

WRITING

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- analysis,” 179-83, and Woollard, “Interpretation and Truth,” 107-11.
15. Lacan, *L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue, s’aile à mourre* (1976-1977), unpublished seminar, 18 April 1977.
 16. Bernard Seynhaeve, “An Act of Saying That Holds Up In and Of Itself,” 89-95, and Laurent, “The Pass... or to Finesse Against the Subject Supposed to Know,” 79-88.
 17. See also Neus Carbonell, “When the Cure Stops... Where it Could Have Begun,” 99-105; Vicente Palomera, “When Freud’s Cures Stopped, The Rat Man ‘Wishing One’s Life Away,’” 153-58; and Jean-Pierre Klotz, “On Some Ways to ‘Stop and Go’ With Analytic Treatment,” 159-65.
 18. Lacan, *Les non-dupes errent* (1973-1974), unpublished seminar, 9 April 1974.
 19. Lacan, *L’identification* (1961-1962), unpublished seminar, 15 November 1961.
 20. Lacan, *Le moment de conclure* (1977-1978), unpublished seminar, 10 January 1978.
 21. Tom Svolos, “On Reading Hurly Burly,” in *Lacanian Compass* 1.14 (16 October 2009): 45.
 22. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 1.

EROS AND ETHICS: READING JACQUES LACAN’S SEMINAR VII

marc de kesel

(Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2009), 364 pp.

At the symposium on structuralism at Johns Hopkins University in October 1966, Lacan reportedly told Derrida of the two anxieties afflicting him at the time. First, he wondered how he would be read after he died and, second, he worried that the binding of his 900 page *Écrits* would not be strong enough and that it would fall to pieces. “You watch,” he said, gesturing with his hands, “it won’t hold.”¹ These anxieties, concerned as they are with keeping things together and the proliferation of interpretations to which all proper events give rise, seem to have been cured by the University. The contradictions and antagonisms so central to the movement of psychoanalytic invention have been excised, as the pious myth of legitimate Lacanian theory writes its history in the future perfect tense, thereby anaesthetizing the corpus of any improper deviations. The possibility that the binding will not hold and that its pieces will be fashioned according to a multiplicity of logics seems to have been foreclosed in advance by reducing the movement of Lacanian theory to a systematic elaboration of concepts stable enough to be taken in hand, instrumentalized, and put to work in the service of whatever task lies before the operator. This is the official version, and it will hold, so says every new publication of a seminar. In clear opposition to the ceaseless task of reproducing the authoritative Lacan, Marc De Kesel’s excellent *Eros and Ethics* lays bare the inconsistencies, historical specificity, and demonstrable novelty of Lacan’s invention while, at the same time, insisting that the threads

binding Lacan's teaching together are liable to snap, that everything might fall to pieces, rendering the dumb, inert material unifying this discourse plain for all to see.

The "tensions and knots" De Kesel aims to "clarify" and "illuminate" in *Eros and Ethics* are the unacknowledged "impasses and aporias" that have been either covered up by the reductive syntheses of Lacanian executioners or simply excised from the record by suppressing deviant editions of Lacan's work (8). It is the ceaseless tightening of these knots that have kept the binding of Lacan's writing (and its transmission) in good order. This is an occupation for which De Kesel seems particularly unsuited, as he subtly critiques the union into which certain Lacanian orthodoxies claim to have "tied the knot" with the one and true Lacan. Instead, *Eros and Ethics*, the first extended interrogation of Seminar VII in English, offers what might be called a "pirated" reading of the seminar, a sustained interrogation of the conjuncture of Eros and ethics that is as erudite as it is accessible and whose crystallization is a welcome contribution to a field that threatens to capsize under the weight of so many feet toeing the official party line.

The terrain upon which *Eros and Ethics* performs its "archaeological" work is both banal and novel. On the one hand, its method of analysis is unrepentantly classical, insofar as it is closer to an *explication de texte* than a cultural reading that passes Lacan through the sieve of popular culture; on the other, by reading Lacan against both himself and the traditions with which he is associated, it produces an effect akin to telescoping, wherein the novelty of the Lacanian intervention is constantly called into question, folded back into the historical continuum of inheritance and influ-

ence so loved by genetic accounts, only to then be ripped out of its context in order to demonstrate its originality with patient care. *Eros and Ethics* pans from the oftentimes "inexcusably substandard" (7) editions approved by Jacques-Alain Miller to the "reliable" (283) pirated editions with a steady hand, as it registers the kinship between Lacan and his interlocutors (Maurice Bouvet, Bentham, Aristotle, Kant, Simone Weil, Augustine, Freud), in order to establish a fundamental *distance* between these partners and Lacan's restaging of the Freudian *skandalon*.

According to De Kesel, the "stakes and themes" (9) of Seminar VII are anchored in Seminar VI, necessitating that we tarry with the so-called radical break between the early and late Lacan, said to pivot around the introduction of *das Ding*. We might say, then, that the stakes of *Eros and Ethics* reside within the suspension of such a break — or, more precisely, *Eros and Ethics* stands or falls with its attempt to reinstall Lacan within the problematics of object-relations theory and the "ethics of distance," which Lacan himself derided as "worthless for thinking the relation with the object" (282). While *Eros and Ethics* stresses the sharp lines of demarcation separating Lacan from object-relations theorists like Bouvet (one cannot "approach the ego and the object as ordinary, *real* qualities" [20] as Bouvet does) and Klein (sublimation is not, as Klein claims, a "*reparation* of the object" [172]), De Kesel nevertheless maintains that Lacan "has always moved *within* the same paradigm of the diverse object-relations theories of his time" (12) and that the crucial *emphatic* turns introduced by Lacan in Seminar VII are best understood by viewing Lacan as an object-relations theorist, albeit a "contrary and rebellious" one (21). This "artificial architecture" does not allow us to

collapse Lacan within the strictures of the object-relations problematic; on the contrary, it forces us to measure the decisive distance between the various seminars, and between Lacan and his fathers, both within psychoanalysis and without.

According to *Eros and Ethics*, the basic paradox of object-relations theory — the subject is both an object and the relation to this object — “gains adequate expression” (31) in Lacan, a paradox whose “fundamental impasse” must be “neutralized” (26) if Lacan is to depart from the company of his “moralizing” and “naturalizing” fathers. It is to De Kesel’s credit that the stakes of Lacan’s conceptual invention can now be brought into sharp relief; the detours that saturate *Eros and Ethics* demonstrate the precise move required for psychoanalysis to break ranks with both its tradition and its contemporaries. De Kesel’s telescopic method claims that, for example, Lacan would “hardly have changed the classical ethical paradigms” (43) had he continued to “‘close’ the whole problematic of desire and its lack in on lack itself” (42), as he seems to do in Seminar VI, thereby sealing an unseemly alliance between psychoanalysis and the mystic Christianity of Simone Weil. It also claims that the primacy Lacan gives to the signifier in the Rome Discourses would have banished reality and brought him into near conformity with Bentham’s theory of fictions and its evacuation of the real, had he not reaffirmed Freud’s emphasis on the unconscious as *irreducible* to the symbolic by installing a “real” reality (70). De Kesel’s schematization of these minimal differences traces the countless permutations that, when taken together, compose a dossier on those who invest in the service of goods rather than following the Good to its limit — that is, to the real Thing at which jouissance aims.

It is from the perspective of this limit — the real — that Lacan pursues a logic that perverts nature at every turn, a psychoanalytic logic that operates under the sign of ethics. While *Eros and Ethics* makes it manifestly clear that psychoanalysis can establish an ethics of neither exemplary figures nor the Good, there is little reason to lament its lack of invention with regard to ethics, as Lacan does a propos of perversion: “You heard me very often claim that psychoanalysis did not even invent a new perversion. It is sad. If perversion is man’s essence, what an infertility in that practice!”² While it is, of course, impossible to establish a general rule to manage the game of polymorphously-perverse subjects, there nevertheless remains, according to De Kesel, a fundamentally rigorous and terrible virtue to an ethics of psychoanalysis — it leaves open “the paradoxical possibility that one can consciously confront the domain in which one usually disappears” (267), that “evil” at which we secretly aim, by keeping “the *real* reality at a distance” (82).

— Ryan Crawford

1. Elizabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 319.
2. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975-1976*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), 153.

CARANTIN

JÖTTKANDOT

KLOSSOLYSKI

MALABOU

This is incredible, and ended up having absolutely mad consequences: there are people who imagined that with a bit of logic -- that is to say, the manipulation of writing -- you would find a way to have...what? *New ideas*. As if there weren't enough of them already!

McMULTY

MILLOT

RABATE

ZUPANČIČ

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