



## ARTICLE

### *Lacan's nightingale*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** In this important work, Jacques-Alain Miller offers an insightful, lyrical and persuasive argument for a mode of psychoanalytic practice that emphasizes the contingent and the singular. Terms like contingency and singularity are perhaps common place in our post-modern social experience. However, in this intellectual tour de force, Miller gives depth and range to such concepts. Drawing on an impressive range of scholarship from philosophy to literature to the history of science, he provides the reader a solid basis on which to engage the contingency of language and human subjectivity. Miller also demonstrates the unique contribution of Lacan's *Seminar* making such awareness possible. Moreover, Miller's discussion of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale", via Borges, powerfully illuminates both the challenge and promise of practicing in the Lacanian orientation.

**Key words:** Lacanian practice; diagnosis; universal categories; singularity.

**Resumen:** En este importante trabajo, Jacques-Alain Miller ofrece argumento lírico, persuasivo y perspicaz para un modo de práctica psicoanalítica que enfatiza al contingente y al singular. Términos tales como contingencia y singularidad talvez sean lugares comunes en nuestra experiencia social posmoderna. Sin embargo, en este *tour-de-force* intelectual, Miller les da profundidad y los ensancha a estos conceptos. Discurriendo con impresionante erudición de la filosofía a la literatura y a la historia de la ciencia, el autor le presenta al lector una base sólida sobre la cual se yergue la contingencia de la lengua y subjetividad humanas. Miller también demuestra la contribución inigualable del *Seminario* de Lacan al posibilitar tal concienciación. Además, la discusión de la obra de Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale", vía Borges, ilumina de forma intensa no sólo al desafío, sino también a la promesa de hacer una práctica según la orientación de Lacan en lo que respecta al diagnóstico.

**Palabras claves:** Práctica lacaniana; diagnóstico; categorías universales; singularidad.

There are two dimensions in teaching: accumulation and investigation. To that end, repetition is a part of any teaching. It is a part of the teaching that must not be

disregarded. Neither is it unpalatable. It is the recitation of the work accumulated by those who came before us.

We recognize importance of compiling bibliographies which, these days has actually been made easier through the use of information technology. The effect of informatics is so dramatic that one can obtain a single compact disc (CD) that contains all of the American psychoanalytic literature. This CD, which I found at a recent IPA conference, has every issue of the *International Journal Psychoanalysis* on it. Beyond this, thanks to such a CD or similarly by using the right internet portal, it is possible to conduct research on psychoanalytic terms and concepts and in a few seconds have the necessary references. That said, while bibliographic work is getting easier, it is less and less the case that one actually traverses different disciplines to establish bibliographic connections. However, one must recognize the value of bibliographic research. It falls squarely within the dimension of accumulation and validates the importance of being a well informed researcher.

But there is the other dimension of this teaching, as one doesn't teach merely through repetition. This other dimension is investigation. Investigation is research, research of the new. It is true that, to have an idea of something new, it necessary to know the existing literature. Research is also searching, waiting for the new. As such, there is dialectic between the planes of accumulation and investigation. Custom dictates that we "await the new". We look for the right moment where it can be found. This then obeys another approach, different from an emphasis on repetition. However, that dimension assumes everything is contingent wherein any kind of foundational assurance is absent. In repetition we gain surety, but on the dimension of research this is not so. The emphasis has to be as it is in the "hard sciences", where people organize and meet and in crossing paths with one another, generate new ideas. The importance of this cannot be underestimated, just as what I emphasized in respect to the systematic. It is this dimension toward which I am directed, leaving aside all that is systematic, the foundation that sustains all activity, but that is only interested in the measure; that, as a result, also gives a place to the a-systematic and to the singular.

### *Lacan's Research*

I'll begin talking about one singularity: the search by Lacan for the form of his Seminar, his manner of teaching. He never had another way and never disregarded

that style, even when he had his own School. Next, I'll make some reflections about the singular as such and some generalizations about the singular. To preserve this aspect, I will give tonight's talk a Borges- like title "Lacan's Nightingale" (there is a text of Borges to which I will allude that is called "Keats's Nightingale").

Lacan, in truth, had only one style of teaching: his Seminar. Probably the existence during thirty years of Lacan's Seminar, contributed to making this concept part of the French language. In the classic Latin, *seminarium* is a kitchen garden. *Seminare* comes from semen. The modern use of the work Seminar has its origins in the Counter-Reformation (or, better stated, a place, a religious institution where the young are trained to receive religious orders). The modern meaning of *Seminarium* is born with the Council of Trent, in the Counter-Reformation, when the Catholic Church sought out mechanisms for reconquering Christendom. By extension, from this point in modern history, it took on the general meaning to be the place where youth were "formed". I found all of this in a dictionary of the French language, which went into detail on this point.

We can continue the history of the word seminar by considering the modern sense of the term: in the university a seminar is distinct from a more didactic style of "master's" course. In the former, the students present their work and the professor or master orients or corrects it and talks about the students' work publicly with them. The students are directed based on the orders from above. This is what we call the seminar in the university environment. I believe that this form of teaching, the seminar, comes from Germany. I believe I read, in the memoirs of a historian, that it was introduced in France after the war (against Germany, that France lost) of 1870. Immediately after that, the French began robbing the ideas of the Germans, which had the end result of strengthening the French structures in a certain way such that many of fields of instruction imported and put in place the German methods. Thus, we had Ernest Renan giving the advice to France: study the Germans. This was something that was imposed in many intellectual disciplines.

We now consider the Seminar as a form of teaching.

We can't say that the interventions of the students had a major role in the Seminar of Lacan. These interventions were more residual in character. Nevertheless, periodically Lacan sought to re-energize the participants and stimulate questions or to present some kind of communication, but fundamentally in his Seminar, it is Lacan,

the master, that speaks. This produced in France, almost a change in sentiment, or at least, eased the limit of what would be a Seminar.

But it is also important to say that Lacan's Seminar is well named because it was a "sowing" of psychoanalysts, a place for the development of psychoanalysis and for the formations of the unconscious. One could say: a place for the formation of the unconscious and for the treatment of the unconscious by psychoanalysis and with results, that is to say, famous ones, because among the psychoanalysts formed in Lacan's Seminar, there are many present in all of the analytic societies in France. If we consider its publication one could say that it was a successful formation both intellectually and at the level of practice. This implies the necessity that we examine, with a very powerful lens, just exactly what was this marvelous stance that Lacan took in his Seminar.

Was it about a procedure? Was it a method? It does not appear to be the case. I think it was such a success because it was neither a procedure nor a method. Some might classify it as a procedure, consider its results as if it was a technique, but clearly the Seminar was not a technique of Lacan. It began as a Seminar with a reading of Freud's work. The first ten Seminars always referenced one or two of Freud's books. The crucial point was *Seminar XI*, when Lacan considered the four key concepts of Freud, but presented in a new way. Later, he moved away a bit from the typical reading style of an academic seminar.

Lacan had a model. It wasn't all original. This model, I think, was the Seminar on Hegel that Kojève brought to life in the 1930's. The readings done by Kojève in his Seminar recreated what Hegel had done. He created a reading that was a scansion, a punctuation of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* on the point of the dialectic between the Master and the Slave. It was a creative reading so pregnant with meaning that it is only now that commentators have attempted to unpack the power of Kojève's interpretations of Hegel's work.

Lacan's reading of Freud was also a creative reading, a reading based on language and the function of the speech, or, should we say, as result of what appeared to be a pioneering science for the so-called "human sciences" of the 1950's: structural linguistics. This form took as a point of departure a reading of Freud's, but one informed by Saussure, revised and reedited by Jakobson. In truth, it is a formula invented by Levi-Strauss, not by Lacan. So, to summarize, the Seminar of Lacan was

initially a seminar style of reading, which had as its model Kojève and was informed by a specific understanding of structural linguistics.

However, the Seminar of Lacan is something else all together. It was, day after day, week after week, a discourse of someone who was experiencing the unconscious. Someone who manifested what in psychoanalysis was, at the same time, its practice and its difficulty and its preoccupations. Someone who expounded as he went, as he was going about making this discipline and this object; as he was entangled and trying to untangle himself, as he became enmeshed, muddled and then unstuck again. It is evidently the case that he was a long way from arriving at the idea of a teaching method.

In the *Seminar*, Lacan exemplified, as result of Freud's texts and the texts of others, his way of doing it, which clearly changed as time went on. He modified his way of working, in such a way that he succeeded in transmitting psychoanalysis as a discipline, but reinvented in his way. It is clear that it wasn't always like that. In the beginning of his teaching, he presented things in the manner of a structuralist, in the style of "this is the correct form." But now that we have a picture of the totality of his journey, we can perceive, in the evolution of his propositions, a style of reinvention and reformulation that constitutes a particular way of working. Certainly, it would be more palatable to present his teachings as an intellectual journey in the direction of the scientificization of psychoanalysis and the intellectual strength of Lacan had something of this, but the perspective of reinventing dislocates the impetus to scientificization.

Lacan yielded an extraordinary effect in the formulation, dissemination and fecundity of psychoanalysis, because he demonstrated his own struggle with an object and a dimension that he could not completely master. It is a dimension that has its own consistency and its own internal resistance. At first glance, one might think that Lacan demonstrated his mastery of the topic, but no, by being aware of its unceasing quality, he shows, in contrast, the resistance of knowledge and a certain shattering of any mastery of the real. It is patently obvious that this is a demonstration of the inability of total mastery. Lacan was always reformulating, remobilizing and never said "its ready" about any point. When in the few times that he said it, he denied it shortly after a few words.

What is at stake is preserving this sense or dimension of dissatisfaction. Even though one could be justified in doing so, we are not going to add a special domain:

the domain of dissatisfaction. It would be the domain where one would be say that there is nothing satisfactory either in the programme, or in the methods that were achieved. It would be a domain where one would never say "it's complete." Dissatisfaction is a part of everything and for this reason we don't need to create a specific domain for it.

*To justify oneself as an analyst is a work of desire*

The Seminar of Lacan was not a method. We can develop this point further. This seminar, as I see it, was done by someone who sought to justify himself. It was ministered by someone who perhaps wanted to be pardoned for the practice of psychoanalysis. Sometimes, this is lost in the post-analytic experience of analysts, but for Lacan there was a certain sin in practicing psychoanalysis: the attempt of the professional to master a real which does not lend itself to being mastered. It is in this way that psychoanalysis is like an imposter, as Lacan asserted toward the end of this life. This is what energized him such that he presented himself every week in front of the audience, in front of the big Other, to defend his cause.

It is important not to forget that it was he himself who invented the concept of the big Other. It is necessary to think that he had a certain relation with the dissimilar: that to which one is directed. At the same time as it is the place where a message is directed, it is also, in a certain way, its author. The big Other thus has two faces. On one hand, in order to be distinct from the small other, it is a function that seems anonymous, universal and abstract. But on the other hand, as Lacan underlines in *Seminar V: The formations of the unconscious* (apropos of the *Witz*), this big Other doesn't function without a limitation of its space, without a limitation of its field to a parochial dimension.

The parochial dimension is a province of shared meaning. Lacan established it in his Seminar, a province which allowed him to speak self-reflexively. That is, he created a province of the Other. He directed himself toward the analysts and formed them. It is because Lacan directed himself to this province of the Other that the community of analysts became constituted. The specific discourse that was directed toward them transformed itself into an Other. The discourse of Lacan was deposited, collected and returned to us, the Other to which he directed himself.

The royal road to the unconscious was a dream, according to Freud. The Seminar of Lacan, for several generations, has been a real road to reach psychoanalysis. As it was neither a procedure nor a method, what was produced in the seminar had something to do with both desire and guilt.

At the same time, Lacan created a special language to speak of the unconscious of psychoanalysis, a language especially adapted to capture and circumscribe psychoanalytic phenomena. This special language imposes itself now as psychoanalytic maxims, used outside the immediate circle of Lacan's students. This language he created, as a result of elements he took from scientific discourse, was reconstructed and reshaped in order to conform to the object he was addressing.

Lacan's idea, surely, was to make a transcription of Freud's work that could re-energize the psychoanalytic field and obtain, as such, a language more appropriate, adequate, and adaptable for psychoanalysis. I believe that teaching and research are not really effective if a teacher is not also animated by a dream.

### *Making packages*

I will now give some general ideas about the singular. I began this lecture with a very singular case: that of Lacan. I believe that this perspective imposes itself on our clinic as well. And, in the transmission of our clinic, we must give primacy to the singular more than the general or universal. It is exactly for this reason that I did not present any general ideas about teaching, but the particular case of a teacher who was important to many, at least along these lines.

Maybe we are post-modern clinicians. Since we privilege the particular case, the detail, the ungeneralizable, we no longer believe in categories, in the categories inherent in systems of classification. We can classify Lacan. We can say that he did like Kojève or like Levi-Strauss, but in my opinion this does not give an accurate account of the phenomenon.

We know today, at the end of the century, that our categories and our classifications systems are mortal and the categories we use are artifacts of history. We have our mental health classification system; we know what psychosis, neurosis and perversion mean, etc. We know that our classifications have something of the relative, the artificial or the artful, and in sum that they are only *semblants*. That is,

the categories are not founded in nature, nor are they structural, nor are they in the real. It appears to me that the categories are founded only in a certain kind of truth.

However, the truth has variations, as Lacan expressed with his neologism *varité*, variety. This neologism connotes both truth and variety simultaneously. Our categories produce truth effects, but, at bottom, the truth is not grounded in the real. Already long ago, Pascal used to say that he knew and illustrated his arguments with varieties of the truth to exalt the eternal, divine truth. Today, it is axiomatic that the truth is nothing if not truth effects. That is, it is always the truth of a particular time or of a particular project.

In the time when one trusted more in the semiology of psychiatry, for example, we have the theoretical constructions of Chaslin<sup>3</sup>, a French psychiatrist, an excellent semiotician, who could give examples in an idiosyncratic or chaotic way, as shown in the first chapter of his work. He began with examples, or, better stated, with cases that had described diagnoses. So, first he had examples of the disorder. In the second chapter comes a matrix, perfectly ordered, of the nosography which demonstrates that if on one side there are signs, on the other there must be categories and that, through the diagnosis, we move from signs to categories. Or, better stated, with the signs and the nosographic matrix it is possible to locate a category to which these pathological signs refer. In the practice of diagnosis—not that there is a foundation to it—there is an inherent idea that the individual is ultimate example of a category. I say this in a general way.

Precisely for this reason the practice of diagnosis repudiates, we will say it like this, contemporary individualism. The contemporary individual resists the idea of being turned solely into an ideal type, and every time we place such a classification on him, the answer is: “no, I’m just me, I’m not a number, nor am I an ideal type.”

These days, doubts are launched about such classifications. We live in a culture of historicism. This teaches us that all our familiar, everyday categories have a history. Our everyday way of thinking has a history, or better stated, things were not always perceived in the way in which they are today. The same word meant something else at an earlier point in time. This is a powerful lineage. Everything we think about is nothing if not the result of an earlier historical process.

We have, all in all, an “industry” of historicism that is applied to every aspect of life. There is a historicism of privacy which teaches us that the private life has its own special history. Each object has its own historian. In the end, I am spoofing this;

however, it also fascinates me. I bought recently a book, which I still have not read; I only leafed through the pictures. It tells the history of *packaging*<sup>4</sup>, a magnificent history of the way in which people package the things we buy. For example there is an American who through an invention made it possible to put text directly on the wrapping material. This invention only came about because of a push to increase sales through more advertising. Our world is a world pulverized by historicism. In a certain way, our categorizing is also a type of packaging.

### *Induction and Pragmatism*

If historicism exists, there must also be logicism. In addition, there are the paradoxes that undercut the logic of induction. I dedicated some time in my course to study Hempel's famous paradox, so important for our clinic. Finding a black raven confirms the proposition that all ravens are black. (Although, if we encounter ten ravens, we are already in a Hitchcockian universe and will be feeling that frightening feeling!) For us, finding one black raven confirms a universal proposition that all ravens are black. In the meantime, Hempel demonstrates, and this would have enchanted Borges, even though I suppose that he wasn't familiar with it, the corollary that all objects that are "not black" and at the same time are "not ravens," confirms the proposition that all objects which are "not black" are "not ravens." Each time that the men see a black raven they say: "well, just one more." But, logically, the same confirmation obtains every time the men find something that is "not a raven" which is at the same time "not black" and it can be demonstrated with the small letters of a logical equation that it is not possible to get out of this. Or, better stated, the universal proposition "all ravens are black" is confirmed also when the men find the green of a plant, the white of a shoe, the blue of a shirt, the red of blood, the purple of a finch, or passion fruit ice cream. This paradox, which provokes laughter, was an important theme for the field of logic, and, for him, an argument that was taken very seriously.

I also commented in my course on the paradox of having a predicate for a certain category of class of things or ideas. This comes from Hempel, but was forged by the logician Nelson Goodman. He created a predicate of a category that integrates the factor of time. That is, considers the moment of the observation, but, when it stops, what occurs afterward? He showed that, when one integrates the factor of time, nothing prevents that tomorrow the emeralds will be blue and that, as well, chickens

can have teeth. In Goodman's world, nothing prevents that tomorrow this could be true.

Allow me to propose an answer to the question that these paradoxes demonstrate—why we use some categorical predicates more than others. Why don't we use a predicate like Goodman's which opens up this possibility? How do we make our classifications? Goodman responds that in the final analysis, we use predicates that function, that is, those that don't leave us too surprised, as a result of reflection about these paradoxical limits. We don't operate with a predicate that leaves open the door such that tomorrow the emeralds will be blue. We don't use these predicates (it is necessary for a logician to invent them). We only use predicates that work with a base that has been established and that has been apprehended from a practice. It is the equivalent of saying that, on a purely theoretical level, the predicates don't have any foundation and that the classifications are not solely constructed at the level of theory and contemplation. At the level of contemplation, we leave the door open to all of these paradoxes. Finally, the classifications refer themselves back to a practice, which is effective, and is already in existence. That is, we have confidence that the predicates permitted them to make predictions and were already verified long ago. Or, better stated, the emeralds will continue to be green.

These paradoxes demonstrate that we don't have that many schools of thought. Our theories of classification are chosen not so much as a function of data, but as a function of our linguistic practices, the way in which we speak or talk to one another. It is the equivalent of saying that, essentially, we have confidence in the customary terms and categories, in the terms already employed to formulate inductions as a result of the data, which are always incomplete. Goodman says that it is the past that guarantees the possibility to "project." Or better stated, in these cases we have a certain type of path that goes from "incomplete data" to the "all." We are not concerned here with an absolute guarantee, but a specifically pragmatic guarantee.

### *Nominalism and pragmatism in the diagnosis*

Why should one make such a reflection? Because all diagnoses refer themselves to a category and our diagnostic categories have an extraordinary past that can be traced through the centuries. Our categories are founded neither in nature nor in observation. Neither psychosis nor neurosis is a natural kind. It seems to me that what

distinguishes us from those who came before us is that we understand the artifice of our categories. We know that our categories have their foundation in linguistic practices of those concerned with the theme under consideration. That is, the founding of categories is a conversation for those who are engaged in practice. It is precisely for this reason that we have conferences where there are questions and answers and that we engage in research projects, colloquia, etc. We speak with one another, and in our time it has already turned into an international industry of speaking. It is this that appears, now that we are aware of artificial character and socially constructed quality of our categories, at least the more agreed upon ones. If the categories were a natural kind there would not be a necessity for research projects or colloquia. Each of us could sit at home relaxing in front of the television.

Lacan says: "There is a clinic, there are typical symptoms"<sup>5</sup>, but when he says this, he makes us understand that this doesn't take us very far. Rather he makes us understand that similarity is not science (*ressemblant ce n'est pas science*, in French). It is exactly what Quine, the logician, said when he affirmed that it is doubtful that there is scientific law about the general notion of "similarity." He says it is difficult or almost impossible to define scientifically a notion as general as "similarity." I cite him as follows: "nothing is more fundamental for thought and for language than our sense of similarity." It is important to reassert what he says: "*our sense of similarity*," something that is at the limit and that cannot easily be established.

Quine makes it evident that we use general terms such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. We can classify "man," "table," "fish" as a function of certain similarities between their elements, however, if groups are a natural phenomenon, in the sense of a theory of groups, in which two things, no matter what they are, can be taken as elements of a more extensive kind. For example, there are groups of "animals," of "humans," and of "plants," but if we construct a group of "live beings" these groups would join into a new group. As such, it is always possible for one kind to spill over forming a more extended group or grouping.

The surrealists explored this fissure, for example, by way of a game: they would take any word—"egg" for example—and next another—the word "deck" as in deck of cards. The game consisted of defining the first word by the second one. If I remember well, one could have said: "an egg is a deck with only yellow and white cards ...and if you shuffle the deck then you get an omelet." [laughter] It was a game that permitted one to see that there did not exist a better way of defining an egg other

than this. What it demonstrates is the artificial character of similarity and that it becomes obligatory, for the whole discipline, if one wants to be scientific, to be explicit about the criteria used in making similarities. Depending on the criterion that is chosen, the one that is deemed "natural" can be located on one side or the other.

We can follow this in the work of Michel Foucault whose path goes from intuitively imagined laws of similarity to artificial similarities operating purely in the symbolic order, which are *semblants*. Or, better stated, we can play with constructing categories of similarities based on the criteria we select.

Here nominalism exists side by side with pragmatism. The alliance between the two defines, we can say, the spirit of post-modernity.

It appears to me that this is the spirit of the *DSM*, because in it, the nosographic categories are determined as a function of the ways in which the physicians perform. Or, better stated, the synchrony of the nosographic matrix depends upon the diachrony of the actions and the inventions that occur during the course of treatment. These can be, for example, the invention of a new molecule or the identification of a new neurotransmitter. Each would have immediate repercussions for the determination of categories. It is devastating. All our constructs are reduced to the *semblant*, a caricature that makes us laugh. There is both absolute artificiality and constant pragmatism.

### *The effect of the subject*

What are implications for us of this nominalism, pragmatism, and reduction of categories to the *semblant*? This is our culture, and we cannot escape it. It is the discontent of today's civilization. That said, I think there are interesting implications for us. Because of the artificiality one encounters, we find ourselves turning away from the game, turning away from the mastery of this game of artificial categories. This artificial game, nominalised and pragmaticized, continues on its course, irresistible, resulting in the grand movement of history that does not stop. However, the result is that the individual is detached from the game. The individuals play the game with their things off to the side of this artificial chaos.

The universal of a category, no matter what the purpose, is never completely present in an individual. As much as the real individual can be an ideal type within a category, it is always an ideal with a gap. A *deficit* exists in the case of the category of

the individual. It is precisely as a result of this *cut* that the individual can become a subject, by never being able to be a perfect ideal.

Having spoken of categories, we can now take up the issue of the subject. From our point of view, the subject appears every time that the individual backs away, be it from the species, the genus, the general or the universal. It is something that needs to be observed in the clinic when we apply our categories. That is we don't avoid using categories, but we must be aware of their pragmatic and artificial character. We must be sure not to nullify the subject with the categories that we use.

I cannot find a better example than the one that Borges offers me in his book *Otras Inquisiciones* (Other Inquisitions) where one encounters a small piece of writing, not more than three pages long, entitled "El ruiseñor de Keats" ("The Nightingale of Keats"). I reread it so many times, this text, as if there was some kind of mystery within it. Finally I decided to use it. It is one use among many possible uses, because it can also be taken as an apology for the signifier, as the logicians do.

"El ruiseñor de Keats" ("The Nightingale of Keats") refers to a nightingale heard once by the poet Keats in his garden in Hampstead in 1819 and that, according to Keats, is the same nightingale of Ovid and of Shakespeare. This is how Borges presents it. It comes from "Ode to a Nightingale," which John Keats composed in a garden in Hampstead, at age 23, on an April night in 1818. Borges writes: "Keats in a garden in the suburbs heard the eternal nightingale of Ovid and Shakespeare, felt his own mortality, and contrasted it with the thin, tenuous, ceaseless voice of that invisible bird."

Some English critics said: "It was an error on Keats's part. The nightingale he heard in Hampstead in 1819 is clearly not the same nightingale of Ovid and Shakespeare." It is an error, but it is also a confusion between individual and category. Borges cites the comments of Sidney Colvin. Citing Colvin verbatim, he says: "his curious declaration: with an error of logic that from my point of view, is also a poetic failure, Keats is contrasting the fleeting quality of human life which he understands in the context of the life of an individual, with the everlasting quality of a bird's life which is understood in the context of the life of a species." In addition, Amy Lowell wrote: "The reader who has a spark of imagination or the poetic intuition immediately understands that Keats is not referring to the nightingale which at that moment sang, but to the species."

Borges reflects on the commentary of the English critics and says: "this is not what Keats is saying". He writes: "I disagree with those who postulate a distinction between the ephemeral nightingale of that night and the generic nightingale." Borges says that, in the end, the key to that stanza is found in a subsequent text of Schopenhauer, unknown to Keats who passed away before its appearance, and locates the real sense of Keats's nightingale in a paragraph from the book *The World as Will and Representation* in which he says the following:

"We ask with sincerity if the swallow of this spring is different from the swallow of the first spring and whether actually between the two the miracle of creation out of nothing has been renewed a million times in order to work just as often into the hands of absolute annihilation. Those who hear me assert that the cat who is playing over there is the same one who played and did tricks right here three hundred years ago can think of me what they will, but it is even more absurd to imagine that fundamentally it is another."<sup>6</sup> Borges comments: "Or, better stated, the individual is, in a certain way, a species, and the nightingale of Keats is also the nightingale of Ruth."

In the end, what Borges explains in this text is that he and Keats are Platonists. For both Keats and Borges, categories, classes, orders and genres are realities of a cosmos in which each one has its place. This is the precise reason why Keats is not understood by the English, because for the English the real is not made of abstract concepts, but of individuals. For them, language is nothing more than an approximated game of symbols. The English, according to Borges, reject the generic because they feel that the individual is irreducible, unassimilatable, and odd.

The curious thing about it is that Borges, who was a total anglophile, was also a Platonist. For Borges, each one is a nightingale. In this text, he says that if one traces the history of man back through the centuries, it is as if they were all the same. The Platonists return inevitably like Parmenides, Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Francis Bradley, etc. It is always the same nightingale that returns. But there is other nightingale, the Aristotelian, who believes neither in classes, nor genres, etc.

Platonism is central in Borges's work. It is through this Platonism that he could give an infinite echo to his phrases as if it was the echo of the eternal homeward voyage.

However, for us who is right?

Keats is right. The song of the nightingale divides him as he is a subject; it makes him experience his mortality, and returns to him his lack of being. Of course,

this is because the ideal model of the animal is a species. Here the real Platonism is true at the level of the animal, because, effectively, an animal is a total manifestation of its species.

This is what I am proposing. Of course for me, this is a Lacanian perspective. One could say that the animal realizes exhaustively its kind while it is an ideal—a true specimen. However, the speaking subjects, the subjects of language, never clearly and exhaustively fulfill a category or class. They can only imagine themselves as part of the human species when they think they are mortal, as Keats does in this example.

It is important to note that true logic tries to extinguish this death drive that separates human beings from other species. It can do so with the following syllogism. “All men are mortal.” “Socrates is a man,” therefore “Socrates is mortal.” This syllogism makes us think that Socrates dies because he is part of the human species. Or, better stated, the logic of this universal proposition extinguishes precisely that which is singular. It is as if we were speaking of a natural phenomenon when, exactly, Socrates was someone who had a very different relation with death, different than a purely “natural death,” proper also to the human species. He desired death different than dying because one is human. In a certain way, being driven by the Other, he put his life at risk.

Saying this is a different way, we speak of “the subject” as the effects that unceasingly displace the individual from the species, the particular from the universal, and the case of the rule. Or rather, what we name “the subject” is this disjunction that makes it such that Keats is neither Ovid nor Shakespeare. Nevertheless, the nightingale of Keats is the same as the nightingale of Ovid and of Shakespeare, but Keats is neither Ovid nor is he Shakespeare.

### *The Diagnosis of Our Time*

In our practice we address the “subject aspect” of the individual. That is what we have sought to elaborate upon and to transmit through our teaching styles and further discussions. In doing so, we back away from applying foundational reference points such as nature and science. We introduce contingency and with it, a world that is neither a cosmos, nor a universe. Inversely, we are dealing with a world that is not a totality but one which is always in abeyance—dependant upon the event that is going to produce it. We are in a world where ewes are cloned. That being the case, nothing is

impossible, and as such, to return to an earlier point in the discussion, a world where chickens can have teeth.

It is the clinic of our time. We experience surprise and a return of contingency. In such a world, a particular case is never an ideal for a rule or for a category. There are only exceptions to the rule. This, paradoxically, is the universal formula.

Now we can return to talking about the diagnosis in the way that I have been thinking about it. We will concern ourselves with elaborations on it and practicing it in the new Institute Clinics: diagnosis is like an art. It is an art to judge a case without following set rules or pre-established categories. This is very different than an automatic diagnosis which categorizes an individual based on an established class of pathology. The latter is the utopia of the *DSM*; it is what is on the horizon: the automatic diagnosis. In addition, it constitutes part of the horizon of our epoch. Or rather, a diagnosis that can be formulated without the necessity of thought, where it would be necessary merely record some relevant data, systematize it and feed it to a machine which would spit out the diagnosis. A machine to diagnose, we are almost there. We are in search of a program that will achieve the automatic diagnosis. It will be a machine worthy of Father Ubu. And at the same time, it is a utopia because it sutures the moment of judgment, in the Kantian sense, the moment of judging which is logically necessary. The judge or judgment from practice is neither knowledge nor theory, but art. From this perspective, practice is not an application of theory.

Of course, it is necessary to develop a theory of this gap. I believe that the *Seminar* of Lacan is firmly enmeshed in theorizing this gap between theory and practice.

Practice is not an application of theory. This is the most interesting dimension of practice. When operating distinctly from one another, theory is necessary, but there is also a dimension where practice operates laterally or on parallel track with theory. We know this very well. It is precisely practice which must discover or re-discover, in each particular case that is presented in the here and now, the principle which could govern the case. In each case, practice concerns itself with the principles in that particular case.

Kant illustrates this well. Until now it seemed impossible to move beyond his idea that between theory and practice an intermediary is needed which permits the connection of one to the other. Though at the same time, we also presume that a theory can stand alone on its own merits. The logic that supports this argument is as

follows: to develop the concept that supports a rule of any sort, an act of judging is required. This act of judging allows those engaged in practice to decide if the case fits into a rule, a category, or a universal.

I don't see how to overcome this argument that I just summarized. Hegel would have subjected it to a critique, but Goldman would have said: In the end, it is practice that resolves everyday problems, all the time. What is true, of course, is that on a purely conceptual plane this resolves itself, but resolves itself on the side of action. It is precisely this that we are trying to transmit, for example in supervision: the tact that each case requires. The tact develops with experience. If we begin with experience and, we wait for more data to draw a conclusion about the hypothetical orientation of the treatment, over time we end up with less. Therefore, between the universal and the particular, it is always necessary to insert the act of judging, being that this act is not universalizable.

As Kant said: if logic was intended to demonstrate how to subsume a case into a rule, or better stated if it was possible to say that such a case responded to such a rule, it would necessitate a rule that prescribed it. Judging, that is, using universal categories in a particular case, is not the same as applying a rule, but it is deciding if a rule is applicable to the case. And this decision, this act, is not capable of being automated. If one wants to automate it, we have an infinite regression. Lewis Carroll demonstrates this in the allegory entitled "What the tortoise said to Achilles", when the tortoise leads Achilles into an infinite regression. It is also found in the rediscovery of Wittgenstein and what Saul Kripke highlights in commenting on Wittgenstein. It concerns the necessity of this intermediary. There is a dimension that goes beyond the rule, a different dimension, that of the decision, the dimension of pure practice, different than what is typically understood or conceptualized.

The utopia of the *DSM* short circuits this logically necessary moment. But it is this moment that permits the founding of the perennial quality of clinic of diagnosis and the perennial quality of the practice itself. These clinics are not secondary nor are they subsidiaries, but are clinics of the plain exercise of logic. The clinic of the *DSM* would never cause the disappearance of this clinic of judgment, nor the clinic of tact, which is the clinic we are trying to transmit.

*The invention of the symptom*

Why all of this? There is a hole in the universe of rules and categories. Lacan names it:  $S(\bar{A})$ —S of the barred A. It signifies the universe of discourse at the exact point in which it is both founded and undone. It is this point in which the invention of rules and categories is necessary.

In psychoanalysis what are the rules and categories that are invented? We can ask the psychoanalytic theorists this, but in truth we must look at the analytic subject. In this place, the  $S(\bar{A})$ , it is the analytic subject who invents. The subject invents a way himself that will subsume his case under a rule valid for that supposed species of subjects.

And what is the universal of species of subjects under which each analysand can subsume his case? It is a universal that is very particular: it is the absence of a rule. It is a negative universal. It is the universal that is a hole. It is a formula not written, a formula which is not inscribed. It is the absence of a program (like in informatics), the absence of a sexual program. Lacan famously stated: "there is no sexual relationship." It is the only universal that matters for a subject. However, it is a negative universal that signifies the absence of a rule, which permits the passage to the limit, the fact that makes the relationship between two members of the human species especially open to variation in comparison to other animal species. Open both to truth and lies. Open to variation, to contingency and to invention. With this, we distance ourselves from the nightingales, and ladies (*senhoras*) and gentlemen (*senhores*) are distanced from nightingales (*ruiseñores*)...This is deducted from all our knowledge of the Freudian experience: the subject is always obligated to invent his mode of relation to sex without being guided by a "natural" program. The mode of relation invented—particular, peculiar and always crippled—is the symptom. The symptom comes in the place of natural programming which does not exist. What it means to be human, a speaking being, can never be simply subsumed by itself merely as a case of the rule of the human species. The subject is always constituted as the exception to the rule and its symptom is an invention or reinvention of that which is missing.

There are of course typical symptoms, however, even if they take the same form, each is peculiar and particular because, as Lacan pointed out, the meaning of the same symptom in diverse subjects is different. In Kantian terms, the subject attributes his private law in the symptom or thanks to his symptom. In this sense, the symptom would be a rule proper to the distribution of libido in each subject.

Since the beginning of the experience of an analysis, and through all of it, the symptom purifies, illuminates, and at the termination of the analysis, it is disrobed. What occurs with the symptom? Does it disappear? No, it does not. A residue of the symptom always remains, a residue invested in the subject, that Lacan names the object *a*.

But beyond this—I am at the limit of what I can formulate in respect to this—a form perseveres, a significant articulation of the symptom. The piece of the investment, or super-investment as Freud said, retreats, but the form stays. Or, better stated, while the finality of the symptom has dissipated, the formal element of the symptom persists. It is for this reason—and correlated with the disinvestment—that it produces, perhaps (I say “perhaps” because I have to work on this) necessarily, an aesthetic of the symptom. It becomes a finality without purpose, which is the Kantian definition of art: finality without purpose. This had been foreseen by Freud in his Conference XXIII of the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, “The paths to the formation of the symptoms,” which concludes with the use of fantasy as a component of the symptom in order to produce art.

Recently a colleague told me that he thought I was so overly logical that I couldn't handle the idea of psychoanalysis as an art. I hope I have responded to him tonight.

*Translation by Gary Marshall*  
*Review by Thomas Svolos*

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<sup>1</sup> This is a translation of the “O Rouxinol de Lacan,” opening conference of the *Instituto do Campo Freudiano de Buenos Aires* (ICBA) which originally appeared in Spanish in: Miller, J.-A.: “El ruiseñor de Lacan” in AAVV: *Del Edipo a la sexuación*. Buenos Aires: ICBA, Paidós, 2001. Translated from the Spanish to Portuguese by Carlos Genaro G. Fernandez, and published for the first time in Brazil in: *Carta de São Paulo*, São Paulo, Escola Brasileira de Psicanálise de São Paulo, v. 10, n. 5, p. 18-32, 2003.

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<sup>3</sup> Chaslin, P. (1912). *Eléments de Sémiologie et Clinique Mentales*. Paris: Asselin & Houzeau.

<sup>4</sup> English in the original.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, J. (2001). Introduction to the German edition of the first volume of the *Écrits*, in *Autres Écrits*. Paris: Seuil.

<sup>6</sup> Schopenhauer, A. (1958). *The world as will and representation*. (E. Payne, trans.) New York: Dover Publications, Inc. The complete quotation of Schopenhauer is as follows: “Ask yourself honestly, whether the swallow of this year's spring is an entirely different one from the swallow of the first spring, and whether actually between the two the miracle of creation out of nothing has been renewed a million times, in order to work just as often into the hands of absolute annihilation. I know quite well that anyone would regard me as mad if I seriously assured him that the cat, playing just now in the yard, is still the same one that did the same jumps and tricks there three hundred years ago; but I also know that it is absurd to believe that the cat of today is through and through and fundamentally an entire different one from that cat of three hundred years ago” (p. 482).