

Will Greenshields has recently completed his AHRC-funded PhD thesis (titled 'Lacan: The Topological Turn') at the University of Sussex. The thesis introduces and explores Jacques Lacan's controversial topologisation of psychoanalysis and attempts to establish whether or not it was necessary, successful and important by providing readings of texts that have been largely ignored by the Anglo-American reception of Lacan (such as *L'Étourdit* and *Seminar XXII*). What do the differences between Freudian topography and Lacanian topology tell us about Lacan's 'return to Freud'? What was it that topology offered that his numerous other interdisciplinary resources – such as linguistics, philosophy and literary or visual art – did not? If, in his later seminars, Lacan was chiefly concerned with 'giv[ing]' his audience 'a bit of real' (SXXIII: 16/3/76) – a real that is both inaccessible and immanent, both impossible to imagine, predict or verbalise but also effective and actual – how is it that the Borromean knot and the Möbius strip, in a fashion different or superior to his other eclectic references, amount to a 'writing [that] supports a real'? (SXXII: 17/12/74) For those of us who have come to expect a little more post-structuralist quibbling about the stability of representation from our continental thinkers, what are we to make of Lacan's provocative claim that topology is not a model, metaphor or image?

Lacan's definition of the unconscious as 'structured like a language' is well-known and has proved popular with literary critics who saw in his contention that repression functions exactly like the linguistic mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy an opportunity to gain access to a textual unconscious. How should a 'Lacanian' literary critic proceed in light of Lacan's declaration (issued in the preface to the English-language edition of *Seminar XI*) that 'the unconscious... is real'? What aid does Lacan's topological structuralism – as opposed to his earlier linguistic structuralism – offer here?

Will Greenshields write the regular [SPEAKING LACANESE](#) column for REFRAMING PSYCHOANALYSIS. [Contact him here](#).

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