

## CHAPTER SIX

# God and the *Jouissance* of ~~The~~ Woman. A Love Letter

Undoubtedly the most controversial and difficult of the texts in this collection, 'God and the *Jouissance* of ~~The~~ Woman' and 'A Love Letter' are the two central chapters of Lacan's Seminar XX, *Encore*, which he gave in 1972-3.

In relation to the previous articles, *Encore* marks a turning point in Lacan's work, both at the conceptual level and in terms of its polemic. It represents Lacan's most direct attempt to take up the question of feminine sexuality, not just as part of a return to the earlier debate, but in a way which goes beyond Freud. And it raises issues which clearly relate to feminist demands for an understanding of femininity which is not confined by the phallic definition.

It is the central tenet of these chapters that 'The Woman' does not exist, in that phallic sexuality assigns her to a position of fantasy. Lacan argues that the sexual relation hangs on a fantasy of oneness, which the woman has classically come to support. He traces that fantasy through a sustained critique of courtly, religious and ethical discourse.

Against this fantasy, Lacan sets the concept of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is used here to refer to that moment of sexuality which is always in excess, something over and above the phallic term which is the mark of sexual identity. The question Lacan explicitly asks is that of woman's relation to *jouissance*. It is a question which can easily lapse into a mystification of woman as the site of truth.

This is why Lacan's statements in *Encore*, on the one hand, have been accused of being complicit with the fantasy they try to expose, and, on the other, have led to attempts to take the 'otherness' of femininity even further, beyond the limits of language which still forms the basis of Lacan's account.

These chapters – which show 'Woman' as a category constructed around the phallic term at the same time as they slip into the question of her essence – underline the problem which has dominated the psycho-

*analytic debate on feminine sexuality to date: how to hold on to Freud: most radical insight that sexual difference is a symbolic construct; how to retrieve femininity from a total subordination to the effects of that construction.*

*The cultural references in this text are especially dense. But rather than weigh down the text with references, we have chosen to leave the various allusions to work in terms of how they are used in the course of Lacan's argument.*

*'God and the Jouissance of ~~The~~ Woman' and 'A Love Letter' are Chapters 6 and 7 of Seminar XX, Encore (Lacan, 1972-3), pp. 61-82*

*Today*  
*from seminar*  
GOD AND THE JOUISSANCE OF THE WOMAN

[Reading-loving, hating]<sup>1</sup>  
The materialists  
Jouissance of being  
The male, polymorphous pervert  
The mystics

2

Today I will be elaborating the consequences of the fact that in the case of the speaking being the relation between the sexes does not take place, since it is only on this basis that what makes up for that relation can be stated.

For a long time now I have laid down with a certain *There is something of One* the first step of this undertaking. This *There is something of One* is not simple – to say the least. In psychoanalysis, or more precisely in the discourse of Freud, it is set forth in the concept of Eros, defined as a fusion making one out of two, that is, of Eros seen as the gradual tendency to make one out of a vast multitude. But, just as it is clear that even all of you, while undoubtedly you are here a multitude, not only do not make one but have no chance of so doing – as is shown only too clearly, and that every day, if only by communing in my speech – so Freud had to raise up another factor as obstacle to this universal Eros, in the shape of Thanatos, which is the reduction to dust.

Clearly this is a metaphor allowed to Freud by the fortunate discovery of the two units of the germen, the ova and the

spermatazoa, whose fusion, crudely speaking, engenders – what? a new being. With this qualification, that the thing does not come about without a meiosis, a quite manifest subtraction for at least one of the two just before the conjunction is effected, a subtraction of certain elements which are not without their place in the final operation.

We can, however, comfort ourselves that there is unquestionably much less of the biological metaphor here than elsewhere. If the unconscious is indeed what I say it is, as being structured like a language, then it is on the level of language that we must interrogate this One. This One has resounded endlessly across the centuries. Need I bother to evoke here the neo-platonists? Perhaps I should very briefly mention that whole saga, but later, since my task today is to make clear exactly how this issue not only can, but must, be addressed from within our discourse, and from the new perspective which our experience opens up in the domain of Eros.

We must start on the basis that this *There is something of One* is to be taken with the stress that there is One alone. Only thus can we grasp the nerve of the thing called love, since we too must call it by the name under which it has echoed across the centuries. In analysis we are dealing only with this thing, and it comes into play through no other path. It is a strange path which in itself enabled me to isolate something I felt myself bound to uphold in the transference, inasmuch as this is indistinguishable from love, by means of the formula: *the subject supposed to know*.

I cannot avoid stressing the new resonance which this term, to know, might take on for you. He whom I suppose to know, I love. Earlier you saw me wavering, drawing back, hesitating to come down on the side of one meaning or the other, on the side of love or of what is called hate, when I urged you to share in a reading whose express objective is to discredit me – which should hardly deter someone who speaks of nothing but disabusement, and who aims at nothing less. The point is that what makes this objective seem tenable for the authors is a de-supposition of my knowledge. When I say that they hate me, what I mean is that they de-suppose me of knowledge.

And why not indeed? Why not, if it transpires that this is the precondition of what I call a reading? After all, what can I presume of what Aristotle knew? Possibly I might read him better the less of this knowledge I suppose him to have. Such is

the condition of a strict test of reading, and it is the one condition which I do not let myself off.

We cannot ignore what is there for us to read in that part of language which exists – namely, what turns out to form a weave by way of its precipitous ups and downs (which is how I define writing). It would, therefore, be disdainful not to give some echo at least to what has been elaborated through the ages on the subject of love, by a thinking which has been termed – incorrectly I might say – philosophical.

This is not the place for a general review of the question. Given the kind of faces which I see blurred before me, I would judge you to have heard that within philosophy the love of God has held a certain place. This is a fact of great import which, if only indirectly, psychoanalytic discourse cannot afford to ignore.

Which reminds me of something which was said when I was excluded, as they put it in this little book, from Saint Anne.<sup>2</sup> As it happens, I was not excluded, I withdrew, which is very different. Not that it matters, since that is hardly the issue, especially as the term 'excluded' has its own importance in my topology. Some well-meaning people – always worse than those who mean badly – were surprised to have it reach them that I placed between man and woman a certain Other who seemed remarkably like the good old God of all times. They only heard it indirectly and became the willing bearers of the tidings. And my God, to put it aptly, these people belonged to the pure philosophical tradition. From among those who lay claim to materialism – which is precisely why I call it pure, since there is nothing more philosophical than materialism. Materialism feels itself obliged, God knows why, we can appropriately say, to be on guard against this God whom I have said to have dominated in philosophy the whole debate about love. Hence these people, to whose warm intervention I owed a replenished audience, were somewhat put out.

For my part, it seems plain that the Other, put forward at the time of 'The Agency of the Letter' (*Écrits*, (1957)), as the place of speech, was a way, I can't say of laicising, but of exorcising our good old God. After all, there are many people who compliment me for having managed to establish in one of my last seminars that God does not exist. Obviously they hear – they hear, but unfortunately they understand, and what they understand is a little hasty.

Today, however, my objective is rather to show you precisely

in what he exists, this good old God. The mode in which he exists may well not please everyone, especially not the theologians who, as I have been saying for a long time, are far more capable than I am of doing without his existence. Unfortunately I am not quite in the same position because I am dealing with the Other. This Other, while it may be one alone, must have some relation to what appears of the other sex.

In this context, during the year of the 'Ethics of Psychoanalysis' (SVII), which I referred to last time, I did not desist from referring to courtly love. What is it?

It is an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put an obstacle to it. It is truly the most staggering thing that has ever been tried. But how can we expose its fraud?

Instead of wavering over the paradox that courtly love appeared in the age of feudalism, the materialists should see this as a magnificent opportunity for showing how, on the contrary, it is rooted in the discourse of fealty, of fidelity to the person. In the last resort, the person is always the discourse of the master. For the man, whose lady was entirely, in the most servile sense of the term, his female subject, courtly love is the only way of coming off elegantly from the absence of sexual relation.

It is along these lines that later I will be dealing with the notion of the obstacle – later, since today I have a certain area to work on – the area which in Aristotle (for all that, I do prefer Aristotle to Geoffrey Rudel) is precisely called the obstacle, the *ἔνστασις*.

[ . . . . ] *Ménage à trois*

If you consult Aristotle, everything will be clear to you when I finally take up this issue of the *ἔνστασις*. You could then go on to read the piece from the *Rhetoric* and the two pieces from the *Topics* which will enable you to grasp exactly what I am getting at when I try to reintegrate into Aristotle my four formulas, the  $\Xi\chi.\Phi\bar{x}$  and so on.

Finally, as a last point on the subject, why should the materialists, as we call them, be indignant that I place God as third party, and why not, in this affair of human love? After all, doesn't it ever happen, even to materialists, to know something about the *ménage à trois*?

So let us try to proceed. Proceed on the basis of this fact that

there is no evidence that I do not know what I am meant to be saying when I am speaking to you here. What puts this book on the wrong track from start to finish is that they suppose me – after which anything is possible – they suppose me to have an ontology, or, what amounts to the same thing, a system.

[ . . . . ]

And yet it is, surely, unequivocal that, as against the being upheld by philosophical tradition, that is, the being residing in thought and taken to be its correlate, I argue that we are played by *jouissance*.

Thought is *jouissance*. What analytic discourse brings out is this fact, which was already intimated in the philosophy of being – that there is a *jouissance* of being.

If I spoke to you about the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it was precisely because a hint of this is there. Aristotle's endeavour, and it opened the path to everything that followed in his train, was to discover what is *jouissance* of being. Someone like Saint Thomas then had no difficulty in forging out of this the physical theory of love as it was called by Abbot Rousselot – which is that, all things considered, the first being of which we are aware is that of our own being, and everything which is for our own good will, by dint of that fact, be *jouissance* of the supreme Being, that is, of God. In short, in loving God it is ourselves we love, and by first loving ourselves – a convenient charity as they say – we render to God the appropriate homage.

The being – if I absolutely must use the term – the being I set against this is the being of *signifiance*. And I fail to see how it can be construed as a betrayal of the ideals of materialism – I say the *ideals* because it falls outside the limits of its conceptual design – to recognise that the motive of this being of *signifiance* lies in *jouissance*, *jouissance* of the body.

But then you see, ever since Democritus, a body has not seemed sufficiently materialist. You have to have atoms, and the whole works, sight and smell and everything that follows. It all absolutely hangs together.

It is not fortuitous that at times Aristotle quotes Democritus, even if he feigns disgust, since he based himself on him. In point of fact, the atom is simply a floating element of *signifiance*, quite simply a στοιχείον. Except that you get into real trouble if you

only retain what makes the element elementary, that is, the fact that it is unique, when what we need to bring in a little is the other, that is, difference.

Now then, this *jouissance* of the body. If there is no sexual relation, we need to see, in that relation, what purpose it might serve.

## 3

Let's start on the side where all  $x$  is a function of  $\Phi x$ , that is, on the side of the man.

On the whole one takes up this side by choice – women being free to do so if they so choose. Everyone knows that there are phallic women and that the phallic function does not prevent men from being homosexual. But at the same time it is this function which enables them to situate themselves as men, and to take on the woman. I will deal briefly with man, because what I want to talk about today is the woman and I presume I have sufficiently drummed it into you for you still to have it in your heads – that, short of castration, that is, short of something which says no to the phallic function, man has no chance of enjoying the body of the woman, in other words, of making love.

That is the conclusion of analytic experience. It does not stop him from desiring the woman in any number of ways, even when this condition is not fulfilled. Not only does he desire her but he does all kinds of things to her which bear a remarkable resemblance to love.

Contrary to what Freud argues, it is the man – by which I mean he who finds himself male without knowing what to do about it, for all that he is a speaking being – who takes on the woman, or who can believe he takes her on, since on this question convictions, those I referred to last time as con-victions,<sup>3</sup> are not wanting. Except that what he takes on is the cause of his desire, the cause I have designated as the *objet a*. That is the act of love. To make love, as the term indicates, is poetry. Only there is a world between poetry and the act. The act of love is the polymorphous perversion of the male, in the case of the speaking being. There is nothing more emphatic, more coherent or more strict as far as Freudian discourse is concerned.

I have half an hour left to try to introduce you, if I dare so

express myself, to what is involved on the side of the woman. Well, it is either one thing or the other – either what I write has no meaning, or when I write  $\forall x \Phi x$ , this hitherto unstated function in which the negation bears on the quantifier to be read as *not all*, it means that when any speaking being whatever lines up under the banner of women it is by being constituted as not all that they are placed within the phallic function. It is this that defines the . . . the what? – the woman precisely, except that *The* woman can only be written with *The* crossed through. There is no such thing as *The* woman, where the definite article stands for the universal. There is no such thing as *The* woman since of her essence – having already risked the term, why think twice about it? – of her essence, she is not all.

[ . . . . ]

More than one of my pupils have got into a mess about the lack of the signifier, the signifier of the lack of the signifier, and other muddles regarding the phallus, whereas what I am pointing to with this *the*<sup>4</sup> is the signifier, which is after all common and even indispensable. The proof is that earlier on I was already talking about man and *the* woman. This *the* is a signifier. It is by means of this *the* that I symbolise the signifier whose place must be marked and which cannot be left empty. This *the* is a signifier characterised by being the only signifier which cannot signify anything, but which merely constitutes the status of *the* woman as being not all. Which forbids our speaking of *The* woman.

There is woman only as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words, and it has to be said that if there is one thing they themselves are complaining about enough at the moment, it is well and truly that – only they don't know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me.

It none the less remains that if she is excluded by the nature of things, it is precisely that in being not all, she has, in relation to what the phallic function designates of *jouissance*, a supplementary *jouissance*.

Note that I said *supplementary*. Had I said *complementary*, where would we be! We'd fall right back into the all.

Women hold to the *jouissance* in question – none of them hold to being not all, and my God, it would be wrong not to recognise



that, contrary to what is said, it is none the less they who, for the most part, possess the men.

The common man, who is not necessarily present here although I do know quite a few, calls woman the *bourgeoise*. That is what it means. That it is he who is at heel, and not her. Ever since Rabelais we have known that the phallus, her man as she calls it, is not a matter of indifference to her. Only, and this is the whole issue, she has various ways of taking it on, this phallus, and of keeping it for herself. Her being not all in the phallic function does not mean that she is not in it at all. She is in it *not* not at all. She is right in it. But there is something more.

This something more, mind, be careful not to sound it out too fast. I can find no better way of putting it, because I am having to cut and go quickly.

There is a *jouissance*, since we are dealing with *jouissance*, a *jouissance* of the body which is, if the expression be allowed, *beyond the phallus*. That would be pretty good and it would give a different substance to the WLM [*Mouvement de libération des femmes*]. A *jouissance* beyond the phallus . . . .

You may have noticed – and naturally I am speaking to the few seeming men that I can see here and there, luckily for most I don't know them, which prevents my prejudging as regards the rest – that occasionally it can happen that there is something which shakes the women up [*secouer*], or helps them out [*secourir*]. If you look up the etymology of these two words in Bloch and Von Wartburg's *Dictionary*, which I delight in and which, I am sure, none of you even have in your libraries, you will see the relationship between them. It is not, however, something that happens by chance.

There is a *jouissance* proper to her, to this 'her' which does not exist and which signifies nothing. There is a *jouissance* proper to her and of which she herself may know nothing, except that she experiences it – that much she does know. She knows it of course when it happens. It does not happen to all of them.

I don't want to end up on the issue of so-called frigidity, although we have to take fashion into account as regards relationships between men and women. It's very important. Unfortunately, in Freud's discourse, as in courtly love, the whole thing is covered over with petty considerations which have caused havoc. Petty considerations about clitoral orgasm or the *jouissance* designated as best one can, the other one precisely, which I

am trying to get you to along the path of logic, since, to date, there is no other.

What gives some likelihood to what I am arguing, that is, that the woman knows nothing of this *jouissance*, is that ever since we've been begging them – last time I mentioned women analysts – begging them on our knees to try to tell us about it, well, not a word! We have never managed to get anything out of them. So as best we can, we designate this *jouissance*, *vaginal*, and talk about the rear pole of the opening of the uterus and other suchlike idiocies. If it was simply that she experiences it and knows nothing of it, then we would be able to cast considerable doubt on this notorious frigidity.

This is in itself a whole theme, a literary theme, which is well worth stopping at. Ever since I was twenty I've been doing nothing other than explore philosophers on the subject of love. Naturally I didn't immediately focus on this question of love but it gradually dawned on me, precisely with Abbot Rousselot about whom I was talking earlier, and then with the whole debate about physical and spiritual love, as they are called. I gather that Gilson did not think much of that opposition. He thought that Abbot Rousselot had made a discovery which was no discovery, since the opposition was part of the problem, and love is as spiritual in Aristotle as in Saint Bernard provided one reads properly the chapters on *φιλία*, or friendship. Some of you here must surely know what a literary outpouring there has been on the subject – have a look at *Love and the Western World*, by Denis de Rougement, they're all at it! – and then at another one with no less talent for it than the rest, *Eros and Agapê*, by a Protestant called Niegrens. Naturally we ended up in Christianity by inventing a God such that it is he who comes!

All the same there is a bit of a link when you read certain genuine people who might just happen to be women. I will however, give you a hint, one which I owe to someone who had read it and very kindly brought it to me. I ensconced myself in it. I had better write up the name otherwise you won't buy it. It's Hadewijch d'Anvers, a Beguine, what we quaintly refer to as a mystic.

I am not myself using the word mystic in the same way as Péguy. The mystical is not everything that is not political. It is something serious, which a few people teach us about, and most often women or highly gifted people like Saint John of the

Cross – since, when you are male, you don't have to put yourself on the side of  $Vx\Phi x$ . You can also put yourself on the side of not-all. There are men who are just as good as women. It does happen. And who therefore feel just as good. Despite, I won't say their phallus, despite what encumbers them on that score, they get the idea, they sense that there must be a *jouissance* which goes beyond. That is what we call a mystic.

I have already spoken about other people who felt all right on the side of the mystics, but who preferred to situate themselves on the side of the phallic function, such as Angelus Silesius. To confuse his contemplative eye with the eye with which God is looking at him must surely partake of perverse *jouissance*. As regards the Hadewijch in question, it is the same as for Saint Theresa – you only have to go and look at Bernini's statue in Rome to understand immediately that she's coming, there is no doubt about it. And what is her *jouissance*, her *coming* from? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics is that they are experiencing it but know nothing about it.

These mystical ejaculations are neither idle gossip nor mere verbiage, in fact they are the best thing you can read – note right at the bottom of the page, *Add the Ecrits of Jacques Lacan*, which is of the same order. Given which, naturally you are all going to be convinced that I believe in God. I believe in the *jouissance* of the woman in so far as it is something more, on condition that you screen off that *something more* until I have properly explained it.

What was tried at the end of the last century, at the time of Freud, by all kinds of worthy people in the circle of Charcot and the rest, was an attempt to reduce the mystical to questions of fucking. If you look carefully, that is not what it is all about. Might not this *jouissance* which one experiences and knows nothing of, be that which puts us on the path of ex-istence? And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as supported by feminine *jouissance*?

Since all this comes about thanks to the being of *signifiance*, and since this being has no place other than the place of the Other which I designate with a capital O, one can see the cockeyedness of what happens. And since it is there too that the function of the father is inscribed in so far as this is the function to which castration refers, one can see that while this may not make for two Gods, nor does it make for one alone.

In other words, it is not by chance that Kierkegaard discovered

existence in a little tale of seduction. It is by being castrated, by renouncing love that he believes he accedes to it. But then after all, why shouldn't Régine also have existed? This desire for a good at one remove, a good not caused by a *petit a*, perhaps it was through the intermediary of Régine that he came to it.