

The Ex-sistence of The Father In The Seminar of David Pereira

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Let the word burn out
On this slope of being where we are stranded
On this arid land
Which only the wind of our limits crosses ...

Let the wildest singer roll from the crest
Illuminating
Vast unutterable matter

Yves Bonnefoy¹

On the dust jacket of an English translation of *Early Poems, 1947–1959*, Yves Bonnefoy’s writing is described as a means of “spiritual illumination” accessed through the “brokenness and poverty of language”.² In his poem, *Du mouvement et de l’immobilité de Douvé*, which in many respects reads as a testimony of mourning, a vacillating movement between a type of faith (in remembrance) and resignation (forgetting proper) struggles for resolution at the brink of the limitations of language. It seems pertinent in the context of the haunting refrain of imagery appearing in the work, that Bonnefoy’s name translates into English as ‘good faith’.

Jacques Lacan’s reading of Freud, which is not imbued with the hope of his resurrection, cuts across an imaginary legacy and its potentially fatal lure; the reduction of Freud’s discovery to a lore of conceptual rigor mortis. Beyond the inventions of a founding father, Lacan brings to psychoanalysis a theory of the function of the paternal name conceptualised as a logical function and designated as The Name of the Father. In *Le Sinthome*, through various reconstructions of traditional logic, he formulates the irreversible effects of naming in the formation of the subject.³ The proper name poses a contradiction

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for the neurotic, whose birth into the symbolic is coextensive with a name, a name that anticipates his very being. The name, as mark of anticipation, produces a hole in the symbolic order; a hole through which the subject falls into discourse, having ‘fallen out’ with an imaginary whole. Lacan proposes that the subject’s desire, as structured around a hole, comes into being according to a logical exclusion:

I situate the support of consistence in the imaginary. Likewise, I make the essential constituent of the symbolic the hole. And I make the real the support of what I term existence, in this sense: in its sistance *outside* of the imaginary and the symbolic, it knocks up against them, its play is something precisely in the order of limitation; the two others, from the moment when it is tied into a borromean knot with them, offer it resistance.⁴

Hence the proper name, that which cuts and hollows out an imaginary consistency, shunts the subject into the signifying chain. It is within this series, caught in the play of representation, that the symptom makes of ex-sistence a signifying insistence.

A focal point of consideration in the seminar of David Pereira, *Philosophy, Theology and Psychoanalysis*, has been (since its inception in 2001) the dialectic movement of naming and desire in the constitution of knowledge of the subject.⁵ In addition, he has been mapping the effects of a lack in knowledge, which interposes as a limit to desire in the transmission of knowledge and the formation of the psychoanalyst. Pereira’s work is producing a writing – a formulation of the ethics of the psychoanalytic act as the “responsibility” of the analyst to the demand for knowledge.⁶ The psychoanalytic act as such, is a logical moment in support of a movement from naming (necessity) to a beyond of the name (impossibility) and the knotting of the name to its ex-sistent. The trajectory of the seminar, which began with readings in metaphysics and ethics, has recently arrived to considerations of logic.

Pereira's critique is following a selection of seminal works chosen from the span of the Western philosophical and theological cannon. His approach is a-historical; a reading of the texts through one another that pauses at the interstices where the ideas can be made conversant. In superimposing conceptual distillations taken from these conversations upon psychoanalytic concepts, Pereira is putting into question the foundations of psychoanalysis – an endeavour referred to as “the application of solvent to psychoanalytic principles”.⁷ The following reflections are made in the context of my participation in the seminar, extending from a particular view of part of the work produced there.

Aristotle, in *On Interpretation*, determines that the proper name is a construction given purely by convention, which bears no relation to the thing (its referent).⁸ Furthermore, in *Categories*, he suggests that where names do not exist, “...it may be *necessary* to invent” them.⁹ Pereira's reading, giving emphasis to the Greek term, *nomothesis* (literally, *law-maker*) and Aristotle's claim that the construction of names is a *necessary duty*, situates naming on the side of the ethical, beyond the natural and the empirical.

In *Le Sinthome*, Lacan, reading Freud with Aristotle, proposes that the proper name is a construction, a logical construction, which by *necessity* structures the subject's desire, as a desire for knowledge. The symptom, as instilled by the name, is that which makes artifice (art/ device/ deception) of a lack in knowledge introduced by the desire of the Other. Manifesting in the concealment of lack within the signifying series, the symptom reveals itself in the bungling of this action. Such is deciphered by Freud in his analysis of dreams, jokes and slips of the tongue, whereby he encounters something enigmatic and resistant to interpretation. According to Lacan, it is in the pursuit of knowledge, a guarantee of the name, that something inevitably escapes:

What is know-how? Let us say that it is art, artifice – what gives to art, to the art one is capable of, a remarkable value. Why remarkable? Because there is no Other of the Other to carry out the Last Judgement ...¹⁰

Lacan situates naming beyond the natural; the latter of which he claims exceeds the human condition of language:

Nature, I will say, to be done with it, is distinguished by being not-one. Hence the logical procedure for tackling it. To call nature what you exclude in the very act of taking an interest in something – that something being distinguished by being named. Nature by this procedure only runs the risk of being characterized as a pot-pourri of what lies outside nature.¹¹

That which escapes the symbolic thus sets knowledge apart from it, in pursuit of an object irredeemably lost to knowledge. In the formation of the subject, the desire of the Other may come to fill this mysterious place. In a paper entitled, *Nominal Transformations and the Formations of the Unconscious*, David Pereira notes that this is where the neurotic risks becoming stuck:

In the formation, in the naming of desire, the risk is there of assuming it as the fixed place of the subject. Provisionally, the subject as subject of the unconscious is there, in so far as the subject constitutes himself in and through the naming of desire, and procures his being as there.¹²

In *Le Sinthome*, when Lacan claims that the subject is *necessarily* constituted via the name, this is not without showing that it is only through the writing of his symptom, insofar as it speaks, that the subject escapes madness (i.e. the necessary delusion of his being).¹³ Further to this, it is in a movement towards a beyond of the name, a beyond of being in relation to the name, which frees up the economy of the symptom.

In 2003 Pereira presented a series of seminars on Plato's work *Sophist*. In this particular work, Plato interrogates the function of the paternal name as a law regulating ontological knowledge, conceptualising the limit of the father's knowledge as a limit-set.¹⁴ In the dialogue, the reader is introduced to "the stranger" who agrees to the task of elucidating the truth of the Sophist's position in discourse apropos of that of the Philosopher. With an interlocutor at hand he proceeds, applying the logic of the categories, until reaching an impasse in the form of a prohibition laid down by his mentor Parmenides – whom the stranger refers to as "father". It comes as a warning, the stranger having been instructed never to assert the possibility of non-being or question its "*unthinkable*" status.¹⁵ Challenged with the task of categorizing the Sophist's art as "maker of appearances", the stranger declares he *must* "...venture to lay hands on (the) father's argument" and in disassembling it, redefines the "*unutterable*" as logically possible.¹⁶

Heidegger offers an extremely close reading of Plato's text in his work, *Plato's Sophist*. In it, he refers to Plato's category of a seeming contradiction (i.e. the being of non-being) as a "self showing of something ... without actually being that something".¹⁷ According to Heidegger, the Sophist's relationship to knowledge is transformed with the acknowledgement of this new category of speech – "... an opening up that occludes". It is a shift made possible by a transgression (the questioning of the father's knowledge) in "... letting something be seen by addressing it".¹⁸ Thus, a transformation of the Sophist's discourse from empty speech (idle rhetoric) to empty-ing speech (true speech) is produced.¹⁹ For Heidegger, the movement from beside the father's knowledge to a beyond of the father's knowledge has a critical function in the re-production of knowledge:

Philosophical questioning – ... is not concerned with freeing us from the past but, has the peculiar characteristic that in

giving, in *tradere*, in transmitting, it distorts the gifts themselves.²⁰

Pereira's reading of Plato with Heidegger, Freud, and Lacan has formed part of his critique of the function of castration in the transmission of psychoanalytic knowledge. In articulating the law in his own name, the psychoanalyst avows the impossible. His desire, as act, indicates a point of non-response in the signifying chain: that which poses a limit to the desire of the Other. Transmission of the unconscious is made possible within the formal relation of an address (as Plato's stranger to the father), addressed to one supposed of knowledge (an opening that occludes), that is to say, within the structure of transference. Beyond the injunction of the father, psychoanalysis supports a "laying of hands upon the father's knowledge" – an encounter with a beyond of the signifier (category of the impossible)²¹. According to Pereira, it is in the emptying out of speech, a movement from the necessity to impossibility, that the re-writing of the father's rule as *a* subjective law becomes act-ualised. Plato's resituating of the Sophist's speech according to this movement, beyond the limits of the father, can thus be read as coinciding with the birth of *a* Sophist. According to Pereira, the birth of the Sophist's desire, beyond the inhibitions of an imaginary father in accordance with the law of the name, can be read as evocative of the self-authorising moment of the psychoanalyst. The Sophist's speech, classified by Plato as belonging to the "dissembling section of the art of causing contradiction" through the "juggling of words"²² is also evocative of the psychoanalyst's relationship to language.

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud theorises the function of paternity primarily in terms of a cultural prohibition. Introducing the myth of the father of the primal horde, a construction, he formulates symbolic law as a function of group identification with the law (i.e. the incest taboo).²³ According to Freud, the law of the symbolic father, beyond the subject's individual history, structures the unconscious and regulates the social tie within the field of sexual difference. Gathering particular threads of Freud's theory, Lacan goes beyond this

conceptualisation of the paternal function to produce a borromean knot (a topological rendering of the subject), formulating its fourth knot as the Sinthome, the law of a logical tie. For Lacan it is the logic of the signifier, a double negation barring the impossible and producing a fundamental lack in discourse, which structures the social tie as unconscious.

Emmanuel Levinas, a theologian and contemporary of Lacan's, in *Otherwise Than Being (or Beyond Essence)* introduces the concept of time to the question of the status of knowledge. In introducing this temporal dimension, he ventures beyond the dualistic play of being and non-being put forward in the works of Plato and Freud. According to Levinas, the ego, faced with the infinite prospect of death as a portent inadmissible to consciousness, is propelled towards the other in search of completion. He formulates an ethic of desire according to an *other than* being, embedded within a social relation irreducible to sameness.²⁴ Levinas' work thus resembles to some extent Lacan's. Not unlike Levinas, Lacan links the ethical to a breach in the imaginary relation, a rent in knowledge of the Other. Similarly for Levinas, the subject in pursuit of recognition, at the horizon of an encounter with the Other (a foreign land never to be reached) faces a pure alterity. It is this face-to-face encounter that leaves the subject ethically accountable via his speech: "the risky uncovering of oneself" stripped of "identical quiddity".²⁵

In Levinas' working of the function of the paternal name however, we see a marked departure from the ethics of Lacanian psychoanalysis. As articulated by Pereira, for Lacan, "the knowledge of the father is only an invitation to go beyond it, to make of the name in the face of the ineffable a subjective law".²⁶ At the horizon of the ineffable, Levinas follows a different trajectory – submitting the law of the father to a universal name, The Name of God the Father. Thus he ascribes to the paternal name the guarantee of the One (a name unable to be questioned) – a law outside the subject in the place of the final word. In submitting the subjectivity of the name to a universal name, the risk is only that of rendering the specificity

of desire mute. Psychoanalysis testifies to the fact that the mark of desire carries a debt, a particular debt that installs the subject within a sexual history of mythical origins. According to Lacan, it is in accordance with this debt that the subject who fails to act, to speak in his own name, accedes to guilt. Guilt is the specific inheritance of the singular subject, given over to the Other's cause and with it, the false promise of absolution. Thus, Lacan insists that: "...there is no Other of the Other to pass the final judgment. This means that there is something we cannot enjoy. Let us call it the jouissance of God".²⁷ Is this then to suggest that god does not have a place in psychoanalysis?

The question of god in psychoanalysis has as its correlative the question of the name and what it is that functions as a limit to the desire of the Other. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche directly poses this very question, *is God dead?* By way of an answer, he announces the arrival of the "overman", who in overcoming "human nature" and supernatural purpose declares that god is dead.²⁸ In *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan in revisiting Nietzsche, notes that he is far from convinced by the intellectual movement that proceeded him:

... the myth of *God is dead* – ... personally, I feel much less sure about (it), as a myth of course, than most contemporary intellectuals, which is in no sense a declaration of theism, nor of faith in the resurrection – perhaps this myth is simply a shelter against the threat of castration.²⁹

Lacan suggests that merely affirming itself via negation, the denial of god points to the endurance of a personal myth – the subject's flight from the impossible; the impossible of the sexual relation. In the *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, in linking belief and myth, Lacan appears to be referencing Freud's formulation of the mythical father, the uncastrated, omnipotent father of limitless enjoyment (constructed, murdered and resurrected in the imaginary).³⁰ Lacan suggests that it is the personal myth as such, which determines that god (the law of "I

am what I am”) will inevitably prevail in the unconscious, sheltered within belief, where the symptom installs itself.³¹ Hence, for Lacan, despite the culture of the Enlightenment and Modernism that hailed the end of intellectual theism, “... the true formula of atheism is not *God is dead* ... (but rather) *God is unconscious*”.³²

Lacan’s assertion that there is no metalanguage attests to the truth of a Real in each case, according to the mark of the symbolic – an empty set containing nothing *in particular*. Hence, if god has a function in psychoanalysis, it is not that of naming the Other, but of situating belief. Bonnefoy’s poetry seems to articulate something of the effects of structure (as a tension between lack and loss), which at the limits of language produces an encounter with the enigma of the *un-nameable*. At the brink of “vast unutterable matter”, he nevertheless dreams of the possibility of an unfettered desire exhausted of sin and freed from the signifying chain. However, for the neurotic subject, subject to symbolic castration, the word does not burn out. It is only within the constraints of a discourse that the word attains its limit, for there is no escape from discourse, not even in ‘natural’ death.

Psychoanalysis has its underpinnings in philosophy and theology, a debt that the work of Pereira’s seminar continues to acknowledge. Freud did not invent the unconscious; however, in naming it as sexual in his own name he fathered the discourse of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis distinguishes itself according to its unique approach to the object of knowledge, the object in the place of cause. Beyond the universal cause, the cause of the moral good or transcendental knowledge, the object of psychoanalysis is a logical remainder of the subject’s birth into language, which manifests as a semblance. Pereira, reading Freud to the letter with Lacan and others is tracing the logic of that object – the “object of dis-content” and the ethic of the psychoanalytic act as a “response-ability” to demand in search of content-ment.³³ Demand may include the demand for a guarantee of the name, an insistence that psychoanalysis necessarily punctuates. The psychoanalytic act is that which supports “a naming of the un-nameable: a writing of that which is irreducible to the name”.³⁴ The

style of the seminar, a response to resistance and flight from the limits of knowledge, is a working contradiction to satisfaction with the Freudian lexicon and the rule of the psychoanalytic precept.

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- ¹ Bonnefoy, Y. Excerpts from *Douve Parle* in *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douvé, Early Poems, 1947–1959*, D. Kinnell & R. Pevear (Trans.), Ohio University Press, 1991, p.107.
- ² Bonnefoy, Y. Ibid.
- ³ Lacan, J. *Le Sinthome, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, J.-A. Miller (Ed.), L. Thurston (Trans.), 1975.
- ⁴ Lacan, J. Ibid. p.14, emphasis added.
- ⁵ Pereira, D. *Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Theology*, The Seminar of David Pereira, Analyst of the School, The Freudian School of Melbourne, 2001–2004.
- ⁶ Pereira, D. For a detailed account see: 'History, Logic and the Temporality of the Subject', in *écritique*, R. Clark, P. Gunn & T. Norregaard-Arroyo (Eds.), Newsletter of the Freudian School of Melbourne (2), 2000, p.14.
- ⁷ Pereira, D. Op. cit.
- ⁸ Aristotle. 'On Interpretation' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 1., J. Barnes (Ed.), Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1995.
- ⁹ Aristotle. 'Categories', Ibid. p. 12.
- ¹⁰ Lacan, J. *Le Sinthome, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, (unpublished translation; 13-01-1976).
- ¹¹ Lacan, J. Ibid.
- ¹² Pereira, D. 'Nominal Transformations and the Formations of the Unconscious' in *The Formations of the Unconscious, Papers of the Freudian School*, O. Zentner (Ed.), 1989, pp. 55–56.
- ¹³ Lacan, J. Op. cit.
- ¹⁴ Plato 'Sophist' in *The Dialogues of Plato*. B. Jowett (Trans.), M.J. Adler (Ed.) University of Chicago, 1952.
- ¹⁵ Plato Ibid. p. 562.
- ¹⁶ Plato Ibid. p. 564.
- ¹⁷ Heidegger, M. *Plato's Sophist*. R. Rojcewicz & A. Schuwer (Trans.), Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 281.

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- ¹⁸ Heidegger, M. Ibid. p. 284.
¹⁹ Heidegger, M. Ibid. p. 281.
²⁰ Heidegger, M. Ibid. p. 286.
²¹ Pereira, D. *Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Theology*, The Seminar of David Pereira.
²² Plato Op. cit. p. 579.
²³ Freud, S. *Totem and Taboo*. J. Strachey (Trans.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
²⁴ Levinas, E. *Otherwise Than Being (or Beyond Essence)*, A Lingis (Trans.) Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002.
²⁵ Levinas, E. Ibid. pp. 48, 49.
²⁶ Pereira, D. Ibid.
²⁷ Lacan, J. Op cit. 13-01-1976.
²⁸ Nietzsche, F. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1981, p. 287.
²⁹ Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XI, A. J-A. Miller (Ed.), Sheridan (Trans.), London: Penguin, 1994, p. 27.
³⁰ Lacan, J. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book VII, J.-A. Miller, (Ed.), D.Potter (Trans.), London: Routledge.
³¹ Lacan, J. Ibid, p. 81.
³² Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, p. 59.
³³ Pereira, D. Ibid.
³⁴ Pereira, D. Ibid.

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