

## MALE AND FEMALE ARE CREATED<sup>1</sup>

Barbara Aramini

Suddenly, from the well-behaved girl emerged the woman, unsettling, carrying the gust of madness of her gender, throwing open the unknown of desire. Nana continued to smile, but with the sharp smile of a man-eater.  
Zola 2014: 34

The main ontological unease does not lie in the fact that there is something rather than nothing, but that there are two sexes instead of one.  
Claire 2015: 19

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the story of Tiresias, who, while walking in a green forest, separates with a stick two snakes entwined in the art of mating. For this act, he is transformed into a woman. Seven years later, the scene repeats itself, and he becomes a man again. In this dual position, being both a man and a woman, Tiresias is questioned by Jupiter and Juno about sexual pleasure. Does man or woman enjoy it more? Tiresias answers that a woman enjoys it nine times more. Juno condemns him for revealing this secret, causing him to become blind. Unable to undo the punishment, Jupiter seeks to compensate for the loss by granting him the ability to see the future, making him a seer.

Pleasure is not dialectical. There is the One, the one all alone. It is impossible to make One starting from two.

Language alters man's natural condition, as he speaks and embodies the very presence of the signifier. The child, in expressing its needs, must resort to words, which alienates it. There is no longer immediate satisfaction of its needs but rather alienation in the question, and the question is not only a question for something but also a question of love. Having to go through questioning to fulfil one's needs, man is confronted with desire, which, according to Lacan, is the gap that arises precisely between need and question. There is a loss, a castration, but it is through the signifier that pleasure is limited, localised. The signifier marks with a minus sign and at the same time allows for sublimation.

Lacan's final teaching maintains a reference to castration, although he dissociates it from prohibition. He seeks to ensure that castration is nothing more than logical negation, nothing more than the inability to hold together all the signifiers. It is also at this point in his teaching (which I say is prophetic for us) that he urges analytic practice to focus on enjoyment as a bodily event, that is, on what escapes the dialectic of prohibition/ permission.

Miller 2018: 75

With the later Lacan and the introduction of the 'There is the One', attention shifts from the lack of being in the subject to the hole. 'The event of the body, which is enjoyment, appears as the true cause of psychic reality' (Miller 2018: 160).

Sigmund Freud wrote that libido is singular: masculine. In the seminar *Encore, 1972-1973*, Lacan states, 'If libido is only masculine, it is only from where it is all, dear woman, that is, from where

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: This paper has been translated from the Italian by the author. References to editions and page numbers are to the works cited at the end, and not to English editions or translations of those works.

man sees her, and only from there that the dear woman can have an unconscious. And what does she need it for? As everyone knows, she needs it to make the *parlêtre* (speaking-being) speak, here reduced to man, and that is - I don't know if you have noted it well in analytic theory - to exist only as a mother' (Lacan S20: 93).

Until a few years ago, before the crisis of gender binarism, it was considered natural - outside the discourse of psychoanalysis, although not universally among psychoanalysts - to connect sexual positions - male and female - with biological sex; that which is assigned at birth. With queer theory, there has been a transition from binarism to fluidity. For many, even today, envisioning sexual identity separately from anatomy is unthinkable. There is a sort of pre-Saussurian discourse on gender identity. Before Ferdinand de Saussure, the relationship between the thing and the name was considered natural. There was no line between the signifier and the signified; the arbitrariness in the connection between the signifier, i.e., the acoustic image, and the concept was not evident. A similar situation occurred in discussions of sexuality: sex and gender identity corresponded. A girl is a woman and should feel as such. The same situation for a boy. The contemporary sexual revolution has attacked this link: biological sex is not gender identity. Similarly, biological sex and gender identity do not determine object choice. A woman can feel like a man and make choices on both the heterosexual and homosexual or bisexual spectrums. The same applies to men.

Lacan, as early as 1972, spoke about sexuation: anatomy is not destiny, even though it has its power. What determines destiny is the unconscious sexual choice. Lacan attempts to formalise this subjective choice: he coins the term sexuation to account for the masculine and feminine, going beyond identification issues, starting from the standpoint of enjoyment. Enjoyment follows different logics on the male and female sides; different and non-complementary forms of enjoyment. Female enjoyment is, according to Lacan, supplementary enjoyment. On the male side, we find the logic of totality, the phallic economy of having and possession, and on the female side, the logic of not-all. Obviously, the choice is not dictated by anatomy.

A reference to Freud: in the first of his three essays on the theory of sexuality, Freud establishes power relations between the object and the drive, with the latter having primacy over the former. The object, interchangeable, is only what the drive attaches to in order to fulfil itself. Regarding homosexuality, Freud opens a pathway: it is neither a genetic nor an acquired trait. For men, it is a matter of keeping bisexuality on the stage. '[...] all human beings, due to their bisexual disposition and the crosswise inheritance, combine in themselves both masculine and feminine traits, so that masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructs with an indeterminate content' (Freud 1925: 216).

Therefore, heterosexuality, like homosexuality, needs to be explained. The child, according to the father of psychoanalysis, is active and uncertain in sexual matters: it is polymorphously perverse. It seeks pleasure beyond reproduction - in this logic, even kissing is perverse as it provides pleasure but is unrelated to reproduction - and are open to various possible positions. The child, therefore, does not have a defined sexual object, and the choice will depend on what happens in relationships with other oral, anal, and phallic objects. The latter will be what retroactively signifies what happened before. In the phallic phase, both male and female children confront castration. They have to deal with it, and the way they 'confront' the lack (denial, repression, and negation) is directly connected to enjoyment.

Even though anatomy is not destiny, the anatomical difference between the sexes, citing Freud, has consequences on the psychic sphere. Following Freud, the threat of losing it causes the child to move out of the Oedipus complex, while the actual loss, which is to be considered at an imaginary level since in reality, the woman lacks nothing, causes the girl to enter it.

For many years, Freud confuses the penis and the phallus, but in 1923, with 'The Infantile Genital

Organisation’, he introduces the phallic mother, thus creating a separation between the two. Lacan will establish a radical difference: he will speak of the imaginary and symbolic phallus. With the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, we have learned to interpret things through the three registers of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, making the interpretation of clinical events multifaceted. The penis is not the phallus: the first makes the anatomical difference at the imaginary level, while the second operates at the symbolic level. The phallus behaves as a signifier on the Other scene, in the unconscious. Structural clinical practice seeks to account for the operability or lack thereof of this special signifier. While it is anatomically easy to assign a body to the male or female side, psychically, the matter is not so straightforward. It is the phallus that guides desire and limits the initial openness of infancy. Remember that for Freud, the child actively seeks pleasure, and in this movement, his sexuality and the object of his sexuality can take various forms; it is the phallus that will narrow the field of enjoyment.

The *parlêtre* (speaking-being) must position themselves on the male or female side, and this assumption is never total and definitive. For everyone, sexuality is organised by the phallus, which indicates lack and difference; therefore, not by the penis, but by the symbolic phallus that serves as a signifier in the unconscious scene. According to Lacan, sexuation will depend on how each person relates to castration, which is in connection with the phallus. With the two sides of the tables of sexuation, the French clinician logically interprets the bisexuality introduced by Freud. If gender identity is related to identifications, enjoyment escapes this grasp. Lacan does not share the position of post-Freudians who explained sexual choice solely in terms of identifications; in his mature teaching, he specifies that the question of sexual choice implies, beyond what Freud already stated, enjoyment. Symptoms arise precisely because identifications, necessary for a person to enter into social discourse, do not completely regulate enjoyment.

In *Encore*, Lacan goes so far as to say that Woman does not exist; he uses this provocative statement to challenge the belief, held by Freud and analysts engaged in the debate on the phallic function, in the existence of a universal feminine grouped on the basis of an isolable trait; a trait that would mark each one’s belonging to a whole. Lacan does not characterise the set of women as a set of failed males, who, in some way, seek phallic compensation for the experienced castration. Women have a singular existence that does not conform to homologation: women exist one by one. This lack of categorisation has defamed the woman, labelling her as a whore and insatiable. Daniel Arasse, in his commentary on Tintoretto’s painting ‘Mars and Venus Surprised by Vulcan’, writes:

Now, if this fable has a moral - a dirty and sexist moral, it goes without saying - here it is: women are all the same, all whores, all seductresses who make fools of us men, take advantage of our blindness, mock us and our desires, lead us by the nose (or by the member, to be precise), and reduce us to the level of foolish young men forced to hide under a table, or old fools content to be cuckolded.

Arasse 2013: 14

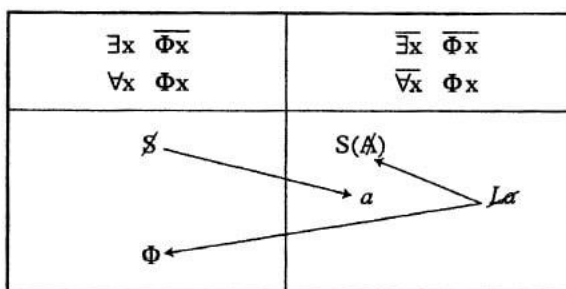
The evil attributed to women is sexual insatiability: in the *Hammer of Witches*, Dominican friars Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger collect beliefs about witchcraft and indicate ways to capture witches. Witchcraft is associated predominantly with women because, according to them, women - seen as failed males - are inferior and more susceptible to succumb to the temptations of the devil. They are described as the whores of the devil, with ‘an insatiable thing that never says enough: the mouth of the vulva for which they frolic with devils to satisfy their lust’ (Kramer and Sprenger 2006: 95). Women are also described as having ‘feeble intelligence, talkative, vindictive, envious, choleric, fickle, forgetful, liars, with insatiable desires’, and are preferred for ‘diabolical prostitution’ (Kramer and Sprenger 2006: 13). This judgment is based on the author’s distorted and discriminatory view of women, particularly regarding their bodies. In some passages, the issue concerns the male organ: the question is raised whether the witch can create an illusion in which the male organ appears separated from the body or removed from the body. This reflects the distorted

beliefs and irrational fears associated with accusations of witchcraft in Europe's past.

Why is the feminine considered horrifying? The real of the body - both in terms of sexuality and reproduction - may provide clues, as Lacan suggests in seminar X, 'Anxiety'. According to Lacan, in the real of the body, from both the sexual and reproductive sides, a woman lacks nothing. This concept might indicate that the completeness or wholeness of the female body, contrary to cultural representations, is not affected by castration or lack. In the same seminar, Lacan also highlights that males must constantly demonstrate the presence of the penis, suggesting that most of the time they live with a detumescent penis. This observation can be interpreted as a way to challenge the culturally ingrained idea of the male organ as a Symbol of power and completeness. Furthermore, Lacan criticises the fetishism of the penis, emphasising the impotence and castration of the male body. This could contribute to questioning traditional representations of male sexual power and dismantling cultural myths surrounding both the female and male bodies.

The female body has an organ that does not reveal its full potency; after a sexual encounter, it can restart and restart. The same is not true for men. Men must demonstrate that they have it and are subject to decline. We encounter the fantasy - not exclusive to males - of insatiability, voracity, greed, and mockery: she wants more and more, is never satisfied, and can render the man impotent and deride him. On the reproductive side, a woman can allow a new being to come into existence through her body. There is power: for good and for ill. It follows the logic of the phallus. She can create and she can destroy. Medea is an example of this.

As mentioned earlier, from two, one is never made; the Oedipal myth narrates how the father is called upon to separate the mother and the child who try to become one. The law spoken in psychoanalysis is precisely the prohibition of incest. The father prevents, or should ensure, that the mother satisfies herself only with him, and that he closes the circle around the mother. Once, on the radio, a man, talking about changes in the couple after the birth of his two-year-old child, said: 'I wondered if it's not a dwarf screwing my wife'. Lacan's significant departure from Freud was his separation of woman from the mother. Woman is not all mother. The question of femininity does not end with motherhood. By making this distinction, Lacan delves into the realm of feminine clinical analysis; he attempts to articulate something about feminine enjoyment beyond the phallic, which also concerns it. Assisted by the upheaval in the foundations of mathematics starting with Bertrand Russell's paradox of the barber and Kurt Godel's incompleteness theorems, Lacan becomes engrossed in the issue of the 'not-all' to account for the mode of feminine enjoyment. However, the 'not-all' is the destiny of every human, whether male or female.



The diagram mentioned is present in *Encore*. The formulas of sexuation are a Lacanian twist on Aristotelian logic through the interpretation of Charles Sanders Peirce, who treats universals like particulars. According to Peirce, the universal can hold even if there are no features, even if the set is empty. As noted by Jacques-Alain Miller, in Aristotelian logic, the universal always implies existence, and Peirce reveals the false parallelism between universal and particular.

Each speaking being is called to choose a position: on the left, the masculine, and on the right, the feminine. The tables of sexuation present the masculine as a set governed by an exception. This way

of proceeding, the singularity of the Father as a means to demonstrate the universality of men, is a particular way of understanding logic. There is at least one, the mythical father of the Freudian horde, not subject to castration. Starting from this element of exception, one can form the set of men. The particular negates the universal but does not make it fall. Remember that Lacan is a clinician; also, remember that for Freud's idea of the unconscious, if there was ever a motion, a drive, an idea, it will always be there, and Oedipal events, with their corresponding sense of powerlessness against the adult rival, even if repressed, leave a psychic mark and enter into modes of enjoyment. This is to say that Lacanian exception is influenced by the Oedipus complex. Let us start from the masculine side; here, we encounter the burden of the phallus and the phallic logic of possession, of having, and having has an identifying value (a man is defined by what he has, by possessing it. The more he has, the more vigorous he is... because having it is not enough). Similarly, this applies to the maternal side. With cultural changes and the opening of doors for women in the world, clinical observations have highlighted new scenarios: for many women, the phallic logic does not have the same identifying power as it does for men. They seek love; they search for the place of absolute difference even when occupying important professional roles. Male sexuality is centred on the object *a*; it is grounded in the nostalgia for the first lost object: the mother. On the masculine side, a vector starts from barred *S* (*S* with a horizontal bar through it, indicating the subject of the unconscious) and points towards *a* (object *a*). This representation signifies that men seek in the feminine side the object *a*; the object taken from the body and found in the fantasy. On the feminine side, there is no element of exception through which the closed set (of men... and women) is constituted, but there is an open and infinite set. Lacan can write that formula only because the set is infinite.

Lacan goes beyond Freud, beyond the Oedipus complex. Even a woman, as a human being, is subject to loss and castration and moves in search of the lost object of love, but she is not entirely regulated by phallic logic. She is not entirely phallic. Something escapes toward the infinite that does not stop; something eludes the grasp of signification. The feminine side differs from the masculine because the movement of recovering the object occurs simultaneously with the question of love. The feminine, less burdened by the phallus, is, on one hand, facilitated in going beyond it - women are more exposed to openness to the infinite, to an enjoyment that bears the traits of the infinite - and on the other hand, precisely because it is not entirely obstructed by the phallus, it is more susceptible to identification. Women seek to compensate for it through the desire of the Other, with the question of love. The inconsistency it tries to remedy is the same inconsistency that resides in the Other, which lacks that ultimate signifier that can account for its own identity. The subject is determined by the structure, but this structure does not reserve any predetermined signifier for the subject. The subject is produced by the symbolic structure and simultaneously by its enunciation. The subject is subjected by the Other and is subjected as it subjectivises itself through enunciation. There is, therefore, a structure that predates the subject and structures it, but this structure is pierced. I repeat and add an element: the subject is subjected by the structure and subjectivises itself in the enunciation - the structure does not assign the subject a predefined and predetermined place - and is subjected in the enjoyment of its own body with the object *a*. The question of love is the beaten path to protect oneself from lack, but it might not find a barrier, and in clinical practice, we see the destructive effects this can have. Speaking of barriers, Lacan specifies that the set on the feminine side is open, and the one on the masculine side is closed. Why? The answer lies in topology: a closed set, complemented by an open one, contains its boundary. The feminine set, on the other hand, is an open set; the boundary belongs to its closed complement, and each element of this set is contained in an open set that does not belong to the boundary. A set is open if and only if it is disjoint from its boundary. Every element of the infinite set of women - potentially infinite and subject to the possibility of adding another element: one more, one more, one more... and still one more without encountering the final element - never touches the limit. There is always a space between the element and the boundary of the space in which it is included. Mysticism attests to such distance from the limit. The feminine supplementary enjoyment is visible in the lack of boundaries in the mystical ecstasy. The soul unites with God in a rapture filled with disturbance and sexual pleasure.

I have surrendered and said:  
I have realised,  
that my Beloved is for me  
and I am for my Beloved. When the sweet Hunter struck me and left me wounded, in the arms of  
love, my soul surrendered;  
and, gaining new life,  
I realised  
that my Beloved is for me  
and I am for my Beloved. He struck me with an arrow full of love, and my soul became one with its  
Creator.  
I want no other love  
since I have surrendered to my God, and my Beloved is for me and I am for my Beloved.  
(Saint Teresa of Avila - Eriksen 2020)

Residing in such distances of enjoyment, how can a man and a woman meet? Lacan answers that the  
encounter can only happen through love!

To conclude, I wonder how cultural changes, which have undermined the discourse of the master  
that divided speakers into two, male and female, will impact enjoyment. 'A discourse is what  
determines a form of social bond' (Lacan S20: 76). The non-existence of Woman will be joined by  
that of Man. If Lacan wrote that Woman does not exist, we will add that Man does not exist either.

### **Bibliography and Sources**

Arasse, D. (2012). *Non si vede niente. Descrizioni*. Torino: Einaudi.

Claire, J. (2015). *Medusa* (trad) G. Ricci. Milano: Abscondita.

Eriksen, F. (2020). S. Teresa d'Avila: <https://www.academiasarda.it/2020/12/lirica-mistica-di-santa-teresa-davila-traduzione-di-federica-eriksen/>

Freud, S. (1989) [1925]. Alcune conseguenze psichiche della differenza anatomica tra i sessi. *Opere vol. 10: 1917-1923 Inibizione, sintomo e angoscia e altri scritti*. Torino: Bollato Boringhieri

Krämer, H. e Sprenger, J. (2006). *Il martello delle streghe*. Milano: Spirali.

Lacan, J. (2002) [1958]. La significazione del fallo: Die Bedeutung des Phallus (trad) G. B. Contri. *Scritti vol II*. Torino: Einaudi.

Lacan, J. (2007). *Il seminario, libro X, L'angoscia 1962-1963*. Torino: Einaudi.

Lacan, J. (2011). *Il seminario, libro XX, Ancora 1972-1973*. Torino: Einaudi.

Miller, J.-A. (2018). *L'Uno-tutto-solo. L'orientamento lacaniano*. Roma: Astrolabio.

Ovidio. (2008). *Le metamorfosi* (trad) G. F. Villa. Milano: Bur.

Zola, E. (2014). *Nanà*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

