Part One
Chapter One

The Imaginary Order and The Symbolic Order
When the living being called man experiences 'absence' for the first time, a hole is created in a self-enclosed state of 'nothing' that is otherwise so completely nothing that there is nothing in it even to indicate that it is nothing. In other words, the first experience of absence causes in the living being a rupture exist in the lack of a lack. This rupture in the transcendental 'lack' causes desire - that makes knowledge, ultimately of the lack, possible - to be born, in terms of the recognition of desire, in spite of, or rather because of, its being no more than a hole in a lack.

Desire is the relation of being - who cannot perceive itself as such, or even exist, except in its lack - to lack of being. This desire that causes the 'primitive structuration of the human world' is 'desire as unconscious', because, it has already 'established' 'relations between human beings' before one has arrived at 'the domain of consciousness.' Differently put: 'If being were only what it is, there would not even be room to talk about it. Being comes into existence as an exact function of this lack. Being
attains a sense of self in relation to being as a function of this lack in the experience of desire.¹

In psychoanalysis, it is 'important' to 'teach the subject' to 'articulate' desire by 'naming' it. 'If desire doesn't dare to speak its name, it is because the subject has not yet caused his name to come forth.' The psychoanalytical approach helps the subject to 'bring this desire into existence' by speaking its name. The 'efficacious action of analysis' is that 'the subject should come to recognise and to name his desire'. It is similar to helping the subject to 'deliver' his desire, and hence, 'what is at stake' in analysis is defusing the symptom by naming desire, or 'delivering the insistence that is to be found in the symptom'.²

The hole or rupture is created in the transcendental lack when, as a child, man experiences, much to his anguish, the absence of his mother. The rupture causes a signifier of the absent object of desire to emerge in its place, which the child, at a certain point of his mental development, discursively replaces with a name and enters the order of language as a

² Ibid., pp. 228-29.
speaking member. Thus, the rupture leads to the ejection of man from the order of lack to which he originally belongs without knowing anything, and his 'ex-sistence' at the place and time of language from where alone it is possible for him to know himself to be.

The relation between the rupture in terms of the signifier that occupies its place, or the name that replaces it, and the subject of speech in whom and through whom the signifier and the name speaks, does not belong to the same order as the relation between a specular image of the self and that of the others re-shaping it, because, while in the former order, namely, the 'symbolic order', the object is introduced to the dimension of time in terms of its name, it is at best momentary sustained in the latter order, namely, the 'imaginary order', where there are no words to lend it permanence. The following is a consideration of these two orders in the context to which they belong, in detail:

**The Imaginary Order**

In between the sixth and eighteenth months of age, the human child is forced by the condition of existence to experience and accept an unexpected alienation of the self, as the means to self-identification. This self-alienation and the notion of 'self' or 'I' engendered by it, has always been a matter of paramount importance within the enterprise known as
‘Psychoanalysis’, inaugurated, arguably, between 1896 and 1908, thanks to the genius of the Austrian Jew, Doctor Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Nevertheless, the question of the origin of the ego was subjected to a rigorous examination from the psychoanalytical point of view for the first time by the French psychoanalyst with a semiotic bent, Jacques-Marie Emile Lacan (1901-1981), when he proceeded to theorise the origin of the formation of the ego at the fourteenth International Psychoanalytical Congress held at Marienbad in August 1936, in the form of a paper entitled - ‘The Looking-Glass Phase’.

A thoroughly revised version of the same paper, under the title, ‘The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience’, was presented at the sixteenth International Psychoanalytical Congress held at Zurich on July 17, 1949, and has been placed as the first one of the collection of seminars for English language readers, entitled, Écrits : A Selection (1977). The ‘Mirror stage’ seminar constitutes the bedrock of the Lacanian ‘imaginary order’, which is the order to which the primary ego and all its subsequent identifications belong.

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3 In 1896, Freud introduced ‘psychoanalysis’ as a term, and in 1908, at Salzburg, the first international meeting of psychoanalysts took place.
Lacan uses the ‘Gestaltist line of enquiry’ to bring out the ‘apprehension of the world’ and of the self ‘by the living organism’.\textsuperscript{4} According to Lacan, the whole of man’s relation to the external world is structured by narcissism, so that the ‘object’, any object, is ‘always more or less structured as the image of the body of the subject’.\textsuperscript{5}

The ego is ‘formed’ in case of the individual child when, sometime between his sixth and eighteenth months, he is held upright by an external support, human or inanimate, for the first time in front of the mirror. It is only at this significant moment that the human child, whose birth is otherwise premature, is born into his being - in the sense of his being born to himself. The mirror-image transforms the child radically and leaves him with an intriguing as well as fascinating ‘ego’ to relate to. That is how the child enters into the order of ‘imagoes’ which, in Lacanian parlance, is the imaginary order.

The importance of the visual image to animals and birds established by a number of scientific researches carried out along the Gestaltist line provided the necessary cue to Lacan’s investigation. The five-year long


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p. 167.
study by R. Chauvin on the desert locust that Lacan has referred to in the seminar, is an illuminating example of it. The desert locust appeared either in a 'solitary' form or in a 'gregarious' form. These two locusts differed widely in colour, behaviour, metabolic activity and in physiology. However, as Chauvin argues, a transition from the solitary form to the gregarious form was possible for the nymphs of a solitary locust if, during the very early phases of their development, these nymphs were brought into visual contact with members of their own or of their neighbouring species, the age and gender of these other members being entirely immaterial.  

A more concrete work to have been cited by Lacan, is the study of L.Harrison Matthews', entitled, 'Visual Stimulation and Ovulation in Pigeons' (1938-39). In it, Matthews has experimentally established that the stimulus responsible for ovulation in pigeons is a visual one. His experiments confirmed that in the case of pigeons, mating was not essential for the female pigeon to take to laying eggs. Rather, the mere sight of any one member of the species, irrespective of its biological

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gender, was sufficient for ovulation. Theoretically, as well as practically in this case, the study revealed how eggs were laid as usual by a female pigeon even when it was left all alone in a cage with nothing but a mirror, and how, quite like the miraculous phenomenon generated by the Saintly protagonist in Shaw's play, the removal of the mirror was sufficient to put an end to the laying of eggs, other factors remaining constant.  

There is also the case of the chimpanzee. The baby chimpanzee that otherwise enjoyed a greater acumen in solving problems than the human child of the corresponding age up to this stage, was, nevertheless, not transformed by its own image in the mirror. Not finding anything in reality conforming to the image visualised in the mirror, the chimpanzee soon lost interest in the gestalt and discarded the piece of glass.

To the human child, contrarily, the image 'informs', that is, it gives form to him. This new form, activated by the significant emotional meaning that it has for the child, makes the process of the child's identification with its image possible. The child 'assumes an image' that leads to the transformation of his initial motor incapacity, turbulent movements and

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fragmentation. The prematurity of the child at birth that embryologists have described as 'foetalization', is explained by Lacan as 'the anatomical incompleteness' of the human brain resulting in 'the signs of uneasiness and motor unco-ordination of the neonatal months'. The absence of self-recognition at the initial stage of man's life, resulting from the 'anatomical incompleteness' of the brain, is rectified, once and for all, by what ought to be described as the humanizing influence of the mirror on him. However, the process of humanization is not one of pure bliss. The initial response of the child to its image in the mirror is a mixture of contradictory emotions, namely, jubilation and hostility.

The expression of jubilation is clearly writ on the face of the child who, in most cases, would even try to touch his other. Lacan attributes a number of reasons to the jubilation of the child before the mirror. To begin with, the gestalt not only allows him to discover his own image, but also confirms the similarity between his image and that of others around him. Also, a joyous impression of mastery and unity is evoked by the image, partly as a result of the child's seeing himself simultaneously as the subject and the object, and partly as that of - no doubt in terms of

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9 Ibid., p. 4.
a complete oblivion of the support that held him in his place and position - taking his 'uprightness' for granted. Finally, while the pre-mirror phase child entertains a rather hazy notion of himself as a collection of three separate zones of the body - the oral, the anal and the genital, which are among the first zones of the body to be identified by the child owing to the pleasurable stimulation received in them during his feeding and cleaning - unconscious of the fact that these zones existed in the form of a single unified body, it is in terms of his self-image that the impression of the body as one fragmented into zones is replaced by the specular as well as spectacular affirmation of an unified body, resulting in his jubilation.

The child's joy at identification with an other is evident in almost all expressions of sibling bond, such as that between Apu and Durga in Bibhuti Bhushan's classic Bangla novel, *Pather Panchali* (1929).

The strong sibling-bond between Mary and her younger brother Charles Lamb, who had lived together alone for around thirty-eight years, could be an example of the same from real life. It is one of the focal points of Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia* (1820-33) that has been referred to in one of
the essays by the appropriate phrase for it - 'double singleness'.

Further manifestation of the same could be witnessed in the following remark jokingly made by Charles Lamb in 1824 to Procter: 'In virtue of the hypostatical union between us, when Mary calls, it is understood that I call too, we being univocal.'

At the same time, however, the mirror evokes a hostile reaction in the child by giving rise to the paradoxical awareness that he is, for ever, alienated in several ways, and could never really be the seamless whole again. In the first place, since the child of the pre-mirror phase has no knowledge of his separateness from the world around him, he is led to consider himself as an inseparable part of the world of objects in which he was situated. The mirror conceptually frees him from this notion by means of a visual confirmation of his radical difference from the table, the chair and so on.

The crucial mother-child dyad, too, is affected by the same sense of alienation. Beginning in the womb and continuous through the maternal

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10 ‘We house together, old bachelor and maid, in a sort of double singleness...’, in the Elia essay - ‘Mackery End, in Hertfordshire’.

supplementation indispensable for the child's sustenance, this dyad that evokes in the child his experience of completeness is severed by the mirror. With the enunciation of his self-image, the child finds his conceptual oneness with the mother irrevocably ruptured - a shocking experience of alienation as though from his very envelope. Moreover, the child's unification with his image as the only means to self recognition, since it has to be assumed from a perspective of exteriority to the self, inevitably produces the effect of self-alienation.

The hostility and aggressivity of the child, emerging from the sense of self-alienation evoked by the mirror, leads to his fascination with dismemberment of the body, as is manifest in his penchant for 'tattooing, incision and circumcision', in his dreams of 'castration, mutilation, devouring, bursting open of the body' and in his 'cruel refinement of the weapons'.

By viewing an image in the mirror and by very soon apprehending it to be his own, the human child becomes aggressively jubilant and aggressively hostile at once. But, the jubilation of the child at this identification is a misrecognition, for he finds human uprightness as

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12 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, pp. 11-12. All these images have been grouped together as 'imagos of the fragmented body'.
already there although it has to be actualised by him only later in life. Also, it is exactly at the time of unifying the fragments of the conceptual self into an image of totality that the mirror reveals to him the image of fragmentation belonging to the pre-mirror stage for the first time ever, because, the image of the 'body-in-bits-and-pieces' from the past is recognized by the child only after he had learnt how to imagize it. Hence, the moment of the child's imaginary transformation into an integrated totality is temporally dialectical, for it is situated between the notion of his uprightness that belonged to the future - as something which, in spite of being upheld by him, is really missing at present - and the notion of a fragmented self that really belonged to the past, perhaps, as remote a past as the moment of severing of the umbilical chord, though it is to be visualised by the child only after an exceptional delay owing to his anatomical unpreparedness for apprehending the gestalt.

The mirror phase brings about the origin of the notion of self-image, of the ego, that is subsequently strengthened by further identifications similarly arrived at. According to Lacan, the ego is really a sum of egos, that is, a series of identifications representing some essential landmark for the subject, invariably having the mirror-mechanism as their prototype. Accordingly, the ego that is sustained by a 'succession' of 'momentary experiences' or transient imaginary identifications, either 'alienates man
from himself’ or else ends in a ‘destruction [or] negation of the object’.\(^{13}\)

Lacan infers the following from the formation of the ego in the mirror:
First, that the ego, since it is situated between an uprightness belonging
to the future and a fragmentation belonging to the past, is atemporal.
Next, that the ego is an optical illusion enunciated by an inverted
reflection in a piece of glass. Finally, that the ego, in prefiguring an unity
and mastery, is a delusion.

The mirror phase conditions the basic mode as well as nature of all
subsequent perceptions of man, and determines as such, his separateness
from the world exactly at the moment of his identification with it. In the
words of Lacan - ‘The image of his body is the principle of every unity
he perceives in objects. Now, he only perceives the unity of this specific
image from the outside, and in an anticipated manner. Because of this
double relation which he has with himself, all the objects of his world are
always structured around the wandering shadow of his ego....Man’s ideal
unity, which is never attained as such and escapes him at every moment,
is evoked at every moment in this perception. The object is never for him
definitively the final object.... But it thus appears in the guise of an object

from which man is irremediably separated, and which shows him the very figure of his dehiscence within the world.\textsuperscript{14}

The fundamental though ego-shattering truth emerging from the mechanism underlying the genesis of the ego is that the latter is nothing but a play of glasses. Hence, the moral that Lacan draws from the mirror phase of man is a paradoxical one, namely - mastery over the self is in the realization of its falsity.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{The Symbolic Order}

The ego is a construct indispensable for self-identification and apprehension of objects. The object could be any object because it stands for the subject as his ‘fellow being’, his ‘specular other’. However, the ego which is an imaginary construction as such, does no lie on the side of the ‘wall of language’. The ‘wall of language’ is ‘there where in principle I [or ego] never reach them.’\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 166.

\textsuperscript{15} The relation between the dialecticality of time and the mirror phase argument of Lacan lies as much in the fact that although it was delivered for the first time in August 1936, it was after an exceptional delay of thirteen years that the argument was given its present shape in writing, as in the fact that by the time Lacan was ready to formalise the mirror phase, he himself was forty-eight.

In Lacanian thought, the existence of language is completely independent of man. 'Numbers have properties which are absolute. They are whether we are here or not. 1729 will always be the sum of two cubes, the smallest number of which is the sum of two different pairs of cubes'\textsuperscript{17}. The order of language is self-contained. There is no need for a further order for the symbolic order to be grasped, because it is significant in its self-referentiality. In terms of its self-referentiality, language points to the existence of a 'world ... entirely deprived of subjectivity'\textsuperscript{18}. The subject’s identifying himself as one in relation to the symbolic order, that is, his entry into this pre-existing order of signifiers at a certain point of his own mental development, implies his ‘inscription’ in that order.

There is a transition involved here, a transition from an imaginary self that is always bipolarised into the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ - preeminently the ‘(m)other’ - to the third pole, that is, to the symbolic Other, where the self, murdered in course of the transition, is no more than the ventriloquist’s dummy, the ventriloquist being the dead father. This transition causes the subject to be decentered in relation to his being the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 284.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 285.

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subject of the ego. Thus, while the symbolic order touches the self and goes beyond it, to a place which the subject confronted with the *cul de sac* of life in death is not in a position to know of, the 'subject-individual', or the subject of the ego becomes the 'subject beyond the subject', or, the 'subject of the unconscious'. 19

Man's entry into the symbolic order is made possible by the 'insistence' of the signifier. It is the insistence of the signifier that, according to Lacan, renders the realisation of the imaginary order as essentially 'false', inevitable. To Lacan, the symbolic order is not only opposed to the order of the ego but also enjoys a complete primacy over it.

But, in what sense is the symbolic order as existing prior to the moment of birth of the subject into it, opposed to the imaginary order? And how is it that the self, in Lacan's final analysis of this opposition, found not to be the cause of language but the effect of it? In order to find the answers to these questions, it would, perhaps, be appropriate to take a closer look at Lacan's 'Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter', delivered between 1954 and 1955 and devoted to the introduction of what he designates as the 'Other', that is, the symbolic Other. A recapitulation of Poe's 'The Purloined

Letter', on which Lacan's Seminar is based, would probably not be considered redundant at the beginning of the examination.

There is no information regarding the sender and the content of this missing letter, and all the characters affected by its presence or absence are forced to look for it with some desperation whenever it is hidden, or to hide it with some ingenuity whenever it is not, for, as far as this letter is concerned, it is indeed purloined, as Poe has weaved his engaging story out of nothing. At stake here is an unique instance of the letter in which it's Poe-etic effect has been captured by the author of the story. Here is a compressed version of the original story:

'At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18 -, the Prefect of the Parisian police, Monsieur G - visits the narrator and his detective friend, C. Auguste Dupin, to consult them regarding a 'simple and odd' case that the Prefect had failed to solve on his own.

The case involves the purloining of 'a certain document of the last importance' from the royal apartments. It is well-known - and this is what made the case simple - that the thief in question is the Minister D, because he has stolen it openly, and it is also known that the article still remains in his possession. Using this document - a secret letter - the
Minister could bring in question the honour of a personage of the most exalted station, namely, the lawful owner of the letter.

The Prefect narrates that this exalted personage, all by herself in the royal boudoir, was reading the said letter, when she was interrupted by the unexpected entry of the other royal personage, the person from whom she specially intended to keep the letter hidden.

Failing to put it in a drawer, she was forced to leave it upon a table, thinly disguised by her having turned it upside down. Although such is never a satisfactory way of hiding a document, yet, in her case, it worked. Though only for a few moments, for, at this very juncture entered the Minister D -, who immediately perceived the paper, recognised the handwriting of the address, observed the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathomed her secret. After some innocuous discourse, the Minister produced and opened a somewhat similar letter, pretended to read it, placed it beside the other letter on the table, and after another spell of conversation for fifteen minutes or so on similarly unimportant matters relating to public affairs, left with the ‘letter to which he had no claim’. No doubt, the rightful owner of it saw everything, but she failed to prevent the theft due to the fear of drawing the attention of the other
royal personage present in the scene, from whom it was important for her to conceal the letter even if that meant the loss of her possession of it.

The Minister, having thus purloined the letter, began to wield the power conferred on him by his possession of the document, to his own political advantage, so recklessly, that its real owner was forced to entrust the said Prefect with the task of recovering it as surreptitiously as possible, announcing for the purpose a reward that is described as 'enormous'.

The Prefect had appropriately examined every particle of every furniture, 'each individual square inch through the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining', using all the appropriate devices. He had thoroughly searched everything - from every page of every book, including its binding, to the moss between the bricks in the grounds about the houses. The Minister himself has been 'twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched' under the personal supervision of the Prefect. The painstaking search operation lasted for months, but yielded nothing in the end. The 'case' is thus introduced by Poe in terms of the Prefect's narration to the narrator of the story and Dupin.
After evaluating the character of the Minister whom he knew quite well and examining the nature of the 'case' under consideration closely, Dupin arrived at the conclusion that the 'intellect... unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident.' Thus equipped methodologically, Dupin, having properly shielded his searching eyes from view under a pair of green spectacles, called at the Minister's hotel one fine morning. As he looked around intently beneath the pretension of being interested only in the conversation of his host, his eyes chanced to fall upon a soiled and crumpled letter. This letter, one that appeared to have been repasted after being torn into two, bearing a conspicuous black seal - D and having the address of the Minister written on it by a feminine hand, was carelessly thrust, along with five or six visiting cards, into one of the upper racks of a pasteboard card-rack hung by a dirty blue ribbon from the knob beneath the centre of the mantlepiece.

Dupin returned to the Minister's apartment the next morning to claim his gold snuff-box that he had intentionally left behind in the Minister's apartment on the previous day, and managed to resume the conversation of the previous day with his host. Suddenly, they were interrupted by a loud report, as if of a pistol, coming from immediately beneath the windows of the hotel.
Exactly as Dupin - as the one who had engineered the production of the noise - had expected it, the Minister at once rushed to the window to see what the matter was, thereby giving him enough time to take the letter from the rack, replace it with a replica of it carefully designed for the purpose in advance and join the Minister at the window.

Dupin gives away the letter to the astounded Prefect the next time he visited them - not without the drama that usually accompanies such scenes in such stories involving people of unequal intellectual acumen - against a sum of fifty thousand francs, before proceeding to explain to the narrator of the story, the working hypothesis behind the detection of the letter and the methodology behind the rescue of it.20

The story by Edgar Allan Poe called 'The Purloined Letter' (1844) may be said to have sustained the enigma of a letter withheld, precisely by using surreptitiousness as the sustainer. One find that, even at the end of the story, only one person knows it all. He is Dupin and not the reader. It is surprising for a successful story of this genre that even after the regular summarising by the detective, the reader is not in a position to solve the

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20 The collection that I have referred to for the story is: Major American Short Stories, Edited by A. Walton Litz (Bombay: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1975), pp. 152-168.
puzzle fully. Towards the end of the tale, Dupin summarises the story of his quest of the letter to the baffled narrator, and reveals with some pride how he had cleverly arranged a perfect show down for the wicked Minister D - by replacing the letter with a citation from Crebillon’s ‘Atree’: ‘So baleful a plan, if unworthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes’.

Begging to differ with Dupin on the question of the letter, Lacan explains in his ‘Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’’ that Poe’s story is really about the significant insistence of the symbolic order, that is, the repeated plea of the symbolic order, in travail, for the realisation of it by the being. To demonstrate the same, Lacan charts out the path of the ‘symbolic circuit’ of the ‘letter’ in the story, and the structuring of the responses of the various egos - played out by the different characters in the story, including Dupin - to the letter without the characters themselves being conscious of it at all. Needless to say, Lacan depends on the double meaning inherent in the word ‘letter’, considering it to be both an epistle and, as he had defined it in another context, 'the material support that concrete discourse borrows from language'.

Lacan explains that Dupin’s move to get back the letter is really a

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re-enactment of the Minister’s own earlier move to steal it in the presence of its owner. This implies that the nature of Dupin’s own intervention in the circuit of the letter is really determined well in advance of his actual intervention in it, at a different place and time. However, instead of simply replacing the letter with an innocuous piece of paper as did the Minister himself, he had interfered with the circuit of the purloined letter with his own inner subjectivity, by adding to it a loaded poetical allusion. The mechanism of the circuit, together with the very nature and terms of his own intervention in it, Lacan argues, leaves Dupin in the position of the ‘perfected ostrich’.

In his Seminar, Lacan is focused on the dynamic intersubjective network generated by the significant insistence of the letter. This has been examined by taking the case of the ‘ostrich’ as the point of departure. The fable weaved around this strange bird that feels secure by burying its head in the sand is revised by Lacan. According to him, the ‘perfected ostrich’ is not the one that felt secure when it had its head buried in the sand, but the second one in a queue of three ostriches. At the head of the queue stood the first ostrich, one that buried its head in the sand in order to feel secure. The perfected ostrich was the one that stood behind the first, all the time thinking itself safe simply because the first ostrich had its head buried in the sand. It is as a result of such precarious naivety that
its own rear is left completely unguarded from a third ostrich who calmly plucked the feathers off it so as to decorate its own head gear.

The three positions occupied by the three ostriches in the fable are the effects of the letter. The first position is one of blindness because the occupant of it is never in a position to see. In fact, the occupant of the position is characterised by a complete blindness, because, not only is he not in a position to see anything, but he is also not in a position even to see that he does not see anything. Thus, he is the courier and never the reader of the letter. Apparently, the second position is an improvement upon the first in as much as its occupant could see that the occupant of the first position was blind, and see as well that the latter failed to see that. However, the second is the most vulnerable of the three positions simply because its occupant, in not seeing anything more than a fragment of the whole truth and yet taking its vision to be complete and for granted, unknowingly played itself into the hands of an illusion whose only destiny is disillusionment. The position is an improvement only upon the position of complete blindness, a point that its occupants invariably tend to overlook. Accordingly, the position ought to be described as one of mere sight. The third position, since its occupant is able to see what the occupants of the other positions did not, ought to be described as the position of insight.
However, one's access to this all-important third position is not unconditional. Rather, it exacts a complete non-interference of the occupant on the question of truth, as the price to be paid for occupying the place of truth. The case of Switzerland could be an interesting example of this, because she enjoys all the benefits of a neutral country only at the cost of her total silence in all matters pertaining to international politics. In the case of Oedipus, the non-interference results from his ignorance of the importance of the position that he occupied as the 'central knot of speech'. Whether or not the third position is ultimately meaningless because it is so demanding so as to abolish all that is meaningful in life, neutrality regarding the truth in question is absolutely indispensable for one's access to it. Accordingly, the letter is described as having fallen into dead-hands when it is received by an occupant of this nature, invariably positioned at the third spot. Allegations of non-neutrality against the subject, or critic, supposedly occupying this position is what has sustained the ongoing debate beginning with Lacan's seminar.  

22 With reference to Derrida's 'The Purveyor of Truth' in response to Lacan's Seminar, as it has been revealed by Barbara Johnson in her paper: 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida'. All the three essays may be found, together with a number of others on this story by Poe in John P. Muller and William J. Richardson's *The Purloined Poe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
But what does Lacan mean by the 'significant insistence' of the letter in the context of 'The Purloined Letter'? 'Significant insistence' is Lacan's rendition of the Freudian term - 'weiderholungszwang' - usually translated into English as 'repetition compulsion'. Lacan coins the phrase 'significant insistence' in order to indicate the repetition of a plea of the symbolic order in terms of the plea of the unrecognised signifier - in the present context, of the 'letter' - to be recognised by the subject. Insistence of the signifier leads to symbolic recognition of the subject who otherwise misrecognizes himself for his ego. As long as he identifies with this imaginary mirage, he fails to perceive the primacy of language which, nevertheless, relentlessly insists on the removal of the mask called death instinct that hides it, that is, for realisation.

Realisation of the letter is possible in terms of what Lacan describes as the 'ex-sistence' of the subject. 'Ex-sistence', because it involves the existence of the subject on an Other plane than the one of the ego, or, on the plane of language. It involves 'the deflection of the specular I into the social I', 23 which, since the loss of the ego is equivalent to the loss of the head, characterises the thus born subject of language as 'headless'. The subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis is this 'acephalic subject' - acephalic, but not

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without the ability to speak. It is this acephalic subject 'as the beyond to the ego' who makes it possible for the subject to recognise himself. The acephalic subject is the subject of the unconscious, who is an 'ex-centric' subject because he is also 'a subject which speaks unknown to the subject'.

Thus, man's entry into the symbolic order is actualized, when, responding to the letter that insists, he ex-sists at the level of it by surrendering his life to its play.

The same holds good in the context of the three position in the story by Poe, for one has already observed that, in order to accede to the third position, the subject has to renounce his subjectivity, his ego, and participate in the autonomous circuit of the letter solely in terms of the laws of the circuit itself. Thus, if the second position is the position of the ego, the third one is the position of the letter. Man's movement from the second position to the third involves the surrender of his ego to the laws of language. Rather, Lacan's symbolic order is a network of language; or a net in which the ego as its prey has already been structured, so that the ego is 'already determined by a determination belonging to a totally different register'.

But, how is the subject's ex-sistence made possible


25 Ibid., p. 283.
by the insistence of the letter in the story by Poe?

Lacan’s analysis reveals that Poe’s story is constituted around three identical scenes. In the first scene of the story, that is, in the one in which the letter is stolen from the royal boudoir, the second royal personage—designated by Lacan as the King—saw nothing and was blind. The first royal personage and the rightful owner of the letter—correspondingly, the Queen—saw that the King had seen nothing, and assumed that the letter was, therefore, sufficiently concealed. This blunder—a characteristic one of the subject of the ego—left her precariously powerless with regard to the occupant of the third position, who is, in this case, the cunning Minister D, who, having briskly interpreted the importance and vulnerability of the letter mainly from the two looks of the two royal personages in question, proceeded to dispossess the Queen of the article by means of an extraordinary sleight of hand.

This very scene in which the letter is silently stolen, is repeated once again in the story. In scene two, it is the Prefect of the Parisian police who occupies the position that the King had occupied in the first scene, and hence, though he had thoroughly examined the Minister’s apartment as well as his person, saw nothing. The Minister occupying the position that the Queen had occupied in the previous scene, having done everything
to hide the letter from the police, believed that the letter was satisfactorily hidden. It is because the Minister had not taken cognizance of anyone who could be cleverer than the police, that is to say of anyone who could look for the letter not in secret corners but in the most conspicuous of places, that he ended up losing the letter - notably in a manner similar to the one in which he himself had stolen it from the royal apartment in the first place - to Dupin, occupying in this scene what was the Minister's own position in the previous one.

The discovery of the lost letter only brings Poe's story, and not the effectiveness of the letter, to an end, because, the recovery of the letter by Dupin creates room for a third scene along the circuit. Once the letter is stolen by Dupin, the Minister, in his not seeing that he no longer possessed the letter, is pushed to the position of blindness that was occupied by the King in the first scene and by the Prefect in the second. Dupin himself is moved to the second spot and is automatically made vulnerable by the norms of the spot. As a matter of fact, he had committed himself to it by using the opportunity for revenge - knowing that the Minister shall not fail to recognise his handwriting - as well as for money. By egoistically interfering with the circuit of the letter in terms of the addition of two venomous lines to the duplicate letter which might as well have been left blank, Dupin had effectively created an excess
which he alone must account for. The third place in this scene could be attributed to Lacan for having exposed Dupin so. According to Lacan, the analyst should never interfere with the symbolic circuit generated by the speech of the analysand which evokes the truth in question in analysis, as a subject, not even when he is engaged in the task of analysing the same. In the story, Dupin, too, was not involved with the circuit before he was invited to participate in it. It is clear from the story that he was successful as long as he remained neutral towards the letter. However, by deciding to employ the opportunity for his personal advancement, he had brought his ego into play, and thereby, albeit unconsciously, made all the preparations necessary for him to be out-smarted by anyone who could apprehend his weakness. However, it must be maintained that, as far as this level of the text is concerned, the story is clearly incomplete.

It is thus that the letter insists, over and over again, by weaving one scene after another. The insistence of the letter in question is never ending.

26 The final position ought to be left to the analyst for his ability to send to the sender his own message by reflecting it back to him with a deadly neutrality. It is by doing so that the analyst shortens the circuit of the letter on the way to its destination, making it possible for the sender to read his own letter anew. The importance of the analyst who engages himself in straightening out the puzzling letters of an anxiety ridden analysand, lies in his knowledge of the laws of the symbolic order and his ability to adhere to them as an egoless participant in order to discover and decipher all the letters purloined by the analysand for the benefit of the latter.
because the letter in itself it is completely mute. No one knows a word of it. The direction of the insistence of the letter in this case is towards the person of the King. The letter insists on the King’s realisation of it, for it is only with the King’s knowledge of it - not as a piece of paper but as a secret document - that is, with the ignorance of the King being supplanted by knowledge, of the words in the letter, that the insistence of letter will cease to be. Untill then, that is, as long as the letter is ‘dumb’, its insistence will persist.

It should now be considered how the self is not the cause but the effect of language. At the most manifest level, as it could be witnessed in the case of the Queen and the Prefect - and the same is certainly going to be the case with the Minister in the awaited scene of recognition when he will be asked to produce the letter which he will not know he no more possessed - which is that, without the letter, the human being is condemned to a state of desperation, even, a nameless damnation.

However, at a more immanent level, the letter is the instrument which determines the positions that the egos shall occupy in the inter-subjective network. It is the letter that makes the Minister move from the third position of insight in the first scene, through the second position of sight in the second scene, to the first position of blindness in the final scene. At
the broader level of the symbolic circuit, Dupin has moved up by two notches and is vulnerable, while the King, as the most important addressee of the letter, has to wait for two promotions in order to be able to see the truth withheld at a formidable cost.

In the words of Lacan: ‘One can say that, when the characters get a hold of this letter, something gets a hold of them and carries them along and this something clearly has dominion over their individual idiosyncrasies’.27 Thus, it is the letter that decides how the occupants of the various positions will behave. Accordingly, the possession of the purloined letter invariably makes the subject passive. It was the possession of the letter that had forced the Queen to feel the need to hide it, re-defining her largely as a mute, anxious and passive subject in spite of her being the Queen.

On the question of gender, femininity is associated with a passivity and silence in Poe’s story. By grabbing the letter, the Minister became the recipient of its owner’s passivity associated with the need to hide anything, and silence on the question of the letter in possession, at once. His rushing to the window upon hearing the sound of the firing below

it is certainly accompanied by an additional anxiety owing to the fact that he possessed the letter. Moreover, while the Queen - now made manly by her having lost possession of the letter - proceeded to employ a whole band of men to recapture the letter, the Minister, although his own honour was less threatened by the revelation of the letter than the Queen’s, took cover under nothing but a feminine disguise. The possession of the letter feminised the Minister in the sense that in course of giving a new shape to the letter, he had his own name and address written on it by a female hand. In his re-posting this ‘feminine’ letter to himself as its recipient, the Minister’s feminization is completed. As in the case of the Queen and the Minister as his predecessors, Dupin too is silenced by his possession of the letter.

In itself, the letter tends towards the analyst, or whosoever is in that position, for it tends towards the realisation of the symbolic circuit. In consonance with this as the innate tendency of the purloined letter, or, of the symbolic order as dumb, the same is re-arranged by the analyst in such a way that the sender is able to receive and read his own letter. The strange play of the symbolic circuit that delays the self-addressed letter from arriving at its destination is due to the fact that the human being is more or less like the postman. He carries the letter but never reads it. But, in case he does read the letter, he turns violent and destructive, and either
destroys the other or he tears his own face and proceeds to nullify his existence.

Lacan's analysis of the letter culminates in the description of the clinical transaction of words that is carried out between the two characters respectively occupying the couch and the armchair on the analytical stage. According to Lacan, it is the task of the analyst to send back to the analysand his own speech after having systematically inverted it. This inversion is necessary in order to make the analysand conscious about his own unconscious which is hidden from him as long as it stands uninverted. One fails to see the letter as long as one fails to appreciate the importance of inversion as the precondition to seeing it. This point is illustrated by Lacan in terms of the limit of the vision of the police in the story: The Prefect's men simply stood no chance of finding out the letter, because they did not know that the letter in question had to be uninverted before it could be searched. Their ignorance is due to the fact that the description of the letter that the Prefect had received from the Queen was the one which they used as the yardstick in their quest, while the Minister, cleverly anticipating the modus operandi of the police, as well as the nature of the description of the letter that they would be having, had turned the letter inside out in order to keep it hidden. The police could not find the letter because, strictly speaking, the letter that they
were looking for was not there, and the letter that was there, that is, the one that Dupin finally recovered, did not externally agree with the letter that they had been briefed on. The problem is that the police did not have the reason or the ability to guess that the letter in question could by any chance look like the one that was hanging from the mantlepiece. It was due to a similar inability to appreciate the necessity of inversion for witnessing truth, that the King had failed to apprehend the letter in the first scene. The King had failed to see the letter even when it was lying right under his nose solely because the Queen had turned it upside down. This implies, that unlike the occupants of the other positions, to the occupant of the position of blindness the letter has only one side to it. It is a platitude that if the King had not been so ignorant of the importance of the other side of the letter, the story - in itself an excess founded on this very ignorance - would have not come into being. However, the importance of reading the other side of the letter was not unknown to the Minister, or to Dupin. In fact, the Minister had employed his knowledge of the significance of the 'other side' of the letter not only in order to steal it but also to hide it successfully from the police, while Dupin was helped in his bid to recover the same by his knowing that the meticulousness of the police was really the testimony of their stupidity, and that, on the
other side of carelessness stood what was most significant. Although the problem appeared quite tricky for the King and the Prefect, little Alice remembered the significance of reversal all the time she was viewing through the looking glass: 'Well then, the books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way: I know that, because I've held up one of our books to the glass, and then they held up one in the other room.'

The symbolic order 'tends beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the limits of life', and must be 'identified' with the Freudian 'death-instinct'. This death-instinct, by virtue of the fact that it is a cover to the letter produced by the unknown or unconscious, acts as the 'mask' of the symbolic order as long as it is 'dumb', 'that is to say in so far it hasn't been realised':

The symbolic order is simultaneously non-being and insisting to be, that is what Freud has in mind when he talks about the death

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instinct as being what is most fundamental - a symbolic order in travail, in the process of coming, insisting on being realised.\textsuperscript{30}

In order to examine these two orders with reference to a single text, it would be appropriate to return to the text of Freud’s ‘Dream of Irma’s Injection’.

Freud’s Imaginary Order

Psycho-Analysis was the dream of Doctor Sigmund Freud, and the dream that provided material support to the inaugural moment of this Freudian dream is Freud’s own ‘Dream of Irma’s Injection’. It is the first dream to have been analysed by Freud for the psychoanalytical community; the one dream that has been referred to most in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900); and, the dream that all analysts since Freud have felt compelled to return to again and again. The complete dream together with the interpretation of it may be found in the second chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams, bearing the title - ‘The Method of Interpreting Dreams : An Analysis of a Specimen Dream’. It would be appropriate to return to Freud’s text - comprising of the dream itself and his detailed interpretation of it - in order to see how Freud had interpreted the dream less as an analyst and more as the subject of his ego.

The dream is preceded by a ‘Preamble’ which Freud felt was ‘necessary’ for his enterprise. In the Preamble, Freud informs us that he has had a ‘mixed relationship’ with Irma owing to the fact that Irma was, at once, a patient and a family friend of his. The treatment of Irma, we are told, had only been partially successful, that is, Irma was cured of her ‘hysterical anxiety’, though some of her ‘somatic symptoms’ persisted. Freud’s treatment of Irma was not completely successful for two reasons. The first reason is that, at that time, the criteria that indicated the termination of analysis of hysteria was not quite clear to Freud himself; and the second - which is the more important one according to Freud - is that Irma was unwilling to accept the solution that Freud had, nonetheless, proposed to her. The treatment had been broken off for the summer vacation.

One day, Freud’s friend and junior colleague, Otto Rank, who had been staying with Irma and her family at their country resort during the same summer vacation, paid a visit to Freud. Freud asked Rank how Irma was, to which Rank replied - ‘She’s better, but not quite well’. It so appeared to Freud, albeit quite vaguely, that Rank’s remark, or in the tone in which it was made, contained a reproof. Freud felt that Rank was effectively saying that Freud had ‘promised the patient too much’. However, Freud restrained from giving any outward sign of his ‘disagreeable impression’
because the reason for the same was not fully clear to him. But, nevertheless, he sat down that very evening to write out Irma's case-history for Doctor M., who was the 'leading figure' of the circle of clinicians at that time, with the view to justify his handling of the case. That night, or probably the next morning, Freud had the dream which—as is expected of any patient undergoing psychoanalysis—he wrote down as soon as he woke up. The dream in question is the following one:

The Dream of Irma's Injection (July 23rd-24th, 1895)

A large hall - numerous guests, whom we were receiving. - Among them was Irma. I at once took her on one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my 'solution' yet. I said to her: 'If you still get pains it is really only your fault'. She replied: 'If you only knew what pains I've got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen - it's choking me.' - I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that. - She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey
scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose. I at once called in Dr. M., and he repeated the examination and confirmed it.... Dr. M. looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-shaven.... My friend Otto was now standing beside her, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: 'She has a dull area low down on her left.' He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left shoulder was infiltrated. (I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress.)... M. said: 'There's no doubt it's an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated.' ... We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls...propionic acid...trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type).... Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly.... And probably the syringe had not been clean.31

31 Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams (Edited and Translated by James Strachey) Penguin Freud Library (henceforth P.F.L.) vol. iv, p.182. It should be noted here that, although in the English translation of it the dream has been rendered into the imperfect tense, dreams, as in the original writings of Freud, are always in the present tense.
Freud states at the beginning of the chapter in which this dream is placed, that it is always advantageous to interpret a dream not as a whole but in parts. Therefore, it would be appropriate to go through the detailed interpretation to which Freud had submitted this dream.

A large hall - numerous guests, whom we were receiving. Among them was Irma: Freud had this dream while he was spending the summer of 1895 at Bellevue, a hill resort in the neighbourhood of Vienna, whose reception rooms were huge and hall-like. The time was a few days before the birthday of Freud's wife, and she had informed him the day before Freud had this dream, that she was expecting a number of her friends, including Irma, to visit her on the occasion. Thus, this part of the dream is in anticipation of the event depicted in it.

I at once took her on one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my 'solution' yet. I said to her: 'If you still get pains it is really only your fault': Freud writes, he might have actually said this to her in waking life, because, at that time he considered that his part of the task as an analyst consisted of revealing the hidden meaning of the analysand's symptoms to him, and that it was the task of the analysand concerned to do with it what he considered best. Also, Freud notes that
the words spoken to Irma in the dream brought out his anxiousness to be freed from the responsibility for the pains that she had.

She replied: 'If you only knew what pains I've got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen - it's choking me': Freud writes that pains in the throat and abdomen and constriction of the throat played no part in Irma's illness; that pains in the stomach constituted an insignificant part of Irma's symptoms; and, that he could not think of an appropriate explanation for the dream's choice of such symptoms that in no way resembled the real symptoms that Irma had, namely, feelings of nausea and disgust.

I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy: Irma had a 'rosy complexion' which gave Freud the cause to suspect that someone else was being substituted for Irma in the dream. He reveals to us a little later that, in this; Irma represented his own wife who was usually pale, and once, when she was in a specially good health, looked puffy.

I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble: This is the expression, writes Freud, of his wish that Irma had an organic symptom. Freud wished that his diagnosis of hysteria in the case of Irma was wrong, and that organic symptoms were present in her, so that he
could get rid of the blame of therapeutic failure on the grounds that the
analyst was concerned with the mental and not physiological aspect of the
illness.

I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of
recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there
was really no need for her to do that: Freud writes, he had never found it
necessary to examine Irma's oral cavity. However, it reminded him of a
similar examination that he had carried out sometime before, on a
beautiful governess who took measures to hide her plates when it came
to opening her mouth. Hence, 'there was really no need for her to do that' is
meant to be a compliment to Irma. But this same sentence brought to
Freud's mind certain other associations as well. There was a female friend
of Irma of whom Freud had a very high opinion. One evening, when
Freud visited this young lady, he found her by the window, having her
oral cavity examined, in a manner as has been reproduced in the dream
in question, by the same Dr. M. of the dream, who pronounced after his
examination, that she had a diphtheritic membrane. However, Freud had
already been informed by Irma that her friend suffered from hysterical
choking, which led him to suppose that Dr. M's diagnosis was probably
not entirely correct, and that, like Irma, she too was a hysteric. This
supposition allowed Freud to play with the idea that she too could ask
him to cure her, although he did not entertain high hopes of being actually asked, because this lady was of a 'very reserved nature', in other words, recalcitrant. Moreover, there was really no need for her to do that because, to Freud, she appeared strong and intelligent enough to get over her illness without any external aid.

In the dream-text, 'recalcitrance' is embodied not only by the beautiful governess with bad teeth and the friend of Irma having a very reserved nature, but also by the extremely bashful wife of Freud, who is the figure as already noted, alluded to by Irma's being pale and puffy.

According to Freud, the dream at this point probably expressed his wish to substitute Irma for her friend because, while Irma was foolish - in that she had turned down Freud's solution - her friend would have proved wiser and would have yielded sooner. She would have opened her mouth properly and said more than Irma did.

She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose: The white patch reminded Freud of Dr. M's diagnosis, and hence, once again, of Irma's friend. Moreover, it reminded him of the serious illness from
which his eldest daughter, Mathilde, had suffered a couple of years earlier, as well as of his immense fright and anxiety at that time. The scabs on the turbinal bones reminded Freud of his worry about his own state of health, because, in order to relieve himself of a 'troublesome nasal swelling', Freud was making frequent use of cocaine at that time. Cocaine, the utility of which as an anaesthesia Freud was the first person to recommend in 1884 at the cost of severe reproaches from his professional colleagues, led him to recall two other incidents of therapeutic blunder. The first one concerned a woman patient who developed 'an extensive necrosis\(^2\) of the nasal mucous membrane' by following Freud's example of taking cocaine; and the other was the death of one of his dearest friends\(^3\) caused by his misuse of cocaine.

*I at once called in Dr. M., and he repeated the examination and confirmed it.*

Freud writes that, this corresponded to the position of eminence enjoyed by Dr. M. in the medical circle, and proceeds to explain the 'at once' in the dream-text. It reminded Freud of his *hurrying* to his senior colleagues for support and guidance when he chanced to produce a severe toxic state in a woman patient by repeatedly prescribing 'sulphonal' that was known

\(^2\) Necrosis: death of a group of cells, tissue, or part of the body.

\(^3\) Probably Dr. Ernst Von Fleischl-Marxow.
to be a harmless drug at that time. The place of this incident in the dream is cemented, or overdetermined, by the fact that this woman patient, too, was named Mathilde, whereby it struck Freud as an 'act of retribution on the part of destiny'. To Freud, this substitution of his patient by his eldest daughter meant 'this Mathilde for that Mathilde, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'.

Dr. M. looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-shaven .... : Though Dr. M., to the anxiety of his friends and colleagues, usually appeared sickly, the 'limp' and the 'clean-shaven chin' referred not to him but to Freud's elder brother Philippe who lived in England, and importantly, 'closely resembled Dr. M.. Philippe was clean-shaven and, according to the news received by Freud a few days before the dream took place, walked with a limp owing to an 'arthritis affection of the hip'. Dr. M. and Philippe have been rendered in the dream as freely substitutable for one another, because both of them had rejected, much to his dislike, a certain suggestion of Freud.

My friend Otto was now standing beside her, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: 'She has a dull area low down on her left': Since Otto and Leopold were relatives, physicians specializing in the same branch of medicine and acted as his assistants from the time
Freud was in charge of the ‘neurological out patient’s department’ in a children’s hospital, it was their fate, writes Freud, to be always compared to one another. Freud writes that scenes such as the one represented in the dream took place quite frequently in the said hospital. Very often, as Freud and Otto discussed a particular case, Leopold, after another examination of the patient, made some significant though unexpected contribution to the diagnosis. The sentence ‘She has a dull area low down on her left’ recalled to Freud’s mind one real case in the hospital, in which Leopold had struck him by the thoroughness of his observation. Freud compares Otto and Leopold respectively to the bailiff Brasig who was known for his quickness, and the ‘slow but sure’ friend of his named Karl, as the two most important characters in Fritz Reuter’s once popular novel Ut mine Stromtid (1862-4). In the dream-text, Freud is found to be contrasting the hasty Otto with the prudent Leopold, just as he had contrasted the disobedient Irma with her wiser friend, earlier in it. The dull area low down on her left also reminded Freud of a ‘metastatic affection’\textsuperscript{34}, and through it, of Irma’s friend as well as to an ‘imitation of a tuberculosis’.

\textsuperscript{34} Metastasis : the transfer of a disease or its manifestations, as a malignant tumor, from one part of the body to another.
He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left shoulder was infiltrated.

(I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress.)... : The infiltrated skin referred to the rheumatism in Freud's own shoulder that he never failed to notice whenever he sat up late into the night. Freud also relates the same sentence to another which, according to him, doctors are of the habit of saying - 'a left upper posterior infiltration' - referring to the lung and tuberculosis. I noticed this, just as he did is an ambiguous way commonly employed in dreams to express - 'I noticed it in my own body'. In spite of her dress recalled to Freud's mind the contrast between the manner in which child patients were examined and that in which adult female patients were examined. Freud writes that while they always examined the children in the hospital undressed, the adult female patients were always examined through their clothes.

M. said : 'There's no doubt it's an infection': What was discovered in the oral cavity of Irma was 'local diphtheritis'. The illness of his daughter Mathilde had caused Freud to discuss diphtheritis and diphtheria, extensively. Diphtheria, Freud tells us, is the 'general infection' arising from 'local diphtheritis'. The dull area brought to the notice of all concerned by Leopold indicated the presence of a general infection.
But no matter: These words in the dream, according to Freud, are meant to be a consolation. In the preceding section of the dream, the cause of Irma’s pains was attributed to a severe organic disorder, which, according to Freud, had been undertaken by the dream with the view to relieve him to the blame of unsuccess with the argument thatFreud’s task was not to cure the patient of organic affections such as diphtheritic pains, but to cure her of those pains that had a psychosomatic basis. This meant to Freud, as already pointed out, that in the dream, he invented a severe illness for Irma in order to clear himself of the blame of therapeutic failure, which in turn made it necessary for the subject of the dream to appropriate an assurance from an experienced doctor to the effect that all will be well in the end, and hence Dr. M’s remark - ‘But not matter’.

Dysentery will supervene: Freud feels that he was probably making fun of Dr. M.’s ‘far-fetched explanations’ and of his making ‘unexpected pathological connections’. However, dysentery also reminded Freud of a patient of his - a young man having great difficulties with defecating. Freud recognized it as hysteria, but instead of trying him with his psychotherapeutic methods, he had sent him on a sea voyage. Some days before the dream took place, this young man had written to Freud from Egypt, informing him of a fresh attack that he had suffered, and of the diagnosis of the same as dysentery by a local doctor. Freud suspected that
the doctor had been taken in by the patient’s hysteria, but, at the same
time, he reproached himself for having sent the patient on a sea voyage
without anticipating that the same could give him some organic trouble
over and above his ‘hysterical intestinal disorder’. Freud also writes that
dysentery in German sounded quite like diptheria, the latter, a word of ill-
omen according to him, however, does not appear directly in the dream.

The toxin will be eliminated: This reminded Freud of an amusing story told
by the same Dr. M. of the dream. In the story, Dr. M. had been called in
by another doctor for consultation over one of his patients who was
seriously ill. Since this other doctor appeared more optimistic than he had
the reason to be, Dr. M. pointed out to him that he had found albumen35
in the patient’s urine. To this observation, the other doctor replied at once
- ‘No matter, the albumen will soon be eliminated!’

This story, Dr. M.’s far-fetched explanation referred to in one of the
preceding sections and the doctor in Egypt who had diagnosed ‘hysterical
intestinal disorder’ as ‘dysentery’, together, led Freud to conclude that the
intention behind this part of the dream was to express derision at doctors
who were ignorant of hysteria. It also occurred to Freud in this

35 Albumin: any class of protein substances found in the blood.
connection, that by suspecting tuberculosis in the case of Irma's friend Dr. M. only revealed his ignorance of the possible hysterical basis of her illness that Freud had reasons to suspect.

Freud's derision at Dr. M. in the dream is the expression of his dislike for him for his not having accepted one of Freud's suggestions. Thus, Freud writes, the dream enabled him to revenge himself on two persons who had refused his proposal: First, on Irma, by shifting the blame on her for the pains that she continued to have; and next, on Dr. M., by deriding him for his ignorance of hysteria as well as by putting a nonsensical consolation into his mouth.

We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection: Freud writes that this direct knowledge is 'remarkable', because, as the preceding sections have revealed, no one had any knowledge of it before Leopold pointed it out to them.

Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection: During the same evening that Freud had the dream, he had opened a bottle of liqueur that had been presented to him by Otto.

36 On the label of the bottle appeared the word 'Ananas' that resembled the family name of Irma.
Rank. The liqueur gave off a strong smell of amyl, that is, of fusel oil, which discouraged Freud from tasting it. On being suggested by his wife that they gave it to the servants, Freud retorted that it was not necessary to poison them either. This ‘amyl’ recalled to Freud’s mind the whole string from his memory of organic chemistry - ‘propyl, methyl and so on’ - that accounts for the propyl preparation in the dream.

*Trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type):* Trimethylamin appears in the dream in the form of its chemical formula, and in heavy type, suggesting special emphasis. Trimethylamin is associated with Wilhelm Fliess, one of Freud’s best friends who was sympathetic to Freud’s cause during the period of gestation of psychoanalysis. It was Fliess who had mentioned to Freud that he believed that one of the products of sexual metabolism was trimethylamin. This introduces to the dream the all important factor of sexuality, to which Freud attributed the key role in his explication of the origin of nervous disorders. Freud writes, the best excuse that he could find of his failure to cure Irma was the factor of her widowhood, adding, that the friend of Irma, too, was a young widow.

Trimethylamin appeared in bold print because it alluded to Fliess, who always expressed his agreement with Freud’s opinions whenever Freud
felt isolated. Moreover, Fliess is associated with the dream in a number of ways. First, he had a special knowledge of the 'consequences of affections of the nose and its accessory cavities'. Next, he had drawn 'scientific attention to some very remarkable connections between the turbinal bones and the female organs of sex (Cf. the three curly structures in Irma’s throat.)'. Freud had also had Irma examined by Fliess to see if her gastric pains were of nasal origin. Finally, Fliess himself suffered from 'suppurative rhinitis', which associated him with the vast number of suffering patients listed in the dream, each one of them including himself, causing Freud some sort of anxiety.

*Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly* : The accusation of thoughtlessness here is directed, once again, against Otto Rank. Freud has already associated Otto with 'quickness', which could easily be an euphemism for 'thoughtlessness'. Injured by Otto's remark regarding the condition of Irma, and the looks that accompanied the remark, Freud was led to think: 'How easily his thoughts are influenced! How thoughtlessly he jumps to conclusions'. Otto's 'haste' reminded Freud of his friend's 'haste' in resorting to cocaine injections because this friend was advised

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37 Suppurative Rhinitis: inflammation of the mucous membranes of the nose, characterized by the formation of pus.
to take cocaine orally. Also, Otto’s thoughtlessness in handling chemical substances recalled to Freud’s mind the case of the unfortunate Mathilde, which led to his redirecting the accusation made against Otto, towards himself.

*And probably the syringe had not been clean*: This constituted one more accusation against Otto, though it is derived from another source. On the day before the dream, Freud had been told by the son of an old lady to whom he gave an injection of morphia twice a day, that his mother was at the country and was suffering from ‘phlebitis’,

38 giving Freud the reason to suspect that she has been the victim of an ‘infiltration caused by a dirty syringe’. Freud writes, he was proud that in two years he had not caused a single infiltration, and that he always cleaned the syringe meticulously before using it. The old woman’s phlebitis reminded Freud of the thrombosis

39 suffered by his wife during one of her pregnancies, and also of Irma and of the dead Mathilde.

The motive behind the dream, according to Freud, was to relieve him of the blame of therapeutic unsuccess that was implicit in the remark made

38 Phlebitis: inflammation of the inner membrane of a vein.

39 Thrombosis: formation of a blood clot (thrombus) in a blood vessel, resulting in the partial or complete blocking of circulation.
by Otto Rank. The dream went about it by making three suggestions, all
of them having the single aim of relieving Freud of the blame of failure:
First, that the doctor was not responsible for the acceptance or rejection
of his solution by the patient. Either way, it was entirely the patient’s
responsibility. Second, it was Irma and not Freud who was to be held
responsible for the pains that she was having. Third, Freud, who was
concerned with the cure of hysterical pains alone, was not responsible for
the cure of those pains that resulted from some organic disorder.

This dream, according to Freud, makes a list of evidence of his lack of
medical conscientiousness. The listing is done at one level of the dream,
in terms of: the illness of Freud’s eldest daughter; his own troublesome
nasal swelling; the case of one woman patient developing an extensive
necrosis by following Freud’s example of taking cocaine; the death of his
dear friend caused by the misuse of cocaine; and, Freud’s having
prescribed sulphonal to a patient that produced a severe toxic state and
ultimately brought about her death. Freud argues that at another level, in
the light of other evidences, this very list serves to bring out evidence in
favour of his medical conscientiousness, because it reveals nothing other
than his concern for: his daughter’s health; the state of his own heath; the
dead Mathilde; the injurious effect of cocaine; the patient who fell ill
while travelling in Egypt; the health of Fliess; the health of Dr. M.; the
health of his brother in England; and, the health of all patients in terms of the cleanliness of the syringe that he used. In this way, the dream, according to Freud served to offset the supposed allegation of Otto and the chain of similar reproaches triggered off against him by it, by bringing out his professional conscientiousness, and as such it revealed how the dream was the fulfilment of a 'wish'.

Freud tells us on two occasions in this chapter - and on both the occasions with an emphasis - that the motive behind a dream was a wish, and the dream-content, the fulfilment of the wish. According to Freud, the wish behind the dream of Irma's injection was to revenge himself on three persons who had given him cause to be displeased: First, on Otto, for his having sided against Freud as well as for his having presented Freud with a liqueur that was, in Freud's rather extreme view of it, equivalent to poison. In the dream, this wish has been fulfilled partly in terms of the suggestion that Leopold was better than Otto, and partly in terms of the proposal that it was not Freud but Otto who was responsible for Irma's pains, because - and in this, both Otto's siding against Freud and his repulsive gift are taken into consideration at once, a fact that escaped Freud's notice to which I shall duly turn in chapter three of this work - it was Otto who had given her an injection of an unsuitable drug. Next, on Irma, for her disobedience, partly by suggesting that it was she who
was to be blamed for the persistence of her pains, and partly by positing her friend as less recalcitrant and more intelligent than her. And finally, on Dr. M., for his having rejected his proposal, partly by positing Fliess as a wiser person than him, and partly by deriding him for his ignorance of hysteria.

Thus, in the dream, the cause of the failure of Freud as a clinician is attributed to the trio - Irma, Otto and Dr. M.. The dream-text also suggests that had this trio been replaced by another - consisting of Irma’s friend, Leopold and Dr. Fliess - Freud would never have been reproached. Freud concludes with the view that it was a wish that triggered off a dream whose content was the means to the fulfilment of the wish; and, that it was possible to apprehend the same only in terms of an interpretation of the dream on these lines.

It is quite clear from Freud’s account, that he is neither willing to concentrate on the question of silence in the dream-text, nor willing to see the significance of the play of words in it, but that he is solely concerned with the injury that Otto had, probably inadvertently, caused to his self-image as a clinician, and with the means to soothing the same.
It was for Lacan, the most controversial Freudian as well as the most original Psycho- Analyst since Freud, to reinterpret the dream of Irma's injection, so as to account for this dream-text belonging to the earliest phase of evolution of psychoanalysis, in terms of the teachings of the whole of the writings of Freud. He effectively reinterpreted the entire Freudian interpretation of this dream, as he did to all the other major works of Freud, to bring out what Freudianism - that was, concerned as he was to establish a 'scientific' status for Psychoanalysis, and accordingly led to interpret his discipline in terms of nineteenth century science, beyond the facility of Dr. Sigmund Freud to conceive - was all about.

Lacan’s Symbolic Order

Lacan’s analysis, as is the usual procedure with all his teachings, is not systematic in the least. There are a vast number of digressions that are not properly accounted for in course of the analysis. Also, there are loose-ends in profusion that are far from integrated to his argument as a whole. Moreover, Lacan himself despised attempts made by others to render his teachings in a systematic manner. His works are, as he had himself put it in another context, ‘most unsuitable’ for an academic research. However, whether or not it opposes one of the essential principles of Lacan, or it involves a dilution of the general complexity that he sought to evoke by such means, it is necessary in the context of the
present enterprise to rewrite Lacan’s interpretation of Freud’s dream-text and his interpretation of it, in a systematic manner.

One could say that Lacan’s interpretation begins with a question. He states, Freud, in his interpretation of the dream of Irma’s injection, is concerned with ‘desire’ only in a ‘general way’. That is, the particular desire whose fulfilment Freud tries to bring out through his interpretation of the dream, is an entirely ‘conscious’ one. In this Lacan is adequately supported by Freud’s own text: About the remark of Otto Rank that triggered off the dream, Freud writes - ‘I was conscious that my friend Otto’s words, or the tone in which he spoke them, annoyed me...’ At another place Freud ratifies it - ‘The dream fulfilled certain wishes which were started in me by the events of the previous evening’. This means that Freud was conscious of the wishes that, as he tries to argue, were expressed by the dream, not after he had interpreted the dream, but in the evening preceding the dreaming of it. Moreover, Freud’s act of writing down Irma’s case history for Dr. M. was a conscious one, meant to fulfil

40 The English translation of Freud’s ’Wunsch’ is ‘wish’. Freud’s French translators, however, have always translated the same word as ‘désir’, which has been translated into English as ‘desire’. Lacan preferred ‘desire’ to ‘wish’ because he envisaged an element of ‘longing’ behind Freud’s ‘wish’ that, so he felt, was missing in the word ‘wish’.

41 Sigmund Freud, Ibid., p. 181.

42 Ibid., p. 195.
the wishes even before he had had the opportunity to do so in his dream. Lacan asks, how could have Freud who will proceed to establish that the motive behind a dream was not any desire but an unconscious desire - that is, not desire in a general way but desire of a highly special category - been satisfied with the present interpretation as his first step towards the demonstration of it, even though, in this first step, he had no more than dealt with a preconscious or even a conscious desire? Needless to say, the question is a highly pertinent one, raised by entirely disregarding Freud’s ego. Lacan then proceeds to answer the question by interpreting Freud’s interpretation in terms of the registers of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, though ultimately, as it is always the case with Lacan’s teachings, his enterprise is aimed at establishing the primacy of the symbolic order.43

Lacan says, ‘we are receiving’ pertains to the visual field, to the realm of the imaginary. As soon as Freud enters into dialogue with Irma, this visual field shrinks. Freud then draws her towards the window and makes her to open her mouth. The dialogue as well as the pun on ‘opening the mouth’, pertains to the symbolic register, because it respectively conforms to language in its presence and to language in its

43 The following section is closely modelled on Lacan’s ‘The Dream of Irma’s Injection’, as may be found in Jacques Lacan, Book II, pp.146-171.
absence. All this takes place against a background of general discussion and of Irma’s resistance to Freud’s suggestion as well as to the examination.

It is on the note of her resistance that Irma is related to the two other women, namely, Irma’s friend and Freud’s wife. Freud’s discourse on these three women brings out his professional interest as well as the ‘mirage’ produced by his ego.

Lacan suggests, if Freud had analysed every moment of his dialogue with Irma in the waking state, he would have found out, without taking the trouble of dreaming and of interpreting the dream, that he saw her friend and his wife behind the figure of Irma. The difficulties of Freud on this part involving the three women was owing to Freud’s being fixated to the delimiting imaginary conditions. One indeed discerns a subjective interference with the analysis on part of Freud in this section of the dream.

Giving evidence of his superb analytical insight, Lacan contends that the three women stand for the three sisters, as in King Lear, or the three caskets, as in The Merchant of Venice, the third one of which, in terms of Freud’s interpretation of it in The Theme of the Three Caskets (1913), is
'death'. The question of the diphtheric membrane is tied to the notion of death in the form of a threat to the life of his eldest daughter that Freud had premonitions of two years before the occurrence of the dream. Freud thought that he was paying the price for a professional mistake.

It is at this point in the dream that Freud discovers the turbinal bones covered with a whitish membrane inside the open mouth of Irma. This sight, according to Lacan, is an ultimate revelation that Freud came across at the 'height of his need' to 'see' and to 'know'. Till this point the need has been expressed in the dialogue of the ego with the object. Freud facing with this 'horrendous sight' - of the 'flesh one never sees', of the 'foundation of things', of the 'ultimate formlessness' which is the aim and origin of all life, which says to Freud - 'you are this' - is in the delineation of the point at which the ego is destroyed. It also marks the climax to the first part of the dream.


45 According to Lacan, these curly structures inside the 'mouth' are associated with the 'female sexual organ'. As such, they stand for the point of *origin* of all life. The open mouth, once again as Lacan tells us, is that which 'swallows up everything', thereby representing the *aim* of all life. The complete spectacle of the open mouth and the curly structures within it is thus associated with death in as much as 'death' - as Freud ratifies in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* - is the 'aim' and 'origin' of all life.
From this point onwards, after Freud’s ego has regressed, it is no longer a question of Freud. He calls in Dr. M. because he himself failed to understand anything about the anxiety-provoking spectacle. There are two other figures who are simultaneously introduced with the figure of Dr. M.: Otto, who was ‘the friend as well as the enemy, the friend-enemy’, and Leopold, a figure used by Freud to counter this friend-enemy, ‘a beloved enemy’. These three figures, according to Lacan, constitute the trio of clowns who play with speech, that is, as the speech of adjudicating law, in order to answer the following question of Freud: What, according to medical law, is the correct way of viewing these turbinal bones covered with a whitish membrane?

With their speech - meant to comment upon Freud’s question regarding therapy and cure in psychoanalysis - the Clowns play the game of ‘passing on the buck’. The climax of the second part of the dream comes from the search of the solution that Otto had injected, one that Lacan rewrites as - ‘propyl, propylene, propionic acid, trimethylamin’.

According to Lacan, this trimethylamin formula \( \text{NCH}_3 \) - is the ultimate point in the dream, because it is this formula that the dream converges all its symbolic significance upon. The formula brings out the significant insistence of the letter in the dream and of the insistence of the dream on
the symbolic import of itself. The meaning of NCH$_3$ is not the important issue. What is important is the very insistence of the dream on the word as word. That is the significance of the NCH$_3$ being written in bold type.$^{46}$

The ego of Freud has been completely absorbed and lost behind the congress of all those who knew. After his ego has been identified with the 'whole of its most unconstituted form', that is, with this disparate trio, it is the 'voice' that is heard - a voice belonging to no one as such, one that articulates the formula of trimethylamin. This voice is the subject outside the subject 'who designates the whole structure of the dream'. What is at stake in the function of a dream is this voice that lies beyond the ego, beyond the imaginary order and beyond the dimension of consciousness. It is that in the subject which is of the subject and not of the subject. It is the unconscious.

$^{46}$ But that does not mean that NCH$_3$ does not have a meaning. For, the play of threes contained in the formula alludes to the notion of death:

![Diagram of NCH$_3$ structure]

This dream shows that analytical symptoms are produced in the flow of a word which tries to get through, all the time encountering a double resistance from the ego of the subject and the images of it. Thus, in the first part of the dream, Freud is on the plane of resistance, because he was on the plane of the imaginary. The 'unconscious' value of this dream is in its quest for the significance of all dreams, that is, in its quest for the word.

After the first part, that is, the part loaded with Freud's imaginary excess, has ended, there enters the crowd. The crowd is that into which the ego-less subject is completely absorbed. It brings about the enunciation of the symbolic order, the subject's entry into which causes him to be completely decentred in relation to his ego. It is at this point that speech emerges as speech, rendering every subject as different from what he used to be. In other words, at the symbolic level, the subject who has hitherto been the subject of his ego, becomes the subject of speech.

Lacan's concluding remarks on the dream of Irma's injection tend to summarise some of the grounds already covered in the main body of the seminar. However, in case of a thinker as esoteric as Lacan, repetition need not necessarily imply redundancy.
He recalls, the first part of the dream terminates with the appearance of the apparition of the terrifying, anxiety-provoking image. An image that one never sees. This unnameable image pertains to the real order. It pertains to the order that lacks all possible mediation, and facing which, all words, like all images of the ego, fail.

In the first phase, Freud reproaches Irma for turning down his solution. He did exactly the same thing in his real life. This attitude of Freud reflects a personal passion that accompanied his psychoanalytical quest. According to Lacan, Freud was far more passionate in his quest than was good for his enterprise, and it was this pressing passion of Freud, in the sense of his ambition to succeed, that was the cause of his failure in the case of Irma.

In analytical terms, the analyst's ambition to succeed is known as 'counter-transference', which always constitutes a hindrance to success in psychotherapy. In case of Irma, such counter-transference is brought into play by two factors. The first factor is that Freud had taken up Irma's case at a time when psychoanalysis was a germinating discipline, the growth and development of which depended almost entirely on the success of Freud. This made Freud too involved with the question of success and failure of his therapeutic practice, because it involved the
success and failure of the very discipline that he dreamt of establishing. According to Lacan, this passion was particularly strong in Freud during the formative phase of psychoanalysis, that is, between 1895 and 1897, when Freud had a feeling that he was on the verge of making a dangerous discovery, and was, at the same time, tormented by doubts and uncertainties as to the final outcome of all his endeavour. In other words, Freud was not neutral as an analyst because he was not neutral to the evolution of psychoanalysis. This was so in spite of the fact that neutrality of the analyst was indispensable for the successful conduction and conclusion of psycho-therapy. It is an issue that has already been examined with reference to the crucial factor that separated the occupant of the second position from the occupant of the third position in Lacan’s “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”.

The second factor is the problematic relation that Freud had with Irma. Irma was not just a patient of Freud but his family friend as well. This factor caused Freud to be over-anxious regarding his success, leading to counter-transference, and through it, to his failure. According to Lacan, the last sentence of the dream - ‘the syringe was dirty’ - signifies nothing but Freud’s ambition to succeed that was too pressing.
After the first phase, everything changes. There is no Freud any more. There is no one who can say ‘I’. This is the point at which the spectral decomposition of the function of the ego is to be witnessed. It is also the point of entry of the crowd.

The crowd is the blossoming of different identifications of the ego. The subject thus transformed into so many heads, is the subject without any head of his own. He is the acephalic subject, that is, the subject sans ego, or the subject who does not belong to the ego. And yet, in spite of his being headless, this subject has the ability to speak. At this point, Freud’s guilt is destroyed by the destruction of Irma, for, a dangerous illness is attributed to Irma for neither whose cause nor cure was Freud to be held responsible. The dream, according to Lacan, comes to this, that man’s tragic relation to the world is eliminated by the same token that abolishes him altogether as the individual. A point that has been put forward in the form of a highly charged query by Oedipus during his last days at Colonus: ‘Am I made man the hour when I cease to be?’

The crux of Lacan’s argument is as follows: At the height of an imaginary chaos, discourse comes into play. This discourse is a senseless one because it is mostly without a meaning. The only meaning of the discourse lies in its insistence on the realization of the symbolic
dimension, which is why what emerges when Freud had lost his head, is the trimethylamin formula, duly emphasised. The order of such discourses lies beyond the order of the ego or any of its images. This beyond cannot return within the level of the ego. In fact, this beyond that is manifest only in the symbolic order, is opposed to the imaginary order or the order of the ego, and depends on the decomposition of the ego for any possibility of its realization by the subject. That is the reason why the symbolic order is relentless in exerting pressure on the subject, in the form of its insistence, to ex-sist at its level. The trimethylamin formula, together with the insistence of it brought out by its being in bold type, signifies the insistence of the word on the recognition of the importance of the word as the last word.

In the context of Freud’s interpretation of the dream-text that is focused on the imaginary constituent of it, and Lacan’s interpretation of the same intended to establish the primacy of his symbolic order over Freud’s imaginary order, it is important to examine the significance of the real order about which Freud has kept quiet by avoiding it, and Lacan, by being cursory about it.

Freud’s intention behind the explication of the dream was to bring out the role of wish in motivating a dream, and to show, even teach, the means
of deciphering it. Accordingly, he concluded that the motive behind every dream was a wish, the fulfilment of which - as an interpretation carried out on the lines suggested by him might reveal - the dream was an expression of. Lacan, on the other hand, bent on explaining this work belonging to an early phase of Freud’s writings in terms of the writings of the more matured Freud, raised the question of the unconscious nature of the wish that Freud later on considered the most important factor informing a dream. In course of his investigation, Lacan discovered that, while the unconscious desire motivating the dream was meant to uphold the primacy of the symbolic order in terms of the primacy of the signifier, the unconscious desire of Freud that allowed him to witness such primacy was his vaulting ambition.

Lacan felt that the nightmarish revelation of the turbinal bones covered with a whitish membrane ought to have cut off Freud’s dream. He explains that that was not to be because Freud’s desire to know was unimaginably powerful. It was Freud’s dream to establish psychoanalysis that allowed him to sidestep this really horrendous sight met with in course of his quest for the answer upon which the fate of the discipline depended. His dream was not to be cut off at the climax of the first part of it because, as Erikson had put it and with which Lacan agrees, Freud was a ‘tough customer’, who was, on top of that, at the height of his
desire to know. In the process, Freud not only succeeded to continue with the dreaming, but also arrived at the zenith of all dreams, that is, at the feature of insistence of the dream-text on the word, which, according to Lacan, dreams were all about.

The unconscious, according to Lacan, is structured like language. The unconscious wish informing any dream is the significant insistence of language on being realised by the dreaming subject from a position external to his ego, the material used to generate such significant insistence of language however, being different in each dream. This insistence, in the case of Freud’s dream of Irma’s injection, is brought out by the trimethylamin formula. Thus, Freud’s unconscious wish to succeed led him to the trimethylamin formula which expressed, in bold type, the wish behind every dream.

But, this is not all that Lacan has in store on the question of primacy of language. For, the third academic year, he introduced, stupifying the trainee analysts for whom it was meant, metaphor and metonymy, to give the question of primacy of language another radical turn.