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Rat Man. Stuart Schneiderman. New York and London: New York University Press, 1987, 115 pages, $25.00 hard, $15.00 paper.

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Rat Man, a lucidly Lacanian rereading of Freud's famous case of obsessional neurosis, suggests at one point that an obsessional cannot establish any temporality of his or her own, and is obliged to wait for what Lacan called "the hour of the Other" (1977b, p. 18). As the author's preface makes clear, something similar is true of *Rat Man* itself; originally completed in 1977, this terse and instructive book took a full decade to find a publisher. I know nothing of the specific circumstances involved in this delay, but hope that it is not an indication of the current status of Lacan and Lacanians in the English-speaking intellectual world.

I mention this possibility because it begins to seem that Lacan has not become established among English-speakers with quite the wide-ranging success of a Foucault or a Derrida. Of course Lacan's name and influence have become more than familiar, and of course certain of his essays are widely read; compared to a figure like Lyotard, Lacan is a byword. Yet a ten-year hiatus in new book-length translations of his writing (between *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* in 1978 and the first two volumes of the Seminar in 1988) gave rise to no particular outcry, while the same period saw the English rendering of the bulk of Foucault and Derrida. Beyond the legal battles over Lacan's copyrights, part of what is involved here is the notorious difficulty of his writing, a problem which is actually compounded by the translation gap, since the bulk of translations before 1988 had come from the *Écrits* rather than from the more colloquial and accessible Seminars.

Also involved is the relation of Lacan's work both to the history of psychoanalysis and to the boundaries which currently obtain between intellectual disciplines. If the arguments of Derrida serve as effective criticism both of literary studies and of philosophy, they can nonetheless be fairly readily contained within the existing academic definitions of those disciplines; the converse attraction of Foucault lies in the extent to which this thinking may inspire an active reassessment of the disciplinary outlines and professional imperatives as such. The writing of Lacan, however, cannot easily be received in either of these ways; his criticism of psychoanalysis is conceived as a renewal, as a return to Freud, and any serious understanding of his contribution thus requires an intellectual investment in psychoanalysis *per se*.

It is also clear that a proportion of the Anglophone intellectuals who have embraced

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Lacan have had very specific and very restricted uses for him. At *Screen* during the second half of the 1970s, and at a variety of journals during the 1980s, the work of Lacan has with some frequency been reduced to the essay on the mirror-stage and the use of the concept of the Imaginary in developing theories of ideology. The initiative of *Screen* was quite valuable in its arrangement of an encounter between psychoanalysis and politics (*Rat Man*, by contrast, is strictly psychoanalytic), and it is important to recognize that the context of *Screen* also contained the work of a scholar like Jacqueline Rose; her essay on the Imaginary provided not only the first full account of the concept in English but also a warning calculated precisely against facile redeployment of Lacan's optical metaphors. Nonetheless, when we come across criticism of a "Lacanian model" which seems to bear only the most distant of relationships with Lacan, we cannot simply ascribe the problem to ignorance or impatience or malice; we must recognize that there is an entire secondary literature which sustains misapprehension, and thus plenty of room for a text like the one under review.

Finally, it is evident that Lacan's reputation in the English-speaking world is as a theorist rather than as a clinician. Once again, it is important not to underestimate the value of the work which has ensued from this; it is also clear from a Seminar like the one on the *moi*, punctuated with the commentaries of Jean Hyppolite and discussions of Merleau-Ponty and Lévi-Strauss, that Lacan's thinking always had its distinctly-defined philosophical ambitions. Yet it is further clear that the North American context for a study as dedicated to the Lacanian clinic as *Rat Man* is only beginning to exist; in my view, this is another of the strengths of the book.

Stuart Schneiderman is presumably well aware of these various contradictions. A professor of literature before he moved to Paris to be analyzed by Lacan and train as a Lacanian analyst, Schneiderman speaks in his preface of setting *Rat Man* aside in order to write something "better adapted to the American intellectual context"; one assumes he refers to his *Jacques Lacan: Death of an Intellectual Hero*, which itself contains some suggestive remarks on the obsessional. Yet before that book, Schneiderman had edited *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan*, which included a case presentation by Lacan, an assessment of that presentation by Jacques-Alain Miller, and a variety of clinical essays by members of Lacan's school, including an essay on obsessional neurosis by Charles Melman to which *Rat Man* frequently refers. Thus Schneiderman's most recent (or most recently-published) book represents his return to the task of establishing the reputation of Lacan the clinician in North America.

One Lacanian stereotype is reinforced insofar as *Rat Man* is a rereading of Freud. As I pointed out in a review published here in 1988, the notion that Lacan abandoned his own clinical practice in favor of rereading and retheorizing cases of Freud was never more than a half-truth – meetings of Lacan's Seminar are often so much predicated on discussion of case presentations that today's reader, ignorant of the specifics of the case in question, may be quite mystified. Yet, as Schneiderman says, it is also true that "Lacan believed the most productive way of learning psychoanalytic theory was to study (Freud's) writings intensively" (p. vii), even though Lacan's reading attends to "a Freudian text that is radically different from the one most people think that they know only too well" (p. viii).

This opens onto a question of fidelity to Freud versus critical distance from him, a question taken up directly in Schneiderman's preface, which argues in rather peremptory terms that most analysts have not yet arrived at Freudian positions, and that therefore there can be no question of going beyond him. If this smacks of Freudolatry, it is important to note that the text of *Rat Man* also speaks quite directly and quite frequently of Freud's fallibility, both as analyst and as theorist; Schneiderman not

only cites errors admitted by Freud (his premature interpretation in one case of obsessional neurosis, his mishandling of both Dora and Wolf Man), but adds examples of his own (Freud's occasional lapse into popular psychology, his failure to recognize the extent to which the Rat Man became "the mouthpiece for the repressed rage of his mother" [p. 83]).

This reference to the Rat Man's mother is one of the culminating instances of a recurring theme. Schneiderman begins with a restatement of the ethic of psychoanalysis according to Lacan ("psychoanalysis finds its justification in the effort to help a person articulate his unconscious desire and perhaps to act accordingly" [p. 2]), and then introduces the notion of Otherness as a structure in language by way of a discussion of Chomsky; while it is "unquestionably true" that "an individual through language can speak expressions which have never before been uttered," it is nonetheless also true that "a system which has so many rules that must be satisfied before an utterance can be grammatical provides an incontrovertible restraint to free and creative expression" (p. 4). What follows from these Lacanian general principles and begins to mark the particular case of the Rat Man is Schneiderman's skepticism concerning traditional male Oedipal desire for the mother; he substitutes the more triangulated, more elusive desire *of* the mother. The partitive/genitive ambiguity of this "of" is part of what is in question, but to clarify as far as possible, we might say that what is at stake for the Rat Man is his relation to his mother's desire. Hence the familiar Lacanian distinction between being and having the phallus; the Rat Man must give up the idea of being the phallus his mother desires, and "will not be able to have the phallus until he has worked through his desire to be it" (p. 11).

By the end of the book, however, this same basic thesis has been transformed into something rather less familiar, the hypothesis that the treatment comes to a premature end because Freud fails to recognize the extent to which the Rat Man is abusing him from the place of the mother. When the Rat Man repeats the story of his childhood told to him by his mother, the story in which he angrily calls his father "You lamp! You towel! You plate!", he is "realizing her desire and in so doing sacrificing his own" (p. 83). Schneiderman stresses that the treatment is for all practical purposes a success, that the Rat Man's neurosis is dissipated, yet he insists that "it is not quite accurate to say that the patient is identified with his mother; rather we should say that he is his mother's desire, that is, the rat that victimizes both father and lady" (p. 85). To some extent, this desire remains difficult to define, and Schneiderman is thus concerned with the obsessional doubt that lingers even after the success of the treatment. What if the mother's criticism of the father is duplicitous? "What if she is lying to lead him to renounce his father, only to let him drop into the status of a good-for-nothing once he does so?" (p. 86).

Beyond this, Schneiderman also notes that Freud remains largely indifferent to the obviously anal aspect of the patient's obsession with the rat torture; enlarging on Freud's technical instincts (as he does more than once), Schneiderman argues that the Rat Man is in fact perfectly content with this anal context and that his analysis cannot make progress by taking it up. Finally, this same point has its metapsychological value, since Freud's indifference to his patient's anality may be used in evidence against those who see the narrative of development through the libidinal stages as the essence of psychoanalysis. As a dedicated Lacanian, Schneiderman puts the accent instead on the acquisition of language and its consequences for the subject. Returning to the mother, he is thus able to make the point that "What a mother asks for during the stage of toilet training is not necessarily what she wants . . . . What the mother wants is for the child to answer with words" (p. 92).

This summary review of the book's treatment of the mother by no means exhausts

its resources; we might just as easily have traced its treatment of the relationship between subject and signifier. The latter begins in the case history, rich with private vocabularies and struggles to prevent unwanted words from forcing themselves into consciousness, passes through an explication of Lacan's distinction between signifier and sign, and concludes in Schneiderman's argument that "the obsessional's doubt involves those elements of the linguistic code that do not function to define him as subject" (p. 114). In other words, this short book is full of ideas. An excellent starting point for readers curious as to how Lacanian principles might inflect the practice of psychoanalysis, it also contains much of interest for readers already familiar with those principles. *Rat Man* is intellectually adventurous without becoming overbearing, and intellectually careful without becoming pedantic; it will repay repeated readings.

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