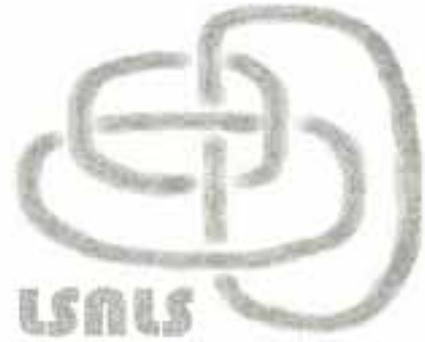


From Psychoanalytical Notebooks 5, 2001: Fantasy and Castration

Family secret and castration

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This young adult comes to see the analyst having already had a long series of partners in her love life. Right from the start of the analysis they are going to be named, presented, measured, dissected, not to say classified. The analyst sometimes has difficulties making head or tail of this and will eventually give up, having nevertheless noticed that the first, through his very name, calls the subject forth to reply inversely to the maternal fantasy, or rather to the mode-of-*jouissance* of the fantasy thus disclosed. She had chosen the signifier 'life' as her object choice when her mother, loaded until then with such presence for the child, wavered softly but in successive bouts of spectacular scenes to madness, depression, and death. All the others who had followed seemed to have the purpose of restoring a homeostatic state in our shaken subject. The penultimate one had allowed her to lead a calm and tranquil life as a couple. She had left him abruptly for a love-passion, having, for the first time or so it seems, crossed the line of an act of seduction by a man other than her partner. The ethical conclusion to leave the present one imposed itself upon her; though she could have had a love relationship cleaved to two complementary men.

Losing oneself in seduction is surely a trait of the mother, a primordial signifier taken from the mother's fantasy — seducing madly — so largely pacified, there more possibly rather than necessarily. We find this again with this subject, metaphorized by the Name-of-the-Father. It is surely not accidental that this man whom she loves violently is a lot older than herself. This 'a lot older' is what she otherwise posed as her condition for absolute love. She recognises in him the presence of the mother's body image — the line of the nose as well as the haughty bearing of the head — while her mother was well; whereas the boyfriend she had left reminded her of a maternal figure reduced to the status of waste, as she had seen her on her death bed. Let us add that she furthermore regarded him as swathed in an aura of intellectual brilliance.

She began her analysis shortly after her mother's death to mourn this loss — a mourning of the *jouissance* of her mother beyond her death — and because nothing worked out with her partner. She had met him a few month prior to her mother's death, but this death seemed to have brought the couple closer. The death of the mother and the signifier of violence, on the imaginary side the exchange of blows, come to meet. This clarifies itself only quite late during the analysis: she, who had initially said that she has never been smacked, then recalls her father kicking her bottom when she was little, her mother shaking her and pulling her by her hair, as well as incessant squabbles with her younger brother. Total immersion in the signifier violence, rather than violence in reality.

Being the mother's 'baby'

She is the first born of a young woman and is for her the 'sunshine of her life'; she remains 'her baby'. At first, her childhood is presented as idyllic: her mother has given her a lot, involved her in her grown-up life, which has allowed her to construct herself within a great wealth of vital and social elements. It is only later that she can evoke the degree to which the signs of her mother's *jouissance*, which had been laid out widely before the children, haunted her: a *jouissance* which, after a full-blown depression, transformed itself into mortified *jouissance*, suicide threats, prostration, etc. Being in the real — the real of her mother's fantasy — being her 'baby', became towards the end of her mother's life being the baby of a 'witch'. At least, this is what her telephone messages conveyed to the subject: "It's the witch of your mother calling..."

A family secret...

The death of the mother remains swathed in mystery for our subject, sealed by a secret. She has been told that her mother had been found dead in her bed one morning. No post-mortem, empty medicine bottles had been found only much later. Death due to exhaustion is the verdict for this young woman, forty-something, who had spend the last years of her life 'committing suicide'. Our subject writes hence to the public prosecutor — the Other of the law — asking for an answer to her question: What did she die of?

This secret redoubles another one which preceded her birth: the murder of her maternal grandmother by her husband — a crime of passion. The mother of our patient had then been five years old. The triggering of what we discern from a distance to be a psychosis occurred shortly after her father, having been released from prison, returned to her life. This reunion was not of her own, but of her sister's making.

Our subject has remained throughout childhood in the secrecy of this drama, a family secret which had to be conveyed to her when she was thirteen years old, but which she got to know a little earlier due to an indiscretion. However, she herself had formulated and immediately forgotten all this, as soon as she acquired speech, prior to being three years-old — this is, in any case, what one tells her. A secret which in any case seems to continue to seal the fantasy joining the link mother-child, as well as the father, and also the extended family.

...from the fantasy of the mother to the Name-of-the-Father

The father is at stake as far as the part he plays for our subject in the construction of her own fantasy is concerned. The word 'secret' had been pronounced by her during the analysis for the first time as far as a desire for a child, her desire for a child is concerned. This desire had been filled by an imperative *jouissance* and pushed her to various symptomatic acts such as testing for pregnancy although she was on oral contraceptives, and in her own words 'firmly believing in it' while waiting for the test results, as well as 'being disappointed' that they returned negative. This secret is this: she had to carry the secret of her step-mother's pregnancy — her father had divorced and remarried — in such a way that her mother did not get to know. The signifier of 'carrying a secret' had been produced following an association which began with a dream of her carrying her father's child in her arms to save it. She could then put into words in the work she produced during her analysis that she had fallen in love with her father follow-

ing her mother's depression, that is during her adolescence. She does not fail to question herself on this 'delayed' Oedipus. Thus she was able to cross the screen of her fantasy and find herself pregnant by the man whom she loved henceforth with a love substantiated by the mother's fantasy, but also metaphorised by the Name-of-the-Father. This object choice is in some way a choice of object-symptom — as Lacan said 'child-symptom of the family couple' — coming to substitute itself for the object which she had been in the maternal fantasy.

The bottle-opener of her desire.

Thence she does not recognise that she substituted her Oedipal love for her father with love for a man who is no less a man-child himself and who had chosen her because he sees in her a woman who is not quite his own mother, while all the while still being this mother nevertheless; she replies to his own fantasy.

In the analytic *Durcharbeitung*, she shows herself pierced by the words which he had pronounced to her, about her. One word, an apparently innocuous signifier, can be the crystallising seed that triggers ravages and simply devastates her. But nevertheless these very same words open her being and allow her to recognise 'true love'. And this is just what she wants. She turns the least of his comments into her *Che vuoi?*, the bottle-opener, to follow Lacan's expression, opening the access to her desire.

We do not follow the distinction between partner-symptom and partner-ravages any further. The analytic journey takes its course, which we will not develop here. But this love which devastates her also gives her direction. Let us rather spend some time to reflect upon, according to Jacques-Alain Miller's indications, the other couples that this object choice as partner-symptom (or ravages) covers for our subject.

Various modalities of couples and their foundation.

This young woman is an apparent way caught up with a man who waits with her next to a telephone box while her present partner is busy making a call. Helped by their waiting, they end up exchanging telephone numbers. Lured, the fish takes the bait. This Other who baits, what is this? Neither him nor her. It is the Other of modern times, consisting only of the network of potential communications. Its inexistence itself appeals to the two subjects at stake. One has just left his girlfriend; the other replies via her own homosexual fantasy (having taken effect once not long ago.) From then on she will be confronted with this man's Other woman and this I (A) which he is for her, and which she pins together, soon allows the *a* to appear as taking over, no doubt amalgamatic but governed by its own modes-of-*jouissance* which it cannot renounce. It is when the (big) I he is for her wavers that the ravage-effect happens.

The object *a* which he is for her does not conceal her own; we can perceive its ins and outs through some symptomatic characteristics imparting the secret of her *jouissance*. A modern symptom, if there is such thing, of making herself vomit, a symptom which emerged during the pregnancy of one of her friends who had taken refuge at the mother's house and so took to some extent her place besides her mother. A hysterical symptom in the Freudian sense, if it is indeed one, as identification with the other. This 'eating for nothing', this object swallowed down and then promptly returned hardly digested to the Other of consumption, allows her to significantise [*significantiser*] her rejection not so much of the Other, but of what she herself is for that Other. She

renders herself over to the sewer when she takes refuge in the bathroom wounded by the flaws of the Other of language.

She borrows a lot from her mother's psychotic illness amid the symptoms she displays: she hurts herself slightly or lets herself be injured by her partner so that she can bear stigmata which she exhibits and then hides in a shameful gesture. The link is evident with the stigmata her mother carried on her body, such as self-inflicted cigarette burns and other injuries. She says that she is inhabited by impulses borrowed from scenes in which she had been spectator of her mother playing with death. Let us state clearly that the realisation of such suicidal impulses in the mother's death was, for our patient, decisive to her resorting to analysis: the death that she had provoked had become 'true'.

Finding a way of being-in-jouissance.

This 'spoken' being which had become a 'speaking' one through analysis finds little by little, but not without difficulty, her being-in-the-world, which is for us her mode of being-in-jouissance — in the *jouissance* which Lacan has defined as the one a subject receives in place of a first conceded renunciation. She takes up her studies again, a choice made a long time ago of a profession not dissimilar to that which her mother had exercised. On the other hand, she posits as an enigma to herself the modes of enjoyment [*modes-de-jouir*] of her partner. How to enjoy a man if the relationship with this man sends one straight back to an infantile type of *jouissance*, a solitary and narcissistic one? Nothing more remains than the words with which he gratifies you, hence one enjoys then the blablabla. She suspends the act that would create the child she wanted at all costs by way of a short-circuit in order to spin the threads of a relationship to the man which would not exclude her from the procreating act.

The partner-analyst, a figure of indecision.

Let us say a few words about the partner-analyst taking his or her place only very late in the formations of the unconscious in the shape of a tempering figure, as a figure of indecision. The analysand herself has so given the *gnomon* on which the desire of the analyst had to locate its *x* and make it function, a between-two. Why would this have dislodged too early this love-partner, love-ravages functioning well for the subject as *pousse-au-dire* in the analysis? But little by little this partner of another type than that of the analyst gives ground, cedes the step of the partner-analyst to make room for a desire of the subject, put to work from the unconscious, which could progressively plan its run up as far as its own modes of enjoyment [*modes-de-jouir*] are concerned.

Without doubt, the analyst in his or her indecision is called to work the devastated field with his or her enigmatic desire through the action of the love object-choice, of *jouissance* first to the subject, without however weakening the impact of what the ravages stir up in the utmost depths of her being.

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