

Abstracts of Books and Articles

Cheris Kramarae. *Women and Men Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1981. Chapter 4, entitled "Language and Prescribed Place," purports to delineate Lacan's theories on language as "the reconstructed psychoanalysis approach." This book is widely used as the standard text in the growing area of socio-linguistics, but Kramarae presents a confused picture of Lacan. In her view Lacan "argues repeatedly that the unconscious is a language and thus psychoanalysis is linguistic analysis" (pp. 65-66). By reducing Lacan to Saussure, Kramarae depicts him as being enclosed in a system and in generalizations; as not leaving space for a concept of communication or for the nonverbal. Since he uses codes, he also disposes of speech. Although Kramarae thinks Lacan is valuable insofar as he enjoins us to look at women and men as constituted by language, she thinks his theoretical lacunae point us away from psychoanalysis to social evaluations (based on empirical studies of speakers) or to phenomenological views of speech. Kramarae's critique of Lacan is based on her reading of Luce Irigaray. In accepting Irigaray's picture of Lacan as accurate, Kramarae accepts the biological reduction of Phallus to penis. "Behavioral" differences between the sexes are explained by Irigaray's understanding of Lacan, and supported by empirical studies that show adolescent females becoming aware of public restrictions on their speech. Not altogether satisfied with this theory, Kramarae turns to an unpublished article by the literary critic Cora Kaplan that tries to recuperate the Lacanian concept of difference in a totalizing way. That is, "difference" has some abstract dimension about which Kramarae is unsure. Although Kramarae essentially dismisses Lacan's teachings as holding any value for the study of language or gender, the contradictions in her arguments make her chapter a paradigm of a critique in search of a theory.

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Gregory L. Ulmer. *Applied Grammatology; Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Chapter 7 is entitled "Seminar: Jacques Lacan." Ulmer argues that Lacan's presentational pedagogical strategies are compatible with grammatological Writing whose goal is to challenge the metaphysics of presence and of the self—conscious subject. One would use Lacan's technique by retaining its structure while abandoning its reference. Under subheadings of St. Theresa, Lalangue, Matheme, Love, Knots, and Shaman, Ulmer displays an in-depth reading of Lacan, whom he describes as a multimedia genius of the Imaginary. Like a shaman, he is a producer of opacity, the "happening." As a subverter of the Symbolic order, he uses rope tricks (like the shaman) in the form of Borromean knots, thus dramatizing a pedagogy that reveals half-truths of the unconscious. Ulmer's picture of Lacan is political, Lacan's style a model for a new kind of teaching that will reveal the repressed drive for narcissistic glory that lies behind knowledge systems, particularly the university discourse.

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Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds. *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986. This collection is an anthology of theoretical writing of the last twenty years by thirty-eight contemporary theorists and—as background—eighteen "important

intellectual precursors" (jacket note), among them Jacques Lacan. These precursors (Frege, C. S. Peirce, Saussure, Husserl, Bakhtin, Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Isaiah Berlin, Emile Benveniste, Lacan, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Lukács, Lévi-Strauss, Blanchot, J. L. Austin, and H.-G. Gadamer) are placed in an appendix after the main anthology, and so give a fairly accurate reflection of how the critical mainstream sees the nature of Lacan's relation to contemporary theory in language and literature in the United States. The longest section is devoted to Jacques Derrida (pp. 79-136). The selections from Lacan are a brief fragment from "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" and "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud" in its entirety. The introductory sketch to Lacan commits the common error of classifying him under the head of "structuralist linguistics" (p. 733). Lacan's use of the term "structure" referred to the topology of the human subject, best expressed in the three intersecting orders of the Borromean knot—Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real—knotted by the

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Name(s)-of-the-Father. The editors also make the object-relations error of supposing a Lacanian "theory of three stages of human development [. . .] the mirror stage, the imaginary, and the symbolic" (p. 733). The subject does not enter "the symbolic via the mirror stage," but through the divisive impact of the process that Lacan has called "castration."

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Frederick Crews, *Skeptical Engagement*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. In a new attack on psychoanalysis, Crews lumps together Derrida, Lacan, and Althusser. His view of Lacan is completely negative. "The most exuberant and widely practiced academic-Freudian school is now that of the late Jacques Lacan, who maintained that the real core of psychoanalysis was such awesome knowledge that it had to be eventually repressed by Freud himself as well as by his timid successors. Only the Lacanian, then, can gaze at the Sphinx from which Freud turned away in horror Lacan concocted a fanciful linguistic unconscious, whose remarkable features he described without even a perfunctory nod toward principles of corroboration. And this mind-numbing intoxicant is swallowed unhesitatingly by Lacan's American disciples" (introduction). Throughout the book Crews attacks Lacan, generally equating his "strategies" with Derrida and his politics with Althusser.

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Kathleen Woodward and Murray M. Schwartz, eds. *Memory and Desire: Aging—Literature—Psychoanalysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. Many of the essays in this book draw upon various aspects of Lacan's teaching. When Lacan is used he is taken seriously, treated as one who can open further vistas on issues of aging, knowing, desiring, and dying. The book has been well received by literary critics, as well as gerontology institutes and psychoanalysts. Contributors include Herbert Blau, Norman Holland, John Muller, Kathleen Woodward, Diana Hume George, Mary Lydon, William Kerrigan, and Carolyn Asp, with introduction by Murray Schwartz.

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Stephen W. Melville. "Psychoanalysis and the Place of *Jouissance*." *Critical Inquiry*, 13, no. 2 (1987): 349-70. Melville notes a turn in American interpretations of Lacan that first showed up at the Amherst

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conference on "The Transference" (1985): the difference between axiomatic readings and literary ones. Melville concentrates, then, upon various formalizations that emerge from his reading of *Encore* (Seminar 1972-73). He uses this text as a way to examine the charges against Lacan that his brand of psychoanalysis is abstract, loses touch with the "human reality" integral to Freud's work, with the "brute facts" surrounding orgasm, pleasure and discharge, replacing these with linguistics. But, Melville asserts, those who see Lacan as trying to secure psychoanalysis in place through an examination of the reciprocal play of pleasure and sense will find in *Encore* that *jouissance* turns out to be a matter of logic and inscription, a logic proper to the emergence and development of human sexuality, the sexuality of beings that speak.

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Stephen W. Melville, "Sexuality and Convention: On the Situation of Psychoanalysis," *Substance* 50 (1986): 75-92. In a rigorously argued reflection based on an in-depth reading of philosophy and of the critical theoretical arguments of our day, Melville re-reads Lacan's Seminar on "The Purloined Letter." "My conclusions will be similar to those drawn by Barbara Johnson in her reading of the debate," he says (p. 75). Melville takes up again Derrida's polemic against psychoanalysis, "particularly the Lacanian variant." He also considers Abraham's and Torok's arguments for *Anasémie*. Concluding that the latter arguments may well fall on the side of a philosophy that only thought itself purged of psychology, Melville suggests that psychoanalysis rears its head again with Lacan to confront both philosophy and psychology with questions regarding words, things, feelings, and meanings. He concludes with an acceptance of Lacan's acknowledgement of finitude in preference to Derrida's espousal of skepticism. Linking his conclusions to Stanley Cavell's *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), he argues that Lacan's radicalization of Freud's determinisms to the theory that "for a speaking being there is no such thing as randomness, only random order" (as presented in Lacan's game of odds and evens in the seminar on Poe's story) becomes an ontological matter, rather than an epistemological one. Lacan's argument is seen as an advance in explaining "how we are in the world" over Derrida's skeptical argument that order is random.

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Shannon Hengen, "'your father the thunder / your mother the rain': Lacan and Atwood." *Literature and Psychology* 32, no. 3 (1986): 36-42. Hengen reads Lacan's essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I" as saying that the formation of identity and the beginnings of speech occur simultaneously. Making the error of equating the imaginary order with a developmental stage, Hengen writes: "A speaker's use of language is affected by gender identification in a pre-symbolic or imaginary stage" (p. 37) where identity formation requires a child to perceive the mother as linguistically dependent upon the father. In her phenomenological

separation of the sexes Hengen concludes that such a state of affairs would mean that a child's speech would evolve as an indirect and ambiguous form with reference to an incompetent mother and a competent father. Having set up the paradigm, Hengen accuses Lacan of "sexism" and then finds Margaret Atwood guilty of the same kind of "sexism" in her early and middle periods of writing where she fails to give an adequate voice to her female characters.

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Literature and Psychology 32, nos. 3 and 4, are special issues on feminism and psychoanalysis which grew out of the 1986 conference on feminism and psychoanalysis (Illinois State University). All the essays have been influenced by Lacanian texts or by French feminists.