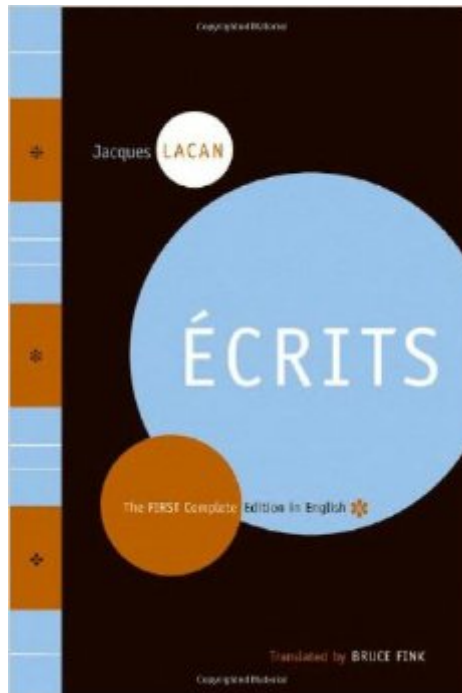


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Écrits: The First Complete Edition In English



Synopsis

• Fink's precise new translation makes this pivotal period in Lacan's thought more accessible to English speakers. • Publishers Weekly, starred review Brilliant and innovative, Jacques Lacan's work lies at the epicenter of modern thought about otherness, subjectivity, sexual difference, the drives, the law, and enjoyment. This new translation of his complete works offers welcome, readable access to Lacan's seminal thinking on diverse subjects touched upon over the course of his inimitable intellectual career.

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In the *Ecrits*, Lacan states that our discourse (our speech and language) comes in an inverted form from the Other (those who are not like Us). In a similar line of thought, we can simply say that it is a sense of difference (which is brought about by unconsciously associating with certain social signs and cultural symbols) that goes on to structure an individual's identity (which is their own personal interpretation of their true self, making it Imaginary). In other words, identity is shaped by associating with signs and symbols, unconsciously (in, what Lacan calls, the Symbolic Realm or Order). And since those signs and symbols are the opposite of what Others use to define themselves, we see them as being different from Us, and, as such, create a false sense of separation (an Us and Them scenario). It should be noted, however, that the Other is not always outcast or alienated for being the opposite. The Other, in fact, can be the unattainable object of our desire (our "objet petit a"). In a way, people desire because they build an identity, which divides them from Others by a means of

difference. In other words, we desire that which is not like us (like the yin looking for its yang, unaware that both yin and yang are already within us from the start). This, of course, is all a symbolic illusion brought about by language (found, for Lacan, in the unconscious association of signs). Still, in our society, we see people desire every day, trying to find that difference (or Other) to match the missing part of their identity (that part looking for its missing piece) even though such a thing doesn't exist. Searching for the object of our desire is a lot like a person that is suffering from an imaginary persecution complex.

In the closing decades of the 20th century, a large number of American intellectuals were obsessed with the seemingly infinite ways language and signification could impinge on and form the human experience: the movement was called "postmodernism", and justified itself by pointing to ways art and culture had changed in the "era of mechanical reproduction". Almost all American postmodernists had been heavily influenced by "poststructuralists", French philosophers and social scientists trying hard to get out from under totalizing methods for analyzing the human mind; although he was intellectually active quite a bit earlier than most such minds, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan was an integral part of poststructuralism -- in fact, he was one of the wildest and woolliest of that bunch of slippery characters. In some places in the world (France and Argentina, e.g.) "Lacanian" psychotherapy was a real deal, but even where Lacan was only a name on paper his bravura analyses of the human soul commanded a great deal of attention. Lacan's influence came in two forms: the training seminar for psychoanalysts he conducted for twenty years and *Ecrits* ("Writings"), a collection of lectures and articles first published in French in 1966. Many of the seminars, put into canonical form by his son-in-law Jacques-Alain Miller, have been translated into English: but for many years even the premier Freudian publishing house W.W. Norton only had a sketchy translation of a few pieces in *Ecrits* available for the English readership.

By the time that Jacques Lacan published *Ecrits* in 1966, he has already passed through a long apprenticeship first as a psychiatrist, then later as a psychoanalyst. Beginning with his earliest writings, mostly essays, Lacan made it clear that he would modify the collective theories of such assorted luminaries as Freud, Hegel, Jakobson, and Saussure. The first edition of *Ecrits* from 1966 contained his best and worst. Lacan was a spellbinding orator as his audiences from his Seminars would attest. He was less innovative as a writer, a failing exacerbated by various translation problems from French to English. Still, what came through clearly enough was his general thrust that implied far more than what he asserted positively. He was not bashful about attacking anyone

with whom he disagreed, including the various American ego and French psychoanalysts who persisted in valorizing their whole or totalizing view of the speaking subject. The terms he uses are not meant to be definitional; rather they are the product of an evolving mind, one that like Derrida resists functional specificity. Their context, then, rather than their seemingly ingrained meaning, is the key to comprehension. The problem for his readers who had not attended Lacan's Seminars was that they lacked the verbal wizardry that inevitably accompanied their give and go. Readers new to Lacan were forced to read the New Critical way of close reading, a method that discouraged the very means that gave *Écrits* its distinctive flavor. Of the essays that comprise all of the *Écrits*, three are generally held as seminal: "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience;" "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious;" and "The Signification of the Phallus."

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