasions in *Seminar XXIII*, the Borromean link may be transformed into a knot by performing splices at the inner crossing points.¹⁰ This shows that what interests Lacan above all else are the outer crossing points of the Borromean rings, the three peripheral overlaps (in the conventional depiction of the three rings), and not the three inner overlaps which are superfluous in the use he makes of the link.

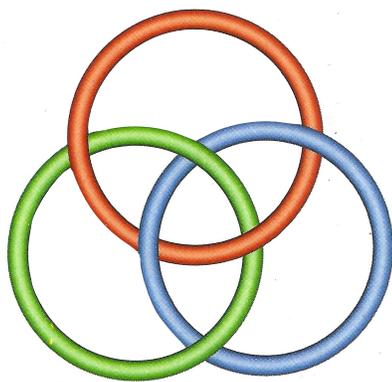


Figure 1a (L6a4/Rolfsen 6^3_2)

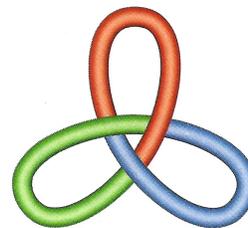


Figure 1b (Rolfsen 3_1)

¹⁰ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII, op. cit.*, p. 42, p. 45, & pp. 86-7.

This oscillation between the three-component link and the three-crossing knot is encapsulated in a new nomination: the *chainoeud*, which we may translate as “linknot”. The three-crossing knot that is produced by the splicing operation is the so-called *trefoil knot*, the simplest form of knot one can tie. It is basically an overhand knot with the loose ends spliced together. This is the knot that you perform every day, when you tie your shoelaces, when you truss a joint for a roast, when you tie up a thread after sewing, and so on and so forth, indeed any one of these everyday operations that seem to be so peculiar to the human species, despite the existence of highly dextrous claws and digits in some sections of the animal kingdom and ready access to vines or threads in the plant kingdom. Indeed, this simple overhand knot seems to require an elementary form of deliberation that perhaps draws on the kind of symbolic operation that remains foreclosed to all but humankind. The role of knots, even these simple overhand knots, in creating snares or tying on clothing, would seem to indicate that the knot has a pre-eminent place in fundamental human activity.

For Lacan, the trefoil knot, or what he calls with some ambiguity the *noeud à trois* (where at least once the *trois* seems to denote the components rather than the crossing points) is the support for “any sort of subject.” By “any sort of subject” Lacan means that this is a trans-structural support. It ensures that the real, the symbolic and the imaginary are held together in such a way that the subject is supported. If any of the three crossing points are botched, the knot comes undone. It becomes an unknot. In the same way that the Borromean link goes directly from a three-component link to zero link if one of the rings is cut, the trefoil knot goes directly from three crossings to zero crossings. In other words, just as there is no Brunnian link of just two components, there is no knot of just two crossings.¹¹

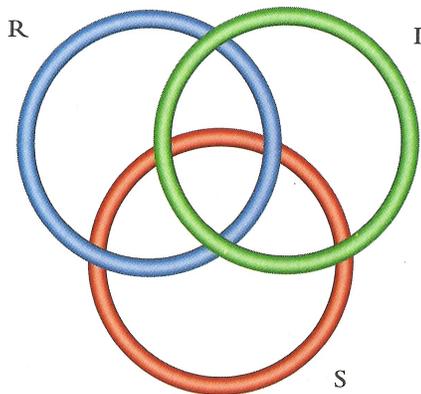


Figure 2a (Rolfsen 0^3_1)

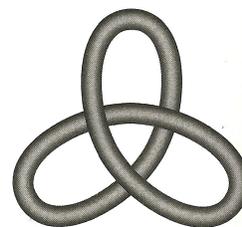


Figure 2b (Rolfsen 0_1)

¹¹ Figures 2a and 2b are not minimal projections. Each of the apparent crossing points are actually trivial.

If the trefoil knot falters, then, we can suppose that we are faced with something like the triggering of a schizophrenia. Imaginary, symbolic and real come apart and the personality dissolves. The imaginary of the body no longer holds, giving rise to the so-called negative symptoms of bodily neglect or to hallucinatory phenomena where the organs or members of the body appear detached. The symbolic no longer performs its metaphorization of the subject, its representational function. Meanwhile the real becomes the site of the signifier that has been rejected from the symbolic, and as such no longer remains in abeyance but invades the subject. This is the kind of deductive use to which the knots and links may, tentatively, be put.

Notice that I said “triggering of a schizophrenia” and not “triggering of a psychosis”. On the contrary, the trefoil knot, as the minimum support of “any sort of subject”, produces a paranoid personality. In the trefoil knot, *imaginary*, *symbolic* and *real* are in continuity. This gives rise to the paranoid mechanism that Lacan described in *Seminar III*: first there is the isolation of some captivating element in the real (Lacan gives the example of a red car seen in the street); then, by virtue of being isolated in this way, it takes on the value of a signifier (“the red car”); and lastly, since the function of a signifier is to support a signified, an imaginary signification is generated, even if this is nothing more than the *signification of signification* (the red car must mean something, it is meaningful, only I don’t know what it means – it just means that it means).¹² Ultimately, this imaginary signification can slip back into the real, isolating further elements in support of the signification that is starting to burgeon.

A paranoid subject can be an extremely robust and well-functioning subject, even one with a certain dynamism. This is what can make diagnosis of paranoia somewhat problematic in the absence of a clear-cut or openly expressed delusion. The paranoid subject is a reasoning and reasonable subject, who understands and solicits your understanding. In paranoia, things make sense. This is why Lacan says that sometimes the only diagnostic clue to the paranoia is a certain dialectical inertia. The paranoid personality is caught in the continuity of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary, and this produces a rigid circular channelling.

The Dimension of Naming

It is at this point that Lacan introduces the component that can be added to the three supports to ensure that the full nodal set functions as a neurotic or pseudo-neurotic structure. According to the logic of linkage that Lacan sets out in *Seminar XXIII*, this fourth element can bind together the three unlinked components such as we meet them in schizophrenia, or counter the dialectical inertia of paranoia by introducing a heterogeneous entity. The binding

¹² Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book III, The Psychoses*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 9.

element may also be figured as a second component added to the faulty trefoil knot (the unknot), producing L7a1.

This binding component is equivalent to what he calls the symptom, or, using the spelling that he finds in the Block and von Wartburg etymological dictionary: *sinthome*.

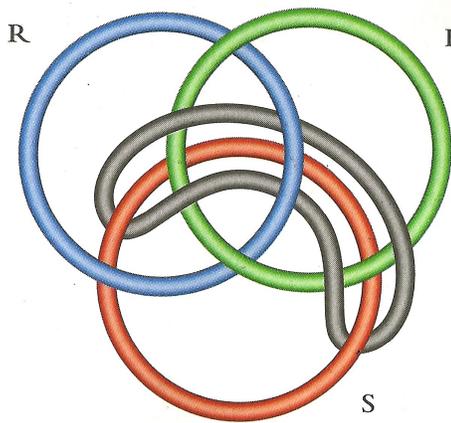


Figure 3a

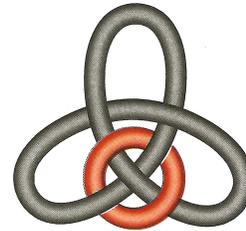


Figure 3b (L7a1/Rolfsen 7²₆)

In the dictionary, it carries the first attested date of 1495. Lacan says that *sinthome* is an “old way” of spelling symptom, but more than likely it was a *hapax legomenon* used exclusively by Bernard de Gordon in his medical incunable, *Fleur de Lys en medecine*.¹³ By the time that Rabelais was writing (just a few years later) – like de Gordon, Rabelais was a medical practitioner – *sinthome* had been transformed into *symptomate*, which resembles more closely both the contemporary form and the original Greek construction. Lacan underlines the Greek etymology, as reported by Bloch and von Wartburg, of “coincidence”. Quite literally, the *ptom* means that something “befalls” what is indicated by *syn-*, the coextensive entity. In this case the coextensive entity is the trefoil knot as the support of “any sort of subject”. The symptom befalls the subject as a heterogeneous incidence. It is integrated, but never to the point that it will take on a consistent or equivalent standing with the three consistent and equivalent components that we know as the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. It will tend to appear to be a foreign body, one that abides in coincidence with the personality rather than being consistent with it.

The first example that Lacan gives of this fourth term is the Father, in the sense that the Father is reduced to his Name. Indeed, each of the further examples that Lacan will give of potential fourth-term components will have to do with the names they bear. Classically speaking, the Father is reduced to his Name in so far as he is particularised in the mother’s

¹³ Where one also finds the adjectives *sinthomaique(s)* and *sinthomatique*.

speech. The mother evidences a stable reference point in her desire by consistently evoking a particular Name when speaking to her child. In this respect, the classical paternal metaphor resolves an enigma: the enigma of the mother's desire. Her desire, and her jouissance too, are accounted for by a Name that stands in opposition to the dyadic mother-child relationship. I said that it "resolves" the enigma. Effectively what it does is to switch one enigma for another: it imposes the enigma of phallic signification. The phallus emerges as a signified in the locus of the Other. The phallus is selected as the eminent signifier for this operation in that it accounts for an attribute of the father that is never revealed in any material sense. In contrast to the potential swell of *signification of signification* that we saw in the paranoid mechanism, the phallic signifier functions as an end term, an anchor, to the further development of signification. The enigma is *resolved* without being *solved* as such: it indicates sexual jouissance while maintaining the enigmatic quality of that jouissance.

The chief consequence of the phallic signifier, as Lacan indicated in 1958, is "to designate meaning effects as a whole."¹⁴ The phallic signifier "conditions" these meaning effects: it "provides the ratio of desire." This can reach very far, it goes from the oft-attested fact that one can easily attach a phallic or sexual meaning to nigh-on anything by means of innuendo, and extends to the support that this signifier can provide when the subject is called upon to fulfil a role that corresponds to that of a man or a woman, whether sexually or socially. More generally, it gives rise to "the jouissance of the imaginary body" that "sustains a certain number of gaps;" gaps "that constitute the different objects that occupy" this body.

Returning to these themes in 1971, Lacan notes that both *Name-of-the-Father* and *phallus* are proper names. At this time he was shifting his focus away from the principally Francophone structuralist edifice of the Saussure-Dumézil-Jacobson-Benveniste tradition to the Anglo-German tradition of the logic of denotation explored by Frege, Russell, Strawson and Carnap. In other words, he was moving away from the signifier-signified dichotomy to look at the finer yet more problematic distinctions involved in the name-reference dichotomy. His principle touchstone in this debate is not, however, the aforementioned authors, but the American philosopher Saul Kripke, whose recently delivered Princeton lectures on *Naming and Necessity* were then being translated by Lacan's young associate François Recanati.

Proper names, not to mention many types of common noun such as natural-kind terms, do not simply name objects, they entail a real dimension. This is what Lacan calls the "realism of the name" (in contrast to a "nominalism of the real"). It is not a matter of appending names to the real (which invariably falls wide of the mark), it is that the very act of naming introduces jouissance, paradoxically, as a default reference. Crucially, however, the dimension of naming stands apart from the three registers of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. It

¹⁴ Lacan, J., *Écrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966, p. 690.

may partake of any of the three, but will do so from a fourth position. Hence the affinity between the name and symptom.

$$\Sigma \approx N$$

In late Lacan, the Name-of-the-Father is as much the Name given by the Father as the Name that he bears.¹⁵ The Name-of-the-Father introduces jouissance as a referent, and indeed Lacan always insisted that his article on “The Signification of the Phallus” needs to be coupled with its German title (the text was presented in Munich): *Die Bedeutung des Phallus*. *Bedeutung* is reference, denotation, implying a firmer bond between name and referent than we meet in signification. Lacan will even go so far as to say that the phallus is the only *Bedeutung* in language, in that all other names fall short of the real when they try to grasp it, slipping back into the signifier / signified scheme with its inherent metonymic slippage. The phallus is the sole stable signifier to stand at the intersection of the symbolic and the real. The signification of the phallus is secondary: it is the extension of phallic signification to meaning effects “as a whole”, with the imaginary dimension that this implies.

Now, as Éric Laurent has observed, however firm the *Bedeutung* of the phallus may be, the fundamentally arbitrary link between signifier and signified is just as arbitrary in the paternal metaphor: “The collapse of the Ancien Régime and the belief in the Father that it used to support, along with the accumulation in the industrial metropolises of forms of kinship that hitherto did not mix, revealed the arbitrary nature of the Father.”¹⁶ This is the context that James Joyce was born into, and everything seems to indicate that Joyce did not share this belief in the Father. To pursue the pun that Lacan makes in *Seminar XXIII*, we can say that the *arbitrariness* of the sign is conventionally superseded by the *arbitration* of a higher power, an *umpire* that extends its *empire* over the body.¹⁷ Joyce seems to have done everything to shake off the yoke of this *imperium*.

Here we meet a fork in our epistemological path. On one hand, we can go down the route of psychobiography, speculating that for Joyce the paternal metaphor was foreclosed on account of his neglectful, alcoholic father who entrusted his eldest son’s upbringing to the

¹⁵ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII, Le sinthome*, op. cit., p. 22. This point had been developed in the lesson of March 11th 1975 from *Le séminaire XXII, R.S.I.* (unpublished).

¹⁶ Laurent, É., “Psychosis, or Radical Belief in the Symptom” in *Hurly-Burly*, Issue 8, 2012, p. 245. This hypothesis of the “social decline of the paternal *imago*” (*Autres écrits*, op. cit., p. 60) represents nothing less than the reversal of the system that according to the hypothesis of Holden and Mace first took hold in prehistory with the shift from hunter-gatherer or crop harvesting communities to stockbreeding societies. The safeguarding of cattle and sheep entailed stronger paternal and fraternal bonds, as the researchers noted in contemporary Bantu-speaking tribes in Africa where the spread of herding goes hand in hand with the loss of matriliney in favour of patrilineal kinship systems. Cf. Holden, C., & Mace, R., “Spread of cattle led to the loss of matriliney in Africa: A co-evolutionary analysis” in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 270, 2003, pp. 2425-2433.

¹⁷ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII, Le sinthome*, op. cit., p. 19.

Jesuit fathers rather than rear his own offspring. This is the hypothesis of the father's "abdication" as the condition of a foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father for the son. Lacan certainly pursues this route at certain points in *Seminar XXIII*, but this line of the fork is only indicated by what stands to be read on the other path, which takes the materiality of Joyce's oeuvre as evidence of a fourth term that successfully binds the three registers of imaginary, symbolic and real, albeit with little indication of a paternal metaphor as the condition of a phallic *Bedeutung* of jouissance. Indeed, Lacan asserts that Joyce's psychical reality "depends in the final analysis on a structure in which the Name-of-the-Father is a non-conditioned element".

The key assertion that Lacan introduces in the Sorbonne lecture is that "there is another term" for the fourth component, a term that is different from the Name-of-the-Father, and which is the *sinthome*. To be more precise, the Father can be a *sinthome*, it is an element that belongs to the *sinthome* category, but there are other ways of embodying this *sinthome* that do not entail the Name-of-the-Father. Indeed, the shift from the clinic described in 1958 to the new clinic of the mid-seventies is that in the former the Name-of-the-Father was a symbolic element, but one which under certain circumstances can be foreclosed from the symbolic, resulting in a hole. In the latter clinic, the symbolic is, of its very nature, a hole. The Name-of-the-Father stands apart from the symbolic in a fourth dimension. As a Name, it shares certain characteristics with the symbolic (i.e. a name is a signifier), but it possesses further intrinsic properties that set it apart. Thus, foreclosure in the first clinic bears on a symbolic element that, when foreclosed, renders the symbolic as a whole unstable, while in the second clinic, the symbolic is invariably stable, simply subsisting alongside the other registers, but changing in character somewhat through the specific intervention of the fourth term. The consistence of the imaginary emerges as the most precarious component.

There is an ambiguity here in Lacan's reading of Joyce, or rather, a slight shift in position as the Seminar progresses. In the first lesson, Lacan says that Joyce has to "support the Father for him to subsist", but in the fourth lesson he admits that all the father-son allusions in *Ulysses* are red herrings with little substance. He concludes by saying that Joyce "remained deeply-rooted in his father while still disowning him". A further formula on this theme appears at the end of the February 10th lesson: "The name that is proper to him is what Joyce valorizes at the expense of the father". (Thus, it is no longer a matter of supporting the father, but of supporting his own proper name by means of the *sinthome*). And then yet another recasting of the formula appears in the February 17th lesson: "in wanting a name for himself [...] Joyce came up with a compensation for the paternal failing". But Lacan indicates that these formulas are unsatisfactory; what is at issue here may be far better stated.

Let's look at how Lacan approaches this *sinthome* via the Name and naming, but a name that is not the Name-of-the-Father.

The Doubling of the Common and the Proper

In his recently published *Lost in Cognition*, Éric Laurent informs us that the shifting perspective that Lacan introduces in the lesson of March 16th stands to gain further clarity when read alongside Lacan's comments following Jacques Aubert's lecture to the Freudian Field, published in *Analytica* issue 4.¹⁸ Lacan had been examining a curious property of the links that was first brought to light by John Milnor in 1954 and further formalized by R. H. Bing. What has since become known as "Bing doubling" refers to the fact that when a link component is duplicated, it can, in some arrangements, hold the link together in a way that would not suffice were there only the single component. The paradigmatic example that Lacan refers to in the Seminar is Milnor's doubling of the two components of the Whitehead link (L5a1/Rolfsen 5²₁), and then the removal of the Whitehead torsion (the point at which the figure of eight intersects itself).¹⁹ If there were only two components, the undoing of the Whitehead torsion would lead the link to fall apart. With the doubling of elements, however, the set holds together as a four-component Borromean link (L10n107).²⁰ Mathematicians speak in terms of performing "surgery" on the node set.

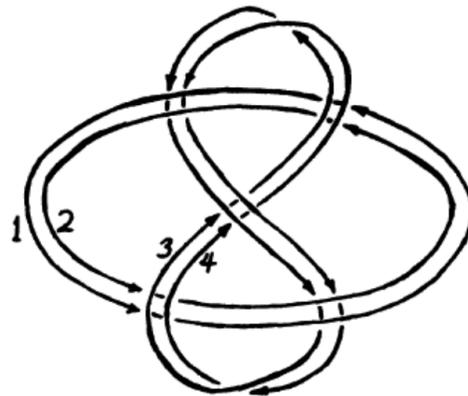


Figure 4: Reproduction of Milnor's doubling of the components in the Whitehead link (prior to removal of Whitehead torsion)

¹⁸ Laurent, É., *Lost in Cognition*, London: Karnac, 2014, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹ Milnor, J., "Link Groups" in *Annals of Mathematics*, Vol. 59, issue 2, 1954, pp. 177-196; cited in Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII, op. cit.*, p. 122.

²⁰ In fact, this is the link we alluded to earlier where $M = 2$.

Lacan draws on this surgical property to hypothesise what he calls “a doubled imaginary, an imaginary of security.”²¹ Éric Laurent observes that this duplication of the imaginary is bound to the duplications of pronominalization described in the earlier lessons of *Seminar XXIII*. Let’s look at this more closely.

First there is Joyce’s own surname, which Lacan claims Joyce wanted to “endure forever.” Lacan goes on to reiterate a point he had made in the opening paragraphs of “Lituraterre,” to wit, that the name “Joyce” is itself an equivocation between a proper name and a common noun. The proper name “Joyce” slides towards the common noun “joy” (in much the same way that Freud’s own surname translates as something along the lines of “joy”).²² “Joy” carries the same Latin root as “jouissance”, and in a sense equates with the elated aspect of certain forms of jouissance. When Lacan names Joyce “Joyce the Symptom”, he is thereby alluding to the fact that Joyce turns his own surname into something more than a mere signifier with a signified: it functions in a similar fashion to the phallic signifier, as a *Bedeutung* denoting jouissance. Lacan insists on this in different ways. The name “Joyce” is not a signifier appended to a signified; it has become a privileged signifier on account of Joyce “having reached the extreme point of embodying the symptom in himself”. This is what Lacan means when he says that, with the proper name “Joyce the Symptom” that he has supplied, Joyce “would have recognised himself within the dimension of naming.” Note Lacan’s somewhat torturous syntax here. He’s not saying that Joyce would have recognised the appellation “Joyce the Symptom” as an adequate moniker, he’s supposing that Joyce would have been sensitive to Lacan’s act within the dimension of naming in his regard. He would have been sensitive to the *Bedeutung* that Lacan achieves. It’s a hypothesis, of course. But this hypothesis forms the backbone to Lacan’s approach to Joyce.

Once we set out on the trail of hunting out Joyce’s proper names in his work, the list of substitutions goes on and on: Dedalus, lapwing, Kinch, Shem the Penman, Nego (identified by Jacques Aubert²³), but what counts for Lacan is not to pursue this series, but simply to note that, “the fact that we can pile up a whole stack of them ultimately leads to one thing – it introduces the proper name back into the common nouns”.

We know that Joyce was especially partial to these slips between common and proper noun. Lacan cites the example of the picture of Cork that Joyce had on his wall, and which he had gone to great lengths to have framed in *Quercus suber*. Frank O’Connor relates how, paying Joyce a visit at home, he walked into the trap of enquiring exactly what hung before

²¹ *Analytica* Issue 4, 1977, p. 17.

²² Lacan mentioned this fact at an event to commemorate the centenary of Freud’s birth, on May 16th, 1956. See Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book III, The Psychoses, op. cit.*, p. 232.

²³ Aubert, J., “Passed over stories” in *Hurly-Burly* Issue 4, 2010, pp. 167-84.

him: “Cork” replied Joyce. “Yes, I see it’s Cork”, replied O’Connor, “I was born there. But what’s the frame?” “Cork,” came the reply.

Another example, this time slipping in the opposite direction (from common noun to proper noun) is the famous Mc’Intosh episode from the sixth chapter of *Ulysses*. A newspaper reporter at the funeral is jotting down the names of those present, and asks Bloom, “do you know that fellow in the, fellow was over there in the...” Bloom replies: “Macintosh. Yes I saw him.” Before he has time to correct him, the journalist has scribbled down “M’Intosh” and beaten a hasty retreat.

Laurent argues that such substitutions of names form a hole: Joyce shows how “the common signification of a language can be formed in a different way. It can even become entirely formed of holes.”²⁴ In *Finnegans Wake*, each word “is a letter that has been taken up in highly singularised networks.” This is not the phallus that infects meaning “as a whole” with its phallic signification. This is a case where the transfiguration process transforms every noun into a proper name that designates the “dreamer himself,” who is nowhere to be found as a character in the book. And this in turn allows these proper names to become common names once more, “the common names of the idiosyncratic tongue that it is up to us to decipher.”²⁵

This pluralisation of the proper name is evident in the very title of the book, where the absence of apostrophe indicates the plurality of “Finnegans”, a name which itself carries the paradox of *fin*, “end”, again: to end again. Thus the title duplicates the circular structure of the book whose last word, its *fin mot*, sends us back to the beginning again.

Thus, if Joyce does indeed valorize his proper name in his art, seeking to make it something “more than the master signifier”, this has to be distinguished from the fairly commonplace tactic of selecting a penname or literary double to be promoted in the public eye. Joyce achieves a singular transformation of *signifiers* into *names* that double up as common nouns and proper nouns, with a unique referential collapse between the position of author and the jouissance of the text.

We might note at this juncture the fine distinction that has been drawn in contemporary linguistics between “proper name” and “proper noun”. This is a distinction that operates better in English than in many other languages where the word for name and noun are identical. The “proper name” singularises the proper noun even further, since a proper noun may be shared by different entities or individuals. This often entails a matching of signifiers, or an introduction of some form of deixis or indexicality. “Joyce the Symptom” achieves this: it singularises to the point that it denotes a singleton, a set with just one element. It is a concept

²⁴ Laurent, É., *Lost in Cognition*, op. cit., p. 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

with no extension, as Jacques-Alain Miller reminds us in his 2008 course, *Choses de finesse*.²⁶ In being *intensional*, as opposed to *extensional*, it stands a chance of touching “upon something real.”²⁷

Equivalence of Signification, Difference of Reference

To contrast with the lapse that we saw earlier, let’s turn now to the prelapsarian by examining the theme of naming in Genesis. Whilst Lacan too respects the Saussurian prohibition on reconstructing the Adamic tongue, this doesn’t stop him from examining the structure of Divine Creation such as it is set out in the first three Chapters of Genesis. What initially catches Lacan’s attention is the proper noun “Adam”. Throughout the Hebrew text of Chapter 1-3, we find the term *Ha-adam*. *Adam* quite literally means “man”, with an ambiguity between *this one fellow here* and *mankind* in general. Note, however, the appended definite article *Ha*. This is why Lacan says that Yahweh’s act of naming is congruent with Peirce’s definition of the index. It’s a matter of “This man here”. Lacan replicates this index by providing his own translation: LOM. LOM is a proper name derived from the French noun *homme* prefixed by the definite article *l’*.

LOM

HA-ADAM

You can see the ambiguity that this creates when considered from the angle of signification. It’s the ambiguity that one meets in the text of Genesis, especially given the absence of modern orthographic conventions like capital letters, hyphens, or apostrophes in the Ancient Hebrew text. The fall of man, his lapse, is both Adam’s fall and the fall of all mankind.

And so the question arises, what about woman? Latterly people have tried to get round the problem by using the term “human” or “humankind”, but that merely sidesteps the issue since these signifiers all share the same root. Lacan says that there are “*femmes chez LOM*”, but these are the hysterics, those that *faire l’homme*, that play the role of the man. So, he further scrutinises the text of Genesis, and finds another ambiguity. In 2:18, and again in verse 20, we find the curious expression *ezer k’enegdo*. The King James Version gives “an helpmeet for him”, and the vast majority of translations since have proffered something along the same lines. But this *k’enegdo* is a tricky term. In the whole of the Old Testament it appears only in

²⁶ Miller, J.-A., § “Kipling’s cat” from “The Unconscious and the Symptom”, in *Hurly-Burly*, Issue 5, 2011, pp. 42-44. See also §16 from Miller’s “Notice de fil en aiguille” in the appendix to Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII, op. cit.*, pp. 236-8.

²⁷ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII, op. cit.*, p. 152.

this chapter. It seems actually to mean something more like “against”. This in any case was how André Chouraqui rendered it in the French translation he published in 1974: *une aide contre*, “a helpmeet against”.

Whereas man is caught between the singular LOM of “the man” and the totality of all mankind, Lacan asserts that the definite article is not appropriate to woman. He does so with a formula that has achieved a certain notoriety: *La femme n'existe pas*. This is a way of indicating that whenever woman is singularised in the sense of “The Woman of my life”, “The Woman for me”, or “The one and only”, it invariably has a ring of inauthenticity. Lacan frequently alludes to a particular penchant that some men have for elevating their spouse to the status of this “one and only” which tends to strike us as somewhat comical: think for example of the word that Lacan underlines in the Jones biography to describe Freud’s attachment to his wife: *uxorious*. Believing in The Woman tends to go hand in hand with this kind of uxorious attachment. Lacan diagnoses the same attachment at the root of Hamlet’s woes, stating that Old Hamlet, Hamlet’s father, displayed something like a courtly love for his wife, Queen Gertrude: when courtly love “appears outside the field of strictly cultural and ritualistic references [...] it is the sign of some shirking faced with the difficult paths that gaining access to true love implies.”

Lacan places Eve on the side of the mythical woman, woman prefixed by the definite article, She that does not exist. Meanwhile, he pursues the “helpmeet against” in the direction of she that forms an objection to the totalising *all*. “All, but not that!” Lacan finds it more convincing to account for woman’s position in relation to LOM by means of this “but not that.”²⁸

We could go much further down this line, but what I wanted to show is that in and of itself, a signifier can give rise to all sorts of equivocations. The mere signifier “man” is not enough to create a stable sexed identity. When Lacan builds his logic of sexuation, he drafts in the phallic signifier inasmuch as it provides the sole stable *Bedeutung* around which the quantifiers of sexual difference can be composed. So, naturally, when Lacan turns to Joyce, he tries to find out something of what Joyce’s wife meant to him. A woman can be a symptom for a man, which means that in believing in her, she can function as the fourth term²⁹, so long as she remains *a* woman (indefinite article) and doesn’t slip into the position of The Woman (definite article). Such a slip would be concomitant with the slide from believing in her to believing her, believing every word she says, which is another kind of lapse.

²⁸ Lacan, J., *The Seminar Book X, Anxiety*, Cambridge: Polity, p. 334.

²⁹ Cf. Lacan, J., lesson of January 21st 1975 from *Le séminaire XXII, R.S.I.*, in *Feminine Sexuality*, New York: Norton, 1982, pp. 168-170.

This doesn't seem to have been the case for Joyce. Lacan singles out the palindrome "Madam, I'm Adam" that Joyce presents in *Ulysses*, and alludes to the fact that this palindromic inversion creates a certain inversion of man and woman. This leads him later to say that Nora, Joyce's wife, was something like a right-hand glove that was turned inside out and slipped on the left hand. This doesn't imply that he believed in her as a symptom, and there's certainly little to indicate that he was attached to her every word.

So what did Joyce believe in? This is Lacan's guiding question throughout the Seminar. It's a counterpart to the cruder question, which Lacan makes a point of leaving hanging, "was Joyce mad?" A fair few have accorded Lacan the privilege of answering this question on his behalf, taking the liberty of turning to his earlier teaching and inferring that, if the Name-of-the-Father was foreclosed for Joyce, then surely he must have been psychotic. If things were that simple, however, Lacan would doubtless have said so himself. Certainly he isolates biographical elements, like the fact that Joyce believed his daughter was telepathic, which is a very curious thing to believe and which admittedly falls wide of what can be held to be a sound judgement. But does this equate with madness?

Lacan's stance is considerably more refined. Joyce has a structure that can be accounted for by a four-component link, like a neurotic structure. It is "like" a neurotic structure, but the nature of this fourth component is very different to that of the Name-of-the-Father. It entails a dimension of naming that gives rise to fairly outlandish effects, which veer between the manic and the highly obsessive, but which form a stable ring, a stable splice, upon which Joyce can depend. And what does he use to form this splice? Precisely the definite article that he positions at the end of *Finnegans Wake*.

The key term in Lacan's baptism of "Joyce the Symptom" is not Joyce, nor Symptom, but quite simply "the." It is this "the" that forbids the psychoanalyst from turning Joyce into a clinical paradigm. It is the singular "the" of "the artist", as in *A Portrait of The Artist...* and not *an Artist*. Ultimately, this "the" denotes the singleton that Lacan calls *Ego*, employing the Latin term customarily used in English to translate Freud's *Ich*, as opposed to the French *moi*. It's an "*Ego* of enigmatic functions, of reparatory functions."³⁰ It's a kind of imaginary, but not the imaginary that Joyce is willing to let drop (the conventional Freudian ego based on the mirror image that produces the illusion of the inside / outside binary), it's an imaginary that has more in common with the primary narcissism of the *Lust-Ich* where the inside / outside distinction doesn't hold.³¹ Hence the invagination of the glove and the palindromic inversion of man and woman.

³⁰ Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII*, op. cit., p. 153.

³¹ Cf. Freud, S., "Drives and their Fates" in *The Unconscious*, Penguin, 2005, p. 27: "The original reality-ego, which distinguished an inside from an outside by means of a sound objective criterion, thus turns into a purified *pleasure-ego*."

The *Ego* is Joyce's *sinthome*, and its specific dimension is the dimension of naming. We can think of this dimension as a neighbourhood, in the mathematical sense, a set that orbits the point of the *Ego*, a set that contains the nouns that stand in for the proper name of the subject. We might even think of it as a Nebohood, to use Joyce's portmanteau word from the second book of *Finnegans Wake*, an allusion to Mount Nebo, the last resting place of Moses. Lacan too alludes to Nebo when he renames his Borromeo node set: *noeud bo*. In so doing, we might say that he amends the misnomer "Borromeo knot" and re-appropriates what was initially the Borromeo family crest by means of a proper noun to designate his own invention.

What is instructive in Joyce is how he does not present as a personality troubled by the foreign body of a symptom. On the contrary, his personality slips over to the side of this opaque and heterogeneous element, leaving the subjective support of I, R and S as that and nothing more: a support. It might even be conjectured that those who mattered to Joyce in his existence – his wife Nora, his daughter Lucia – were able to come to the place of this vacated support, thus permitting true relationships of difference, only in an inverted form: his woman is not the symptom, Joyce himself is.

Singularizing the Composition

Lacan's coining of the *noeud Bo* occurs in the last lesson of *Seminar XXIII*, and with it comes another surprising modification given what the previous nine lessons might have led us to anticipate.

From the start of the Seminar, Lacan has argued that the rings of the link groups may be replaced by straight lines stretching to infinity. This is true to the extent that an infinite straight line will serve the same function of wedging in the other components in quasi-Brunnian fashion. Lacan observes, however, that his mathematician colleagues Soury and Thomé are "careful not to employ" this artifice.³² Dispensing with two loops in favour of two straight lines means that one crossing point is omitted. This can be seen when comparing the two planar diagrams that Lacan provides, and which he claims depict the same figuration.

³² Lacan, J., *Le séminaire livre XXIII*, op. cit., p. 114.

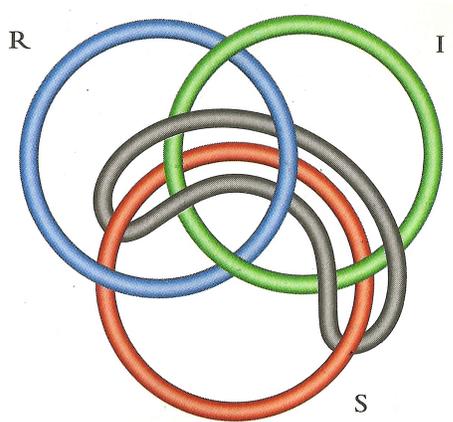


Figure 3a

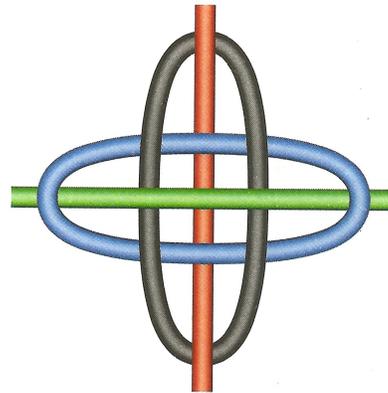


Figure 3c

Note that the planar diagram with loops has fourteen crossing points whilst the cross formation has only thirteen. Throughout the first nine lessons of the Seminar, Lacan allows us to suppose that when the straight lines join up at their ideal *points at infinity*, they would cross in such a way as to form a Brunnian link, as opposed to joining in a Hopf link.

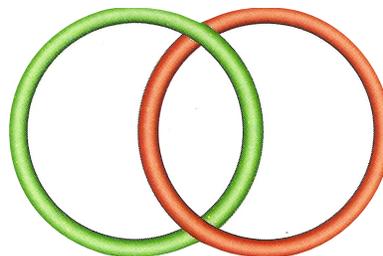


Figure 5: the Hopf link (L2a1/Rolfsen 2²₁)

This supposition is completely overturned in the final session. When Lacan draws the link group that accounts for Joyce’s psychical reality, the symbolic and the real are joined in a Hopf link.

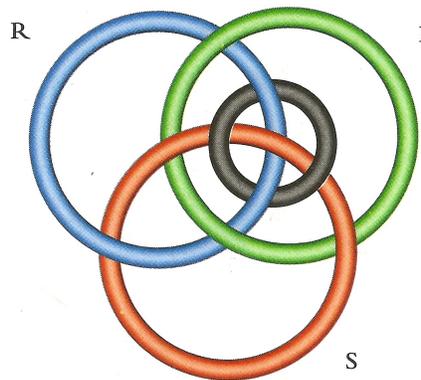


Figure 6 (L10a169)

This is entirely at odds with all of the previous diagrams from the Seminar. The final link group that Lacan draws for “Joyce the Symptom” is absolutely distinct from the four-component Brunnian group that he draws in the opening lessons. It is, however, still a four-component set, whose fourth term rectifies the lapse of the imaginary that occurs when there are only three components.

How does Lacan account for this new way of drawing the link? He asserts that for Joyce, at least in his epiphanies, the real and the unconscious are tied together. In observing that the epiphanies are to be found “at every turn” in Joyce’s work, Lacan echoes a number of commentators who see a powerful affinity between Joyce’s early unpublished notebook jottings (the “Epiphanies” properly speaking, now in the Buffalo and Cornell collections, which were later woven into *Stephen Hero* and *Dubliners*) and the much later literary form of *Finnegans Wake*. From our perspective, we may note that this novel crossing point in the formation of the link between the real and the symbolic falls at the same site as the phallus in the more conventional three-component Borromean link. We might also conjecture that Lacan ascribes a further attribute to Joyce’s artistry, in addition to his fashioning of the fourth term of the *sinthome*, namely: a splice between the real and the symbolic that ensures their permanent link, regardless of what occurs at the level of the imaginary and the symptomatic *Ego*.

This is an exceptionally unique structural composition, that once and for all puts a nail in the coffin of those commentaries that seek in Lacan’s reading of Joyce evidence of a paradigmatic case of a clinical structure or compensatory device. Indeed, from our analytic perspective, Lacan’s fine attention to these singular arrangements of what passes over and what passes under stands as the most effective means at our disposal to distinguish between impasse and Pass, the latter carrying the capital letter that designates it as the proper noun that befits the subjective operation it denotes.



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