

‘WHERE IS THE FRIEND’S HOME?’ ON DESIRE AND THE FEMININE

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*In the flowing intimacy of the space you will hear a rustling sound,
and you see a child
Who has ascended a tall pine tree to pick up chicks from the nest of
light,
and you ask him
‘Where is the friend’s home?’*

Sohrab Sepehri, *Eight Books*¹

‘Where is the friend’s home? ’Twas the twilight, that the rider asked’, wrote Sohrab Sepehri, a modern Persian poet, in his poem ‘The Address’. This question, resonating in a space of lack, suspension, and longing, invites the subject into a journey without destination, the endless pursuit of ‘the friend’s home’.

This essay, drawing on Freud’s ethos, recommends femininity as a space of lack, enabling the subject, overwhelmed by *jouissance* in the modern world, to connect with their desire.

With this seemingly simple question, Sepehri invites us to contemplate the beginning of an invisible journey — a question seeking a sign, yet finding none clear. It holds us suspended between absence and motion, curious and ceaselessly restless. Along this path, traces of a psychoanalytic quest emerge — a journey without any map or destination; it begins in the unconscious and extends deep within it. There is no clear end, no guiding light. Only a fleeting desire propels the subject moment by moment, without promising arrival. This was evident in the way he poses this question. The poem begins with the question and ends with it. Two hollow points, two non-existent objects; in between lies the strife, as in our life. The unexpected encounter with the question at the beginning catches the reader off guard. Three familiar words, and yet so striking, so uncanny.

‘Where is it?’ — where is that which the subject does not know what it is, and which the subject only knows as lack? ‘Friend’ — the one to whom the subject can give this lack, and who, contrary to Lacan’s definition of love², wants it. Where is this friend whom the subject desperately yearns for, and yet knows does not exist? And lastly, ‘home’, where the subject feels belonging, where the subject can stop the struggle, a place at once familiar and still uncannily strange.

¹ Sohrab Sepehri, ‘The Address’ in *Eight Books*, the seventh part: The Expanse of Green (Tehran: Tahoori Library, 1976, in Persian).

² In the Seminar Book XII Lacan adds a second part, a twist, to what he already stated in seminar V, he says: ‘Loving is to give what one does not have... to someone who does not want it.’

The poem itself teases the impossibility of this desire; it begins with the question, and as it reaches the end, the question remains unanswered, and the question is still as striking as the beginning. Perhaps indicating that the pursuit of our desire is in vain, and even at the end of our journey, that which does not exist will not be found, or perhaps that is the whole point of it. The second time the question manifests itself, although it is the same question, it has transformed. Now, the reader (barred subject) knows that this search does not have as its purpose to find the lost object (a), and yet with all her heart she feels a euphoric sensation, and a new question in mind: ‘How do I step in the path to search for something I desire, even though I know it cannot be found?’

Freud, with profound reflections, offered a new framework for understanding the human psyche in this regard. He was a pioneer not only in formulating radical concepts such as the unconscious, sexuality, and repression but also in opening a path toward a darkness long ignored by the rationality of the enlightenment. Yet perhaps his most revolutionary contribution was not in what he could explain but in what he ultimately could not fully express. In his later years, Freud confessed a lingering echo that still resonates today: ‘The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is “What does a woman want?”’ (Jones 1955: 421).

Roughly at the same time, in ‘The Question of Lay Analysis’, he admitted once more that the sexuality of women is a ‘dark continent’ for psychology (Freud 1959 [1926] SE XX: 212). He deliberately used the English words, and not his mother tongue, creating a foreign and striking tone, perhaps indicating femininity as something outside, something alien.

This admission of impotence and ignorance was a valuable confession from one who had devoted his life to dissecting the layers of the psyche. In the question of femininity, which appeared as a mysterious enigma in Freud’s work, gradually expanded with the intellectual and social transformations of the twentieth century, opening the way for more fundamental questions about identity and the subject’s place within the symbolic and social order.

Today, as the confusion grows around the question of ‘What is woman?’ or ‘What is man?’ is more urgent than ever. These questions shake the foundations of our understanding of identity. The body, language, desire, and social structures that compel us to speak are all undergoing radical transformation. What was once considered a natural, instinctive sexual desire is now understood as constructed within the realms of language, culture, and power relations. Gender is no longer limited to sexuality but pertains to the very basis of subjectivity itself: who I am depends on how I desire. Desire, that ever-moving force that drags the subject toward the edge of the impossible, has been transformed in today’s world. This is a world that, through unceasing production of immediate pleasures, has severed desire from its mysterious and elusive source; it is now tied instead to rituals of consumption and commodities. In such a space, the experience of desire, rather than unfolding in the pursuit of its restless, inescapable nature, is worn down in chasing superficial and imaginary gratifications. In today’s clinic, we meet more subjects who suffer not from lack but from an excess of pleasures — those whose experience, which could have been deep and exploratory, has become hollow: fancy travels, thrilling experiences, and fleeting pleasures that, rather than opening something within us, are quickly consumed and disappear.

At a time when secrets and boundaries rapidly fade, and technology offers instant answers to every concern, a new metaphor forms to take on the role of the psychoanalyst. The psychoanalysts themselves become a mystery, ones who do not know. Just as Freud accepted his impotence, the analysts sit in the position of lack, and not because they supposedly possess knowledge, but because they are in the seat of *object petit a*, where they spark the desire and provoke the questioning. From this path, femininity enters the analysis, not as an opposition to masculinity, but as a dimension where the subject, overwhelmed by *jouissance*, can finally confront the question: What do I want? Because desire always manifests itself in the guise of femininity - where chaos ends and the soulful pursuit begins.

Desire emerges from the lack; it moves toward an unobtainable object, forever inaccessible to possession and symbolic representation, and as there is nothing that can represent desire, there is nothing that represents all of femininity in the symbolic. In this sense, femininity designates that part of everything that eludes full capture by language and the Law of the Father. It goes beyond. Desire appears in the guise of femininity because it revolves around the incomplete, the elusive, the unrepresentable. This resonates with Lacan's distinction between the Real and the Symbolic. Therefore, chaos can be understood as an encounter with the Real — a raw, unformed tension where meaning collapses. Desire, as a soulful pursuit, only begins when the subject enters the play of signifiers, navigating the interval between the Real and the Symbolic. The feminine occupies exactly this threshold: neither purely Real nor entirely Symbolic, where desire comes into being, and where the subject starts desiring. So the analyst posits himself in the position of object petit a, as object cause of desire, so that the subject can put himself in the position of desiring.

Thus, in the spirit and tone of Sefehri, if a passerby asks the rider — or if the analysand turns to the analyst and asks: 'Where is the friend's home?' — they surrender their knowledge to the darkness of the sands, gesture forward, and send the subject onward — along a path where love, solitude, and fear softly coil into one another. The subject ultimately returns to the same child who once climbed the pine tree³ — not because the destination lies there, but so that this time the child, risen from desire, may ask: 'Where is the friend's home?'

Because home is always on the horizon, a place we have yet to reach (and yet unreachable and so far away). And thus, Freud's impotence in solving the enigma of femininity became the origin of a feminine path toward becoming.

The Address⁴

'Where is the friend's home?'

'Twas the twilight, that the rider asked

Heaven paused

The passerby bestowed a twig of light on his lips to the darkness of the sands

³ References to solitude, fear, love, and the ascending child are inspired by Sefehri's poem — a metaphysical journey through the signs of nature and the enigmas of love. These motifs are woven into the text as echoes of Sefehri's symbolic geography, where the search for the 'friend' mirrors the subject's traversal of desire.

⁴ The poem 'The Address' is widely known for its opening verse 'Where Is the Friend's Home?' (خانه‌ی دوست / کجاست؟). The poem was translated by the authors of this paper.

And pointed to a poplar and said:
‘Before reaching the tree
There is a garden-line greener than God’s dream
Where love is bluer than the feathers of honesty
Walk to the end of the lane, which emerges from behind puberty
Then turn towards the flower of solitude
Two steps to the flower
Stay by the eternal mythological fountain of the earth
Where a transparent fear will visit you
In the flowing intimacy of the space
You will hear a rustling sound
and you see a child
Who has ascended a tall pine tree
to pick up chicks from the nest of light
And you ask him
“Where is the friend’s home?””

References

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