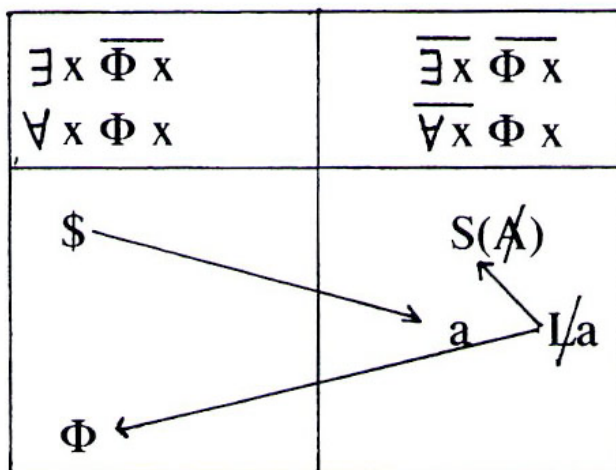


Some Remarks on The Love Letter

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My intention is to comment on - to develop - what is new in chapter VII of Encore, Lacan's 'Love Letter'. And here I have to note that the reading of Lacan is perhaps more difficult when he's speaking than when he's writing. It is a common idea that Lacan - the Lacanian text - is very difficult. That's true. But a Lacanian text - when he's writing - is always a very, very precise text. There is not one comma which is not calculated in the written text of Lacan. Obviously, when he's speaking it is different; not only because he is speaking but because he is speaking in the sense of an improvisation. So, with a text he has spoken, we always have to find the thread - and sometimes this is a hidden thread, one which is not at all obvious. But anyway, if you look for the thread you can always find it. So, I intend to put aside what he has already said before this chapter - since it is true that there are a lot of repetitions. There are some sentences which Lacan repeats a lot with great insistence. We have to extract what is at stake in this chapter and what is new; that is to say, what we encounter and what we can read that Lacan has never said before.

I can say, first of all, that this is not a chapter dedicated to feminine *jouissance*. There are a lot of sentences which refer to both the male and female partner as well as to supplementary *jouissance*. But what is at stake in this chapter is not feminine *jouissance*. That was what was at stake in the previous chapter. Here - if I can start giving it expression - what is at stake is knowledge. I can have knowledge and love. Two very different things - but this is what is at stake, from my point of view.

First, I want to construct the sequence of the text. There are three parts. In the first - from paragraph 1 to 6 - we have something like an introduction to the chapter. This is composed of some statements about knowledge and meaning in which Lacan stresses that he intends to speak about knowledge. From paragraph 7 to 15 - that is to say, to the end of part one - Lacan reminds us of what the aim of the Seminar is. The aim of this year's Seminar is to answer the question which Freud failed to answer: What does woman want? And from paragraph 7 to 15, I can say that Lacan summarises what he has already said about men and women, with nothing new -

except for one sentence.

On the top Lacan writes the logical propositions which he has already produced in the text L'Etourdit. These specify both man and woman as what we can call a 'speaking being'. This is Lacan's reformulation of the Freudian Oedipus Complex. On the side of the man all x is a function of Φx and there exists an x through which the phallic function is negated. To simplify what this means, it says that the essence of man is castration. On the other side, the side of woman, there doesn't exist an x which is not subject to the phallic function and that not all x is subject to it. I will not comment on this. I'll leave it for you to take in.

Now, what is written at the bottom of the table? We have the subject, supported by the signifier of the phallus. On the other side of the vertical bar is indicated the object cause of desire - (a). This is nothing new; that is to say, Lacan has already developed this point in the preceding chapter, as well as in L'Etourdit and even in The Subversion of the Subject... from 1958. You see, this is simply a different way of writing the phantasy. In this Seminar, Lacan puts an arrow to indicate the aim of desire. Now, when he writes the woman, with 'the' barred, he puts in two arrows: one which aims at Φ and another which aims at the famous capital A. But what is new in this table? This arrow writes nothing new. Lacan has already developed the link between feminine desire and the phallus. It is a Freudian thesis, as old as the Freudian teaching. But we have asked if there is something new. If we think that barred capital A inscribes feminine *jouissance* - this is something that Lacan has said in the preceding chapter. So, what is new between paragraph 7 and 15? One sentence - which appears on page 151 (in part one, paragraph 12) - in which Lacan says that the Other is what woman necessarily relates to. This idea is repeated two paragraphs later - on page 152 - when he says that the Other is what one half of speaking beings relate to.

So, here you have a new thesis - because Lacan is saying not only that woman is the Other (which is now endlessly repeated), that woman has a supplementary *jouissance*; he's saying something completely new, enigmatic, opaque - that she has a fundamental relation with the Other, not of the signifier but with the Other in so far as it is barred. And this is not so easy to understand. What is the special feminine propensity to relate to this Other and what are the clinical facts which would permit us to understand it?

Let me continue with the thread of the chapter. In part one, Lacan summarises and also introduces one new sentence. There is another sentence - not new but one which is, interestingly, more precise about phallic *jouissance*, about what phallic *jouissance* is. In the second part it is sometimes difficult to see what he's speaking about - if you follow every little paragraph; but he's speaking about love. He's speaking about love in what he says at the beginning - paragraph 1, page 152 - but not only about love. He's speaking about the way to speak about love. And, until paragraph 9 (more or less), he constructs an opposition between what I can call the traditional way of speaking about love and the scientific way (with the idea that psychoanalysis ought to be on the side of the scientific way). Lacan pretends to speak about love, not in the traditional way but in the scientific way. That is why you have a lot of statements about Aristotle, about the God of Aristotle.

On first reading one can ask: But what does Aristotle have to do with this? It is in order to comment on the traditional way of speaking about love. And then the

chapter ends with a new statement, in which Lacan defines nothing less than what he calls 'the objective of my teaching' - that is to dissociate (a) from the barred capital A, to dissociate the imaginary from the symbolic. This statement is at the bottom of page 153, and it is new in the teaching of Lacan. For he has not always said that the object (a) is imaginary. At the beginning he stressed the imaginary essence of (a); but - if you have read The Logic of Phantasy and the writing linked to this Seminar - Lacan was intending to make object (a) equivalent with the real. In The Logic of Phantasy, Lacan was saying that phantasy was for man the only way to approach the will. So, this point is something - it is a turning point.

Now, the third part. This is longer and perhaps more difficult to order. It is a love letter. If I can say where the love letter is in this chapter of the Seminar it is in part three. Indeed, Lacan himself comments in the thirteenth paragraph, saying that 'that was the beginning of my love letter'. So, from paragraph 1 to 13, you have the beginning of the love letter, and the beginning speaks about love. When I say this, you can immediately deduce that speaking of love and writing of love are not the same thing and we will have to specify what this difference is.

The beginning of the love letter speaks about love - to say what? Something new; new, you understand, as regards what Lacan has said before. He writes, in French, a word that does not exist in French - 'horsese'. Translated, this is 'outsidesex'. Love is outsidese. Another way of saying this is that love is homosexual. This is what Lacan says at the beginning - that love is homomosexual, written with two 'm's as a deliberate mistake in the spelling. In French, when you speak about homosexuality, as in English, you write it with one 'm'. So, Lacan plays with writing, with a mistake in spelling, to indicate that love is outsidese and homomosexual. These two sentences are equivalent.

After that, between paragraph 14 and 19 - well, you have statements about courtly love and about the function of speech. From paragraph 20 you enter the main topic of this chapter, which is divided into two parts in which Lacan introduces what he himself calls a 'clarification'. It is not something unperceived in psychoanalytic teaching until him, but it is something that requires clarification. It refers to man, to man's desire. What is interesting is the conclusion in paragraph 27, which is very strong and which says that love is impossible. So you see, we have a thread. Love is outsidese; love is homomosexual; and, at the end, love is impossible. We will have to explain this.

What follows paragraph 27 is no longer clarification. This other part is what Lacan called 'complement'. This is something new, never before introduced. This complement is about knowledge, about the question of knowing if the Other knows. Knows what? If the Other knows about feminine *jouissance*. If you ask this, with Lacan, you obviously have to do what he does; that is to say, to think about an unconscious, because the unconscious knows everything - or not. So, this is the sequence of the chapter.

Let me summarise quickly what Lacan repeats in this part, before commenting on what he introduces as new. He repeats what he has already said about man being all in the phallic function and about women being not all in the phallic function - but with a choice. This means that anatomy and civil status, which is linked to anatomy, are not fate. Everyone with or without a penis has the possibility of being all within the phallic function - either holding to it or not. Now we have a precise definition of

man. Man is subject - I could say all subject - to castration. That is to say, man is lacking a part of *jouissance*. And we can see this on the schema, where masculine desire aims at (a), at a piece of the body having erotic consistency. Object (a) is a piece of the body. This is something that Lacan has often repeated: what a woman is for a man is nothing more than object (a) - the value of *jouissance*. (Value is always the value of *jouissance* anyway. I'm not going to justify this statement, but I think it is the case.) Value is always the value of *jouissance* and, for a man, woman has the value of (a). This is what Lacan said in 1958, in The Subversion of the Subject.

Now, if masculine desire ends at (a), we can add that the *jouissance* of man is phallic *jouissance*. Phallic *jouissance* is the *jouissance* of the idiot. This is a new sentence in this chapter, concerning phallic *jouissance*. The common meaning of 'idiot' designates a person who is not clever. This is not the meaning which Lacan gives to the word here. The idiot is someone whom we can sometimes see in hospitals; he is the one who dedicates himself to his penis, the one who is alone with his own *jouissance* - that of his own organ. This is the idiot, not linked with the other, outside of the social tie. Phallic *jouissance* is autistic - in itself - and this is why, when Lacan stresses the puissance of phallic *jouissance* in the sexual relation between a man and a woman, he is saying that the man does not really enjoy the body of the woman. He enjoys his own organ, which is why it is possible to say that the sexual relation has no meaning. It is outside of meaning and without ties even.

So, we have the definition of man - as subject, as desire caused by (a) and as *phallic jouissance*. And woman? We can say that it is the same but with something more. This something more is written by the second arrow, from $\bar{\Phi}$ to S(A), and also by the fact that Lacan does not write the woman as a subject but with ' $\bar{\Phi}$ ' barred. Let's develop what is written by the first arrow, from $\bar{\Phi}$ to Φ . It writes Lacan's reformulation of the Freudian thesis - that is to say, this arrow writes of feminine phallicism. It is easy to summarise. There are two forms of phallicism. There is the phallicism of the one - to have the phallus. This is what Freud first perceived - having the phallus in the metonymic way. It is always possible for everyone - for every speaking being, even for the feminine one. The way the woman is able to have the phallus - metonymically - is developed by Freud: she can have the phallus as a child, as money, and so on. And she can have it as the organ of the man and even as the man himself.

Well, Lacan specified that the feminine link with the phallus is not only at the level of envy, but at the level of being: to be - not to have - the phallus. To be or not to be the phallus, that is the specific form of feminine phallicism. Here you have to read again The Meaning of the Phallus and The Guiding Remarks. It is an old thesis of Lacan's - from 1958.

Now, the second arrow. This is another thing, this third arrow, firstly, it registers the supplementary *jouissance* of the woman - which Lacan developed in the previous chapter with the example of mysticism. But, secondly, this arrow indicates what we can call feminine desire. I want to stress that the three arrows are arrows of desire and that at the end of each arrow we have the term - if I can say the term - of desire. The term is what desire aims at: object (a) for the man. Phi for the woman - and also capital A barred. This is the big enigma in this chapter - the relation with the Other in the woman.

'After which it only remains for me to speak to you about love' - this is the sentence with which Lacan starts the second part of the chapter. We have to ask: but what of *jouissance*? If speaking of love is *jouissance* and the whole chapter constructs the opposition between love and *jouissance*, we have to ask what is the *jouissance* implied in speaking about love?

We have to answer the question - either it is phallic *jouissance* or supplementary *jouissance*. We do not have another choice. Perhaps you think that we could have another choice; perhaps you think that the *jouissance* implied in speaking of love is *le plus de jouir*, 'surplus *jouissance*'? We have phallic *jouissance* and we have supplementary *jouissance* (in the terms introduced by Lacan) and we also have a surplus *jouissance*, which is the *jouissance* linked with object (a), but when Lacan says 'to speak about love is a *jouissance*', I think that there are not three possibilities but two. Why? Because there is a solidarity between phallic *jouissance* and the surplus *jouissance* produced by the encounter with object (a). Phallic *jouissance* is a *jouissance* of the one: a *jouissance* of one subject supported by the signifier 'one', and when Freud discovered that women can have a phallic *jouissance*, he spoke about the masculinity complex which indicates effectively that phallic *jouissance* is that of the subject as 'one'. But this is not only the *jouissance* of the subject as one alone; the structure of phallic *jouissance* is itself the structure of the signifier - specified by the theory of one plus one plus one. Phallic *jouissance* is a discrete *jouissance*, as discrete as the signifier.

So, when we say that the subject in itself is castrated - that is to say, is lacking *jouissance* - it does not mean that he has no *jouissance*. He has the *jouissance* produced by the structure of the signifier - phallic *jouissance*. At the same time, the lack of the subject calls for a surplus *jouissance* and so, when we write the formula of phantasy - left on the schema, on the side of the subject, - we have at the same time the minus of *jouissance*. Castration and phallic *jouissance* (the *jouissance* of the one), does not prevent the subject, as castrated, from looking for a little surplus *jouissance*. There is a solidarity between phallic *jouissance* and surplus *jouissance* and this is why, when Lacan says 'to speak of love is a *jouissance*', we can only ask whether it is phallic *jouissance* or supplementary *jouissance*.

The English translation - 'surplus *jouissance*' - introduces an ambiguity between surplus and supplementary *jouissance*. It would be better to translate this plus and minus differently - an added *jouissance*. We can say that we have to distinguish the plus of *jouissance* written by (a) from the supplementary *jouissance* written by the barred capital A. You recall that when Lacan, in the previous chapter, introduces feminine *jouissance* as supplementary he stresses that he does not say 'complementary'. He says 'supplementary'. The plus of *jouissance* is a more complementary *jouissance*. It is a complement of the lack of *jouissance* suffered by the subject in itself. Lacan explicitly introduced this term of complement in the Écrits. That is why I said that the phallic *jouissance* of the one and the plus of *jouissance* are strictly linked.

Perhaps one could refer to the logic of phantasy and find a contradiction because the incommensurability between the one and its aim is at the logical level. But I think that it is only an apparent contradiction. There are two definitions - two different levels of definition - of the (a). There is what Lacan calls the logical consistency of the object (a), and there is what he calls the corporeal consistency, the bodily consistency, of object (a). At the logical level - which is at the level of the signifier -

you can only produce one plus one plus one. You can speak, you can write even, for centuries; language never produces anything but the signifier (one plus one plus one). So, if you ask 'what am I desiring?' - what desire aims at - you can speak, but you will never speak the object in itself. You always speak one signifier and then one more. There is a structure - always repeated - which is this gap between the signifier and the object in itself. So, Lacan says: 'object (a) and the one are incommensurable'. At the level of erotic life this object (a) - which is impossible to grasp with the signifier, which it is only possible to turn around - is an erotic prison which, as a bodily prison, is different for everyone. The erotica of object (a) is the *jouissance* implied in phantasy which is a complement of the lack. To speak of love, then - which *jouissance* is it? It is not obvious. It is something deducible from the text but Lacan does not give the answer. We have to deduce it.

Perhaps if we read the chapter we will find the answer; perhaps it will appear more necessary, i.e. why Lacan says that love is outside sex. I have to stress that it is not possible to reduce what Lacan calls 'outside sex' to love. In the outside sex there is love, but there is also the Ethics of Aristotle, as well as psychology. What does this mean? It means that perhaps we can use what Lacan says about Aristotle to understand this.

What is the God of Aristotle? Aristotle's idea about God is not perhaps that of Luther; indeed, it is a completely different idea. In Aristotle the idea of God is that of the immobile sphere - this is the supreme being, the supreme good. Aristotle's fundamental hypothesis is that the good of every creature, of every being - and especially all mankind - is in harmony with the supreme good of God.

So, there is an idea in Aristotle that there is something like harmony, like continuity, between the good of creatures and the good of God. It would be possible to develop this but perhaps it is not necessary to any great extent. It is why Lacan, says that St. Thomas, centuries after Aristotle, had no difficulties in developing his theory of love - the love of God - as what he calls the physical theory of love. The theory of St. Thomas is an Aristotelean one with changes - it is included in the Christian system but it is still the same idea that to look after one's good is something which God likes. In St. Thomas you have the idea that everyone who is looking for his own good is doing his religious duty. This is the idea that the good of creatures is not in opposition to the will of God but is, on the contrary, in harmony with it. It is convergent with the will of God. The obvious difference with Aristotle is that the God of Aristotle is not thought of as a will but as the immobile sphere.

Christianity has introduced a God of will - a 'dieu de vouloir'. But St. Thomas' idea is that the will of God and the wills of everyone are convergent in so far as everyone wants their own good. This is what was called the physical theory of love. I do not know how to translate that - *La Théorie Physique de l'Amour*.

Well, what is the link with the problem of love? It is not obvious at first glance. But there is one and the articulation is made in the text by reference to the soul - *l'âme*. Love has always been connected in history with the soul. Soul loves soul, *l'âme aime l'âme* - it is like that. You know that Lacan plays with words - *l'âme*, which means soul, and *amour* from which he writes the French word *amour* (with an added circumflex to evoke *l'âme*, that is to say, the soul). What is supposed in love? Always present in love is that what is good for one is good for the other, what is good for the one is good for the partner. The implicit hypothesis in all love is that there is a

convergence of the good. What is good for me is good for you - when there is love. This is Lacan's idea. It is a fantastically synthetic reading of history - with Aristotle, St. Thomas and love in every century - that is, the supposition of the convergence and harmony of the respective goods.

So, Lacan's chapter is presented to break with this supposition. It stresses that there is no convergence, no harmony between the different goods of everyone - when everyone is a speaking being. It stresses that there is no harmony between two souls. On the contrary, there is - what? There is the heterogeneity of *jouissance*. In this chapter Lacan opposes the idea in the dream of love - that of harmony, of convergence between the good of one and another - which has come down through the centuries until the operation of science. This dream covers, dissimulates, something which is very different - that is, the heterogeneity of *jouissance*: the heterogeneity of the phallic *jouissance* of the one, the man, and that of the Other, the woman. On the one hand there is the dream of harmony and on the other real heterogeneity. This is why, after two pages in which he speaks about Aristotlean love, Lacan concludes that the objective of his teaching is to dissociate (a) from the Other.

What does this mean? Lacan put (a) at the imaginary level, at the level of the dream of love and he put the Other at the level of the symbolic. Now, it is quite precise when he says that soul is phantasy - '*l'âme est phantasmatique*'. Perhaps we can construct a maxim for love. The maxim, which it is possible to deduce from this text, would be that (a) dissimulates the barred capital (A). It is another way of saying the same thing as I said before. On the level of love, you have the dream that the object capable of satisfying the subject is the object capable of satisfying the Other. This is the dream of communion. And this dream is made to dissimulate, to forget - to forget the real (which is not so agreeable), that it is not possible to share the *jouissance* of the Other.

Such a maxim would speak of the function of love as an illusion - with an objective which is to want not to know the fact that the speaking being is alone with its own *jouissance*. If there is something called love - with a symbolic construction to support it, to develop the story of love - it is something which exists only as a phantasy; that is to say, of a subject linked with a specific object which it is supposed to be possible to share. Even if there is a discussion of the mystics - I have to come back to that - to speak of love is to speak about phantasy. The *jouissance* implied in the speech about love is the *jouissance* of phantasy; that is to say phallic *jouissance* and *plus de jouir* produced by object (a). Of course, the illusion of love is sometimes present out of love.

In the text we have a little example - perhaps you will grasp it. It is when Lacan notes that when Freud discovered the neurotic phantasy, at the beginnings of psychoanalysis, he discovered that, in the unconscious, the woman did not exist - that there were only what he called 'partial objects'. This is the discovery which he called 'polymorphous perversity'. At the beginning Freud imputed phantasy to women - which is contrary to reality. The phantasy is present and active in supporting erotic life on the side of man. On the side of women, Lacan stresses, it is not object (a) which supports feminine desire, but what he calls a good '*au deuxième degré*', a 'secondary good', which is not caused by object (a). At the beginning, however, Freud thought the contrary. Lacan says that this is very funny and demonstrative of the fact that, when one is a man, one always has the temptation to

impute to the other the same object, to suppose that the other shares the same object. However, I do not think that the *jouissance* implied in speaking of love is supplementary *jouissance* either. The logic of the chapter is without doubt, so that when Lacan says that love is outside sex the expression means that love dissimulates, covers the difference between the sexes. The expression means that love wants to ignore the otherness of the other. Love dreams of unity, of fusion.

Now, I hope that you understand my commentary on the 'outside sex' - on why Lacan uses an expression which is synonymous with homosexual - as written with two m's. Love is always homosexual in itself. It does not make any difference whether it is love between the hetero or the homo - whether of man or woman. To develop the subject of sexuality is not to develop that of love. In sexuality you have the difference between the One and the Other. At this level there is no unity. There is a gap, a split between the One - with his phallic *jouissance*, connected with the *plus de jouir* at the level of phantasy - and the Other, the enigmatic Other, connected with something opaque, written by the matheme: $\text{La} \text{---} \rightarrow \text{S}(A)$. Thus love, as I have developed it so far, aims at identity, at fusion. Love aims at the same, at the relation of like to like. In so far as love wants homogeneity, love has to be put on the side of the homo, with two m's - on the side of the one.

This is something that we have to work at - because it is not so easy to develop every consequence of this. But you can see the paradox when Lacan is speaking about the hysterical woman and says that in so far as an hysterical woman loves a man she is homosexual. You see the complete inversion of the common meaning of homosexuality, which is that of a man loving a man or of a woman loving a woman. A man loving a woman and a woman loving a man is the common meaning of heterosexuality. Lacan turns this upside down and says that when a man loves a man it is homosexuality - and when a woman loves man. The love of the one is the dream of fusion, of the not in the text; it is what Lacan says elsewhere, when he says that 'Everyone, man or woman, who loves women is heterosexual', but it is love as sexual desire.

We must not lose our heads over all these permutations. We have to grasp the logic of the construction, which is very simple. Love aims at identity, while sex implies heterogeneity. In this sense perhaps woman, the woman in herself, is not lovable. When you love you cover the otherness of the other with a supposed identity. This is why Lacan says that the only things which were truly said about women in history were defamatory. It appears to be a misogynistic statement - but it is a logical deduction, because if you want to speak about woman you only have the instrument of words, structured by the series of one. Language, speech, recurrently misses the otherness of the other. It is not anyone's choice. It is a structural necessity implied by the structure of language.

So, you can speak of love, but when you speak of love you are speaking about your own phantasy. You are speaking about your own object and you are enjoying your phantasy. You can also defame - for insult is what, at the level of language, aims at the real. Between the speech of love and defamation you can never speak about the Other itself, the Other which is the main referent but is always missed. I think that, perhaps, in Lacan's way of thinking it is better, it is a greater homage, for a woman to be defamed than to be loved - because the defamation refers to the otherness which is not similarity, which is not what one has in common with all of mankind.

So Lacan is speaking about love - and when you speak in the loving discourse, the discourse of love, you are speaking of yourself. That is Lacan's thesis. You believe that you are speaking to the Other and speaking about the Other, but Lacan's idea is that you are speaking about yourself - that you are in what he calls the pleasure principle, which is on the same side, in this chapter on love, as Aristotle, the psychologist, and St. Thomas. Missing the Otherness of the Other is not something that you can dream of going beyond - or, perhaps, you can only dream of it, but to dream is not to do it. You can only dream of creating a new speech but, anyway, this speech will be your speech and will miss the Otherness of the Other in yet another way than previous discourses.

Obviously, here we have to deal with the mystic - with the discourse of the mystic. I'm not going to speak a lot about the mystic, but I note that mystics are writers and that the testimony we have from them comes through reading. When Lacan evokes the mystics as an example at the end of the previous chapter, as what he called a testimony of the Otherness of the Other, he did not say that this discourse grasps the Otherness of the Other. He says that there is a testimony which exists - he takes, for example, Hadewijch d'Anvers - through writing, not speech. He also takes the statue of St. Theresa - that is to say, the image of St. Theresa by Bernini. This is interesting because it is not speech; on the one side it is writing and on the other side it is an image. We do not get speech about ecstasy.

Now, what is Lacan's love letter? It is not to speak about love. It is to write, to intend at least to write. We see that there is a speaking about love and there is a love letter, but Lacan does not develop anything about the distinction. Of course, he has an idea of the difference between speech and writing and it is not simple to understand, although simple, perhaps, to formulate - i.e. that speech always implies the dimension of the Other. Speech is always addressed; in speech one is directed to another signifier, which in the end represents the Other. Lacan's thesis, in the text called La Lettre Volée (The Purloined Letter) - when at the end of the chapter he says that the letter always arrives at its destination - is understandable only if you suppose that the destination, the addressee, is the writer himself. You write without knowing that you always write for yourself, not for the addressee, a point developed by J.A. Miller. This is the paradox of the love letter, because the love letter is supposed to be addressed to the other.