

Introduction to the translation of fragments of
« Erotique du Deuil au Temps de la Mort Sèche »
(Erotics of Mourning in the time of Dry Death)
by Jean Allouch

We have only translated the first pages of the book which has more than 350 pages. The book alternates chapters called *Etudes* (Studies) addressing psychoanalytic theory with chapters Allouch calls *Littérature Grise* (grey literature).

Following in Freud's footsteps, Allouch in the *Littérature Grise* starts with very personal material, including his dreams and his interpretation of them. We had to include the latter in order to give the reader an idea of how the book came to be. However, this gives a wrong impression of the proportion of *Littérature Grise* which represents in fact a relatively small part of the book.

Erotics of Mourning in the Time of Dry Death

This unknowing knowledge
Is of such high power
That scholars debating
Can never overcome it
As their knowledge does not extend
To hear not hearing
All science transcending

*El saber no sabiendo
es de tan alto poder
que los sabios arguyendo
jamás le pueden vencer;
que no llega su saber
a no entender entendiendo,
Toda ciencia trascendiendo.*

JOHN OF THE CROSS

!Que te sirva de vela!

Address (*Envoi*)

*[...] nothing could be said “seriously”
(be it to form a limited series)
if not taking its sense from the comical order.*
Jacques Lacan, “L’Etourdit”, *Scilicet* 4, Paris, Seuil, 1973, p 44.

Poets, yet again, will have led the way.

Let mourning be carried to its status as “act”. Psychoanalysis tends to reduce mourning to “a work”; but there is an abyss between work and the subjectivation of a loss. The act is likely to effect in the subject a loss with no compensation at all, a dry loss. Since the First World War¹, Death expects no less. We no longer clamour together against it; it no longer gives its place to the sublime and romantic encounter of lovers, by it transfigured. Indeed. Nevertheless, in the absence of rites in regard to it, its current savagery has as its counterpart the fact that death pushes mourning to an act. A dry death, a dry loss. From now on only such a dry loss, only such an act, manages to leave the dead to his or her death, to Death.

Kenzaburo Ôe² characterizes this act (which indeed may demand a certain work) as a “gracious sacrifice of mourning”. Through this, the grief-stricken one effects his or her loss by supplementing it with what we will call “a little bit of oneself”; here is, strictly speaking, the object of this sacrifice of mourning, this little bit not of you, nor of me, but of oneself; therefore both of you and of me, in as much as “you” and “me” remain in “self”, not distinguished from each other.

Eroticised (otherwise it is not clear about what the pure loss would be), this little eroticized bit of oneself calls for an erotics of mourning. Through these stakes, through this phallic stake (“the little”), the notion of “work of mourning” was unfurling a veil of obscurantism rather than of decency. Discard this veil (a different gesture to lifting it), and nothing will be lost from modesty. Whoever finds it offensive to see the function of the phallus thus emerge at the very heart of the horrendous suffering of mourning may relinquish this book right here...

“My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar” publicly proclaims Shakespeare’s Antony³. The version of mourning proposed here is situated between two possible readings of this

¹ The very moment in which Freud wrote “Mourning and Melancholia”. The publication in 1992, of a text such as the philosophical novel by Pierre Bergounioux *L’Orphelin* (Paris, Gallimard) shows that it is only today that we are beginning to fully measure the magnitude of the damage, notably the fracture that the universalisation of war brought to death and paternity.

² Kenzaburo Ôe, Japanese author born in 1935, winner of the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1994.

³ (3) William Shakespeare, *Jules Caesar*, III, 2,105.

sentence. First reading: “I am suffering because my heart is in this casket, it is not in its right place as it has been ripped out of me by death”, such is the person in mourning. Second reading: “Yes, indeed, that is where it is, and I leave it in this place where, I now acknowledge it, it belongs”, here is the gracious sacrifice of mourning, here is the end of mourning. Since mourning, like in psychoanalysis, in essence has an end.

The mystic pushes the passage to the act of this vow of renunciation to its extreme limit. It is not just the stolen object that would be given up, but the theft itself, the act to which mourning responds, act for act. So proposes John of the Cross:

Why, since you have wounded
This heart, have you not healed it?
And having stolen it from me,
Why did you leave it thus
And not take the theft that you stole?

*Por qué, pues has llagado
aqueste corazon, no le sanaste?
Y pues me le has robado,
por qué así le dejaste
y no tomas el robo que robaste?*

And again, Shakespeare: discovering that their father’s death would have made Ophelia go mad, Laërte, shattered, declares⁴:

Oh Heavens, is’t possible, a yong maid wits
Should be as mortall as an old man life?
Nature is fine in Love, and where’tis fine
It sends some precious instance of it selfe
After the thing it loves”

Naming this *precious instance of it selfe* “little bit of oneself” should help us to express its function in mourning.

For death alone to be able to grant this status of lost object is something for which we have immediate proof through a little story, all the more exemplary as it takes place between children, with the implacable lack of pity evident in certain events in school yards. This takes place in Mexico, where it is still known, for instance, that giving children their dead relatives or even their own death mask to eat (both made of sugar, with the identity of the person written in a frame) does not make them sick, far from it.

At recess, a child, taller and more solid than another child, forcibly takes an object deemed precious held by a smaller one. Following this, how does the problem present itself for the latter? Surely, he cannot tell on him [*cafarder*], as this is contrary to children’s ethics. But neither can he purely and simply submit to the law of the jungle and accept a loss to which he does not consent -otherwise he would become depressed [*cafarderaït*], in another meaning of the same word , he would get the blues [*avoir le cafard*]⁵. What then? What will he do? What resolution will it give him?

Yet there is a Mexican solution, as if prefabricated, and directly originating from this well-known close relationship with death that is so characteristic of this country. Thus the

⁴ (4) William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

⁵ Lacan noted, very rightly in my opinion, that depression, as it is called, occurs after a subject has drawn back from an act he could not resolve not to do.

child from whom a stronger one has taken the object (raised to the function of desirable object, of *agalma*, through the theft itself), the one who is therefore violently transformed into a lover [*désirant*], into *eraste*⁶, while he was serenely strolling in so far as carrier of the marvellous object, as the *eromen* that perhaps he did not know himself to be⁷, he might say to the usurper:

- May this be your veil!
- ¡*Que te sirva de vela!*

Implying... (but it is so obvious that it does not need to be said) :

- May this be your veil... for your burial!
- ¡*Que te sirva de vela... para tu entierro!*

After this sentence has been uttered by the weak one, the strong one does not go for his throat to strangle him nor does he give him a good hiding. On the contrary, it all happens, through the formulation of this wish (because it is indeed a wish in its correct subjunctive form), as if the two partners of this “exchange” had become even, even though an event has indeed happened, since a swap has occurred, since the *eraste* has become the *eromen* and the *eromen* the *eraste*. Despite the violence of the act suffered, not to mention the violence (not the same one) of the reaction to the act, the “re-act”, the essential thin is that an ending takes place; after the utterance of the retort, the deal is done, each one can go back to his own business.

This would not have been the case if, as in France, the response had been the following threat: “*Tu ne l'emporteras pas au paradis!*” (“You will not take it to Heaven!”). In France and in Mexico, the elements are the same: two partners, one single object and a shift in place. However, while the French threat takes the row purely and simply to the gate of the hereafter contenting itself with suggesting that a solution could be found only there, that this hereafter would mark a limit, even without knowing why or how, the Mexican retort implies that the hereafter is the place where the problem will be effectively solved; it effectively says how, and by virtue of which the problem is already solved here on earth.

What produces such a resolution? One would not yet be aware of this event if it were admitted that the weak one formulates a death wish towards the strong one, and furthermore the story does not say whether he wishes him an immediate death or after having lived for ninety years! To tell the truth, it does not matter. It only matters that the object abruptly snatched serve as a veil for the snatcher at the time when he is going to *largar las velas* (to set sail, to cast off the moorings)^{8 9} in other words: to die.

⁶ Here there is more than an analogy with mourning. The mourning subject is also primarily a lover [*désirant*] who does not want to be one.

⁷ *Agalma*, *eraste* and *eromen* form a battery of terms found in Plato’s Symposium. Lacan studies them in his seminar *Le transfert dans sa dimension subjective, sa prétendue situation, ses excursions techniques* (bulletin *Stécriture*).

⁸ Note of the translators: in Spanish *vela* and in French *voile* translate as veil as well as sail.

⁹ In Spanish there is here a possible pun: “*vela*” also means eve (as in “on the eve of war”?) and “no darle a uno vela en un entierro” means that this one (el uno), as dead, no longer has any right to speak. Along this lines, there is also

Logically, the real resolution can only be obtained from an act whose content is not difficult to clarify since this content must conform to the event that occurred; it can therefore only be the act by which the weak one gives the strong one that which the strong one took from him. And it is precisely what is achieved with the declarative sentence: he relinquishes the object to him, but for his death. Death alone grants the snatched object its status of gift. Death alone transforms it into an object of sacrifice.

If the current Western culture is all about organ donation, then this present work is situated outside the current culture. Recently, on the radio, a specialist was heard declaring, when interviewed after the publicity given to the death of a child with cystic fibrosis for whom no lung donor was found:

To refuse to be a donor, declared Diafoirus¹⁰ is like taking a treasure into the grave.

Too invested in his interests the doctor who speaks to the media forgets all the objects (nothing less than the most precious) found in the tombs of the Pharaohs, in those of ancient China and in those of many other countries and cultures, including the most remote ones. We will therefore ruffle the feathers of this modern wish to salvage the treasures that the deceased would take with him when we say: mourning is effected when the mourner, far from receiving who knows what from the dead¹¹, far from removing anything from the deceased, adds another loss, that of one of his treasures to his suffered loss.

Thus it is incumbent upon psychoanalysis, if it is true that it was able, with Lacan, to circumscribe the subjectifying scope of the “object little a” as radically lost object, to raise this real from a technical economy of exchange, against this very economy, to the dignity of the macabre.

Consider what it is that hides in the nostrils, in the throat, in the belly: filth everywhere. We who are repelled to touch vomit or dung even with a finger, how then can we desire to hold in our arms the bag of excrement itself?

Odon of Cluny, in the XIth century¹², promotes the macabre to deter from sexual relations, playing necrophilia¹³ against desire. However, the reverse happens, and it is well known that macabre eras were joyous, rich with the enjoyments of life for the very people who cultivated it. It is enough to read these lines in order to note that the macabre, like psychoanalysis, isolates the “object little a”. Similarly, in that other text¹⁴, where the

“velorio”: vigil (which equivocates, since equivocation bounces back, with “velorio”: taking the veil) and “velatorio”: wake.

¹⁰ Diafoirus is a ridiculous, ignorant and pedantic doctor in Moliere’s play “Le Malade Imaginaire”.

¹¹ This is the real issue in inheritance disputes even in problems of transmission. The deaths of Freud and Lacan do not raise the question of what the analyst receives from Freud and from Lacan; they call upon him to determine what he will put of himself in their tombs so that they may be the dead that they are and so that the analyst may consequently be in his own place: the next one.

¹² Quoted by Philippe Ariès, *L’homme devant la mort*, Paris, Seuil, 1977 p.113.

¹³ There is not one word about necrophilia in “Mourning and Melancholia”.

¹⁴ (14) Also quoted by Ph.Ariès, *op.cit.*, p 122.

poet takes care to indicate that the rot which takes over the corpse does not come from the ground in which it is buried, from the maggots living in it, but from the body itself which carries this rot even before its birth:

All is nothing but filth	<i>N'est que toute ordure</i>
Death, spittle and rot,	<i>Mor, crachats et pourriture</i>
Stinking and corrupt crap.	<i>Fiente puant et corrompue</i>
Beware of the works of nature...	<i>Prends garde ès oeuvres naturelles</i>
You will see that each one conducts	<i>Tu verras que chascun conduit</i>
Stinking material products	<i>Puante matière produit</i>
Out of the body continually.	<i>Hors du corps continuellement.</i>

May this book re-establish the macabre in its function as trigger of desire in the living.

For a different mourning

Since it is a matter of putting forward a version of mourning different to the one used by the Freudian movement over the last eighty years (and now received as obvious well beyond them), as it is a question of rendering as largely obsolete this unsatisfactory version, such an endeavour seems to me to have no possible chance of working if I were to limit myself to discussing the matter theoretically. My own stakes here cannot be left aside. Moreover, even if the above comment were wrong, I still would need to go through this rebidding. In order to be convincing it is not enough to use the best and only valid argument, which is, as Freud noted: the case history. Unfurling the case history in the broadest possible manner, which is also an unfolding of the play of its seemingly most “innocuous” details, it is a modality in which the Freudian method advertises itself. Frankly speaking, it is the question of the thing itself. In fact, the version of mourning presented in this book first came to me in a nightmare. Can I avoid giving of this when, during the three years of seminar that gave rise to this book, other dreams or nightmares intervened, orienting and displacing a proposition which decidedly was not able to remain within the bounds of what might have been preferable, at least in regard to the pleasure principle (in other words the least tension), that is: within the “discours sans parole” (discourse without speech) which Lacan favoured. This discourse remains favoured. It is, however, for myself as well as for many others, able to be articulated only through speech, and only at the point where speech, in so far as it is particular, might attain, but through having given itself as such, the universal.

The universal, if it exists, must appear everywhere, to every one, must be revealed in all its snowy, windy, insular, separate singularity¹⁵.

Trick of reason? Yet it is not from that that the question of mourning, as it should today be revised in analysis, occurred to me. Because I had to admit that a dead child constituted the vivid kernel of the *folie à plusieurs* in which the *folie* of Marguerite Anzieu¹⁶, the *Aimée* of Jacques Lacan’s thesis¹⁷, was included, because I had “in my face” the fact that this madness was through and through a mourning, the inappropriate statement that she had not gone into mourning appeared to me in all its obscenity. Of course, it is through her madness that she was mourning! Manifestly, there was a misunderstanding. Psychoanalysis, in relation to mourning, contrary to its method, had veered towards the medical in the narrow sense of: what lays the norm. It is true that mourning calls for norm; nevertheless, it is not a *reason* in the true sense of this term.

Thus, my questioning about mourning found its start from this observation: there was mourning in the very place where it was said not to be, and there was a complaint that there was no mourning where it was expected to be! Some did even go as far as making

¹⁵ P. Bergounioux, *L’Orphelin*, op.cit., p.151.

¹⁶ 2. Jean Allouch, *Marguerite, ou l’Aimée de Lacan*, Paris, EPEL, 1st ed., 1990, 2nd ed., reviewed and augmented, 1994.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*, Paris, Le François, 1932, 2nd éd., Paris, Seuil, 1975.

some people go through mourning (but as they were conceiving it), those very people who were already going through it (but in their own way)! Manifestly, it was this expectation itself which had to be reconsidered. And with it the version (the aversion?) [*la version, l'aversion*] of mourning which vectorised it.

Hence, a simple consultation of the most classical cases in psychoanalytic literature greatly widened the gap between these two contradictory positions: the clinic is the absence of mourning, the clinic is the mourning. This second assertion is a lot less inappropriate than the one which consists in inserting something into others and then claiming that this something is not there. A fair caution asks us to consider Anna O.'s hysteria as being her mourning for her father, similarly the rat-man's obsession, or Ophelia's madness, or the imposture of Louis Althusser, mourning for an homonymous uncle, or again Pauline Lair Lamotte's delusion¹⁸ which occurred at the very moment when she found out that her spiritual director was dying, as if to show us that her illness had the value of mourning for the one she had chosen to guide her.

This identification between mourning and the psychoanalytic clinic demanded a revisiting, as radical as needed, of the psychoanalytic version of mourning. That was in January 1992.

“Mourning and Melancholia”, indeed was waiting for us: credit where credit is due¹⁹. Had this canonical paper by Freud taken good care of mourning? Questioning this text, we were, together with those who took part in this examination, tossed from surprise to surprise. First surprise: Freud did not write this paper to establish a psychoanalytic version of mourning, unlike what most people after him said, or believed or wanted to believe, but taking as fulcrum a non critical version of mourning, Freud only wanted to conquer melancholia. That gross misinterpretation took hold very early and in such a way that it seems almost impossible to recover from it²⁰. Mourning has been turned into... a work, whereas the term “Trauerarbeit” appears once and only once in the paper²¹ (7) and nowhere else in Freud's following papers! The ideology of work is still so predominant, that, forgetting that the word “Arbeit” appeared at the entrance of the Auschwitz extermination camp: “Arbeit macht frei” (“Work makes you free”), forgetting that the word “Work” appeared in a preminent place in the Petainist²² motto “*Travail, Famille, Patrie*” (Work, Family, Homeland), no one was able to see the impropriety of the reduction of mourning to a “work”.

¹⁸ cf. Jacques Maitre, *Une inconnue célèbre, la Madeleine Lebouc de Pierre Janet*, Paris, Anthropos, 1993.

¹⁹ 5. A tout *soigneur*, tout honneur. Allouch plays with the expression à tout *seigneur*, tout honneur, *soigneur* being a healer/carer.

²⁰ In a paper called “*La théorie la plus avancée du psychique*” (The most advanced theory of psychic life), in “*La Quinzaine littéraire*” No 595, 16-29 of February 1992, we can read, from the pen of an author supposedly familiar with Freud that: “Freud reminds us constantly of the necessity to start from the pathological to understand the normal (melancholia throws light on mourning)...”; however, Freud in “Mourning and Melancholia” writes from the first line exactly the opposite: “[...] we want to try to throw light on the nature of melancholia by comparing it to the normal affect of mourning”. The interest of this misinterpretation lies in the fact that it indicates that it could well be that Freud in writing his paper was not as faithful to his own method as one might think.

²¹ It appeared in it not as a new concept but as a compound word as German language allows them, flowing from the pen without the need to make a fuss about it.

²² Marshall Petain formed a French government collaborating with the Nazi invaders between 1940 and 1944.

As an example of the most common position, we can quote the first lines of one of the few books dedicated to mourning in France:

Mourning is the state in which we are after the loss of a dear one (*être en deuil* – to be bereaved), as well as the customs which accompany this event (*porter le deuil* – to wear mourning) and the psychological work that this situation implies (*faire son deuil* – to go through mourning, but also “to come to terms with something”). [Then straight after] It is the work of mourning in which we are essentially interested²³.

For such a result to persist, a large degree of “self-blinding” was necessary. Thus the critiques of “Mourning and Melancholia” not emanating from the Freudian field had to be silenced. Not one word on Geoffrey Gorer (see note 12), not one word on Philippe Ariès, in the parochial world of psychoanalysis. But this policy of putting one’s head in the sand has its limits. I was reaching them. It was indeed necessary to at last respond to Ariès’ assertion according to which “Mourning and Melancholia” prolongs a romantic version of mourning, notably with this idea of a substitutive object supposed to give to the mourner at the end of his “grief work” the same enjoyment as the one obtained in the past from the lost object. It was obvious: “grief work”, “substitutive object”, to which one would need to add the highly problematic “reality check” and many other things, all the metapsychology of “Mourning and Melancholia” had to be reconsidered. I started this work in January 1992.

But a particular stake to which I was turning my back without knowing, was waiting for me around the corner of this necessary de-construction. It was one year later that a nightmare erupted (the nightmare of the dungeon) which I could not ignore inasmuch as it was about the very same topic of the seminar which was well under way. I took the step, unusual amongst the Lacanians, to state it publicly. But it was as if I had opened a trail and since then, at each turn of this seminar, still now as I am writing these lines, I have not ceased to be titillated by the irruption of dreams, more or less anxiety provoking but also comical, which would clarify things independently of my will.

Here I am compelled to place first the nightmare of the dungeon (and its analysis) due to its inaugural and determining character. Its occurrence was provoked by particular events which had nothing to do with the seminar. Nevertheless it happened at a turning point of the seminar when I was about to start the second year of study dedicated no longer to mourning according to Freud but to a version of mourning as it can be read in Lacan.

While practically nothing published by Lacan suggested it, it was no small surprise to discover that there was indeed in Lacan a version of mourning which had gone unnoticed. The contrary would have been indeed surprising if it is true that Lacan, by proposing his ternary –symbolic imaginary real- as a paradigm for Freudian psychoanalysis, had to reconsider from then on the whole set of clinical problems posed to the Freudian field.

²³ Michel Hanus : “La pathologie du deuil”, Paris, Masson, 1976, p.5.

Well, this version happened to confirm the one which came out of my nightmare!
I am well aware that reading this last sentence one could think: “He is delirious!” or “Not surprising! He is so immersed in Lacan that even his nightmares are permeated with him!” or some other idea from the same mould (from the same “Rabelaisian dough”). Of course, I can by no means respond to this, and further more it is not up to me to decide. In the meantime, let us welcome the Wittgenstein suspicion: is it a matter of self-persuasion, or else, as I claim, an actual confirmation?

The encounter with the work of Kenzaburo Ôe²⁴ brought a last surprise, something akin to bliss. His short story, *Agwwîi, the Cloud Monster*, happened to confirm what came out of the previous encounter: the importance of the grief sacrifice found in my nightmare as well as in the Lacanian interpretation of Hamlet. Thus Ôe, although from a country where grace does not have the divine power granted to it in the West, allowed me, by qualifying it as gracious, to fully name this sacrifice: a gracious grief sacrifice.

My own particular experience of grief was that, having lost as a very young child, a father, I lost as a father, a child (a daughter). Most likely, the reading of Ôe triggered a succession of dreams and nightmares which put me back on that track, thus forcing me to admit that the paradigmatic case of grief is no longer today, as it was at the time of the writing of the *Traumdeutung*, the case of the death of a father, but rather the death of a child²⁵.

This displacement from one generation to the other constitutes one of the major features of the version of grief developed here. Already in 1964 the sociologist Geoffrey Gorer²⁶ referred very explicitly to the “privileged status” now given to the death of a child in the West. However, it is once more literature which is the most illuminating. We may look into *L'orphelin (The Orphan)*, by Pierre Bergounioux, to read how this shifting from the death of a father to that of a child occurred, how the sons of those who slaughtered each other in 1914-1918 could only tend to reduce to nothingness the existence of their own children.

On the background of dissatisfaction towards the psychoanalytic version of mourning which was then widely accepted, several very different experiences (my own, the Lacanian reading of Hamlet and the lesson given by Ôe) converge towards another version which situates today's mourning as being essentially a gracious sacrificial act consecrating the loss by supplementing it with a little bit of self. In presenting this other version, the following pages try to highlight some of its consequences.

²⁴ 10. Here I must thank Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière for this encounter.

²⁵ “For me this book has another signification, a subjective signification which I noticed only after the work was finished. I understood that it was a part of my self-analysis, my reaction to the death of my father, *the most dramatic event in a man's life*”, S.Freud, “*L'interprétation des rêves*”, preface to the second edition (Summer 1908) Fr. Trans. I. Meyerson, PUF, 1967. One could imagine that Freud wrote the untimely proposition that we underlined while still stricken by this mourning of the father and that later he did not maintain this primacy given to the death of the father. We shall see that we do not find this conjecture confirmed in his work.

²⁶ Geoffrey Gorer *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, London, Cresset Press, 1965, translated in French by Hélène Allouch, *Ni pleurs ni couronnes*, preceded by a preface of Michel Vovelle “Pornographie de la mort”, Paris, EPEL, 1995.

Grey literature grey (Extract)

The nightmare (night of the 7th to the 8th of December 1992)

It happened the day after a weekend spent with my wife at her parents'. Her father, seriously ill, is declining and dying. A friend of my in-laws, almost a son to them (the son of the cleaning lady, who herself had become a family friend and as such loving and loved by the children), comes everyday to help sort out practical problems; his name is Jeannot, pet-name given to me as a child in the South of France (where my in-laws live) that I have never liked. The nightmare comprises four scenes.

Scene 1: my wife and I are visiting Jeannot in his house which I see, first image, as if it was in a small valley, on the edge of a forest, on the shore of a pond or small lake. This largish building, a kind of rather posh villa or renovated farmhouse [while transcribing those last two words²⁷ I thought of the photo of the farmhouse published in "Marguerite, ou l'Aimée de Lacan"²⁸] is situated close to Paris (in Fontainebleau but much closer, right on the edge of Paris). I thought to myself: "How fortunate to have such a house in such a place!"[Jeannot is unemployed].

Scene 2: we are inside the house and a discussion starts about the chimney [a problem which my in-laws had: were they going to build a chimney or not?]. I explain to Jeannot that it is good to have a chimney, that "we ourselves, in our country house, have a very large one, which goes at least from here to there, and even up to there" ("here" designates a small door on the right hand side, "there" another mark, maybe a beam or an opening and the second "there", another mark further away).

Scene 3: the conversation peters out (like a fire!), we are starting to take our leave; looking back, I spot on the ceiling a sort of hole covered with wire mesh, a few roughly trimmed beams, all of it black with soot, in short: traces of the existence of a chimney. It surprises me a lot because Jeannot had complained that he did not have a chimney, such had been the start of our discussion and of my intervention. I have the feeling that I have been deceived, swindled. This feeling is confirmed when looking down to check what is exactly underneath this shaft [or vent], I see on the floor a blackened spot, perhaps even a few small pieces of burnt wood which unquestionably prove that a fire had been lit here. I am also surprised that it is not exactly a chimney but a fire (extinguished) right on the ground [similarly the vent is not really a range hood]; I think that such a poor installation does not suit such a posh house. All this leads to a certain uneasiness.

Scene 4: my wife and I leave through the back, I do not know why...that is the way it is...probably because someone pointed to that exit. But there is a problem. We are high on a sort of steep rampart. In addition to my previous uneasiness, I start to worry a little that we are going around in circles, that we are stuck and I have a slight feeling of

²⁷ From now on, the indications in square brackets will refer to thoughts that occurred to me during the act of transcribing.

²⁸ J. Allouch, *Marguerite ou l'Aimée de Lacan*, op.cit. p.155.

dizziness (we are high above the ground yet in fact we are at the back of the house which leans against the foot of a hill, I suspect in my dream that this configuration is not right). On the left, there is a rather deep drop [about two or three times as high as a man] and then I see my wife jump off. For a brief moment I am worried, but she is not hurt, there she is on the ground, getting up, out of trouble. I choose not to jump and try to go to her through the other side, on the right [there is here a duplication in the two sides of the chimney which was already an issue in the second scene, the issue of the two exits]; I then find myself even higher on a kind of peak, holding on to a stone dungeon. I realise with concern that the stones are a little loose and so are the stones on which I am perched. I soon realise that I cannot move without falling. All the way down on the right, close to the place where I could crash, Jeannot looks at me totally unconcerned, smiling and waving at me, not realising in the least the situation in which I find myself. This is when, while trying to move an arm, my right arm, I notice that the stone my hand is holding onto is getting loose. It is impossible to let go of it [it is as if my hand were holding it in place], it is therefore impossible for me to move at all. I yell to Jeannot to do something but he does not hear and continues to smile at me. Full of anguish, I wake up.

Interpretation

During the day, an interpretation of this nightmare occurred to me easily. The first image is of a farm-house like the ones that are found in the centre of France. At the age of twelve, I was boarding in a similar kind of building, alone, very far away from my family; in those circumstances, that I was in some ways responsible for, I had for the first time consciously felt the enormous grief of the loss of my father. The first image is exactly that of a landscape in Chambon sur Lignon, the one that can be found in “*La fabrique du pré*” by Francis Ponge²⁹.

Ponge frequently went to that particular meadow (*pré*), which has become famous as a site of resistance against the Nazis. The meadow (*pré*) in Ponge’s poem ends up becoming a “*près*”, (close to, near) which is found in the dream (*cf* “close to Paris”). This nightmare, therefore, was about my position in relation to my father’s death, about the way it was still affecting me to this day. For some time certain signs had given me the inkling that the death of my father-in-law (we had a genuine affection for each other), which was imminent, resonated with the death of my father when I was five, that is almost fifty years ago! My psychoanalysis had confirmed that the way I had been kept away from my father’s funeral (for my own good, of course, so that I should not be shocked, as was the belief at the time) had been detrimental to me. According to Ph. Aries, this attitude is pathognomonic of the “feralisation” of death. Analysis had also led me to recognise the dread I had of a father not dead but... vanished. In the dream my wife managed to escape, I did not. Hence the anguish which would end up waking me.

²⁹ Francis Ponge, *La fabrique du pré*, Genève, Skira 1971. This « factory » (*fabrique*) was to inspire the heteronym “Francis Dupré” to sign the “construction” (*fabrique*) of the case of the Papin sisters (cf Jean Allouch, Erik Porge, Mayette Viltard *La “solution” du passage à l’acte, le double crime des soeurs Papin*, Toulouse, Erès, 1984)

The interpretation came to a halt there during that day; I only need to add that when I got up I had the temptation to tell this dream to my wife but I only said to her: “I had a nightmare” and nothing more, thinking that she had enough worries with her father’s health without infecting her with mine. This abstention allowed things to unravel differently.

During the following night, I woke up several times and had a “flash of inspiration” (that is what I called my discovery (*trouvaille*)³⁰ in between sleeping and waking. The context of this flash of inspiration is related to the fact that for many years since my case study of *Marguerite*, the question of the link between mourning and sexual relation has become one of my main preoccupations, both doctrinally and personally as evidenced here. In this nocturnal wondering wandering, I thought of my dream of the night before and suddenly I saw the little dungeon on which I was nailed in the last image of the nightmare as being obviously what it was: a phallus! I immediately even thought that it was clearly a “signifier of the lack” (Lacan) since taken as a chimney shaft it was associated in the third scene with the discussion on the presence/absence of a chimney³¹. The interpretation of the day before had happily overlooked this little detail. Immediately a question, at the same time a little crazy and important, arose: what was this phallus doing in this nightmare and what was I doing hooked to it? The phallus in question, as demonstrated by its size, was in erection, and I understood then that because of its lateral position close to the summit of the dungeon the stone which was threatening to come off - and that my hand was indeed holding- was a foreskin (*prépuce*)³². Thinking of my wife’s jump in my dream as a *saut de puce* (a flea jump!), made me burst out with laughter partly at the wit, partly at the comical situation. It was confirming in regard to the signifier (*saut de puce*=*faire sauter le prépuce*/ flea jump=to get rid of the foreskin) the identification, at the imaginary level, of the said stone as being my foreskin.

In Chambon-sur-Lignon one of my favourite exercises was precisely to jump from the top of a high terrace, an exercise in which I excelled whereas the other children balked at the truly impressive height from which to jump, (“two or three times higher than a man” as mentioned in scene four of the nightmare) as if one was flying. I nonetheless never hurt myself in the slightest but the exercise in question did not prevent me from having, during the first years of my analysis, an insistent Icarian nightmare: I am flying, I am flying, it is wonderful, I cover long distances, flying over hills, passing over mountains, but, without fail, it turns sour when I realise that I am not able to land. This new nightmare is a toned down version of the previous one: this time my feet are on the ground!

After this burst of laughter I fell asleep and had a brief dream: I am in bed with my wife (but she is not in the picture), maybe naked, vaguely lying on my left side with my legs bent; a man behind me puts his arm between my thighs and his hand grabs hold of my

³⁰ Jean Allouch, “Interpretation et illumination”, *Littoral* no 31-32, « La connaissance paranoïaque », Paris, EPEL, Mars 1991, p 33-64.

³¹ In Chambon, the name of my main rival in every respect: intellectual, physical and spiritual was *Cheminée* (Chimney) and he became a volcanologist!

³² *Pré-puce* can be heard as “before the flea”!

sex, more precisely of its three components [the holy trinity]. I vaguely wake up again, and start to float again between dream and sleep, surprised and embarrassed but not anxious. Since my analysis, I know that the man intervening from behind is my father. That is when I burst out laughing again: I have just realised that I call my wife “*Puce*” (“Flea”)! Of course, in my mind, it is a nickname for “*pucelle*” (young virgin/maiden) and also a little flea, the kind of delightful or silly (depending on one’s point of view) term of endearment created by love. Up until that moment that night, however, I had never ever thought that by giving her that name I made her, metonymically, my foreskin (*prépuce*)³³!

Thinking of the nightmare of the previous night it became clear that by holding on to the stone threatening to come off, I was holding my foreskin, I was holding on to my foreskin. The only thing was, if I wanted to free myself from the death of the father with a flea jump like my wife in the dream, I had to give up holding on to that goddamned foreskin. In other words, with his death my father had taken my foreskin with him! Here we can remember Joyce identifying the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being what he is: a “collector of foreskin”.

The choice I had was of the kind “your money or your life” (*la bourse ou la vie*)³⁴ such as Lacan commented on: the one who is thus cornered, if he keeps the money, will lose his money as well as his life, and if he gives up his money, will keep his life but a life without money; either way the money is lost. Similarly here: I either hold on to my foreskin and lose my foreskin and my life (what kind of a life is it in which one remains up in the air holding on to a foreskin!), or I give up my foreskin and I am alive but with no foreskin. I make a note that this nightmare multiplies the alternatives; scene one: a dilapidated or renovated house, a pond or a small lake; scene two: both left-hand side and right-hand side of the chimney (in my country house the only way out is on the right-hand side of the chimney); scene four: leaving through the front door or through the back door (the “back-door” which we will find again in the next dream) and again a left-hand side or a right-hand side (the left-hand side being the way out for my wife).

In the *Traumdeutung*, Freud noted that when there is an alternative in the manifest text of a dream it is a matter of finding the unconscious one to which it relates. In this instance, better than right/left or front/back, it seems that it is particularly the topological alternative “here/there” or more exactly “near/far” which is a cipher for the unconscious alternative “the foreskin or the life”. It was already present in scene one: the meadow – the small valley where at Chambon I was watching the cows by the pond where I used to catch frogs at night- with, in a textual proximity, as in Ponge’s text, the *près* (near) – *cf* “near Paris”; it occurs twice in the final scene: to stay or not to stay near the foreskin but also in Jeannot’s moving away. This double of myself, waving “hello” (but is it not rather

³³ It is remarkable that the complete sequence: first nightmare, first laughter, another dream, another laughter reproduced, albeit over two nights, the same sequence highlighted by Lacan in his interpretation of the dream called “Irma’s injection”: Freud did not wake up at this point of anguish when he could see down Irma’s throat, his dream continued, as Lacan noted, beyond this point of anguish. I woke up but in the end the second dream by-passes this awakening, explaining the grip at play in the nightmare while no longer having the import of a nightmare.

³⁴ *Bourse* means both purse and scrotum.

a “goodbye”? It is, as we are parting) with his right hand raised like mine, thus simply reflecting my image, does not know if he needs to intervene or not, therefore to come closer or not. To stay close to the foreskin meant to lose everything, foreskin and life, while maintaining the hold of the deceased over me and not disengaging myself from the grief; to move away was to renounce my foreskin as well as to get out of mourning for the father through the act of leaving with him that which he valued so much.

Thus it became luminously clear to me that when we mourn, we mourn for someone who has, in death, taken a little bit of self. Fully awake, I realised that this was a real clinical and theoretical discovery. This impression was confirmed by the fact that it is impossible to determine the ownership of this “bit of self”, that it has a transitional status (Winnicott), at least until the act of handing it over to the deceased, act which puts an end to the mourning by settling the ownership.

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