

## The Mad Love of a Mother

*Eric Laurent*

This subject, produced by a horrific story, has many doctors, judges, educators in her life.<sup>1</sup> She made many appeals for help, and it can be said, *grosso modo*, that she is basically doing her own thing. She has ideas about everything. We could first raise the issue of the diagnostic problem. This subject has already been told that she does not belong to psychiatry. This subject is in effect situated where psychosis and psychopathy intersect. She never maintains a transference relationship for long and the possible treatments throw her into panic. Let's try to refind ourselves in her normal paranoia. The fundamental subjective drama of this subject revolves around a death. The reproduction [*reproduction*] of her mother's death invades all aspects of her life. She is animated by a mortifying passion which generates a distressing world around her. The catastrophic portrait she paints of the family destiny over three generations gives the idea that there are cases that would require a comprehensive treatment of the whole family group, one by one. Whether it is a question of excess cannot be doubted in this type of incredible cloud, this deluge of proper names into which she plunges us. One hour and a half of

Eric Laurent is a psychoanalyst and member of the École de la cause freudienne.

proper names is deafening. Between the acronyms, initials, terms of bureaucratic jargon and the meticulous description of the change in the status of French civil servants during the reorganisation of the administration over the last ten years, the municipal boundary, the transition from municipal to general council, etc., the names of all the judges, all this is mind-boggling. An hour and a half that gives the idea that something of the function of nomination is being touched. She makes a huge effort to come up with naming something that really has a name. It is a huge effort to name her complaint. This necessarily goes through the justice system. It is putting it into legal form that is fundamental. The great medicine of the paranoid is to be called before the Other of justice, to have his rights recognised. This started very early, from the time of marriage. Very soon financial problems implicated the coupling with the Other of justice. First the bank, then the legal authorities turned around the debt, and then the divorce judge, then the judge for the children. She addressed the Other of Law to hold her world together. After her father's death and the contingency of her husband's sudden death, there is a family decompensation. The main disturbances of her daughter lead to serious somatic problems in her. There is a glaucoma operation. The children's problems, of both seniors, with the justice system, do not stop which still allows her to decline the names of the judges to whom she addressed her complaint. Who did not do this and who did not do that, etc. It keeps her busy until 1996. Why does she attempt to commit suicide in 1996? She had already had recourse to psychiatry. This does not prevent her from going through that particular call for help.

### From an Other of the Law to the Passionate other

Let's start from the Freudian hypothesis "the unconscious repeats". When we do not know something that happened before the encounter with the subject, we must have the idea that it is homologous to what is happening now. She comes to demand help in a rapport with her daughter with whom she has a passionate

relationship. She can say about her son: "He is suffering, it is terrible." He has to be given mother's milk turned into Xanax. He has to be given what is necessary for him, so that he does not suffer. She knows what to do. It is the fight with her daughters that generates passion [*passionnelle*]. One of them chases her out of the house and the youngest tells her she will not obey her any longer. It is at this moment that she comes to ask for help. When she came a year ago, it was in a similar context, shortly after her daughter's pregnancy was declared.

She also says that for the last five years she endured a real grind [*galère*]. She gives the date of her daughter's first abortion. The mother-daughter relationship is the pathogenic axis of her pathology, which is consistent with her history. When her mother dies, a sister takes over. There is a settling of generations where the place of the mother is occupied by the sister with passionate rapports. She does not say: "I am guilty of my mother's death", but she says that it is the consequence of the childbirth that caused her death. There may have been sepsis. She adds: "We didn't know how to treat it at the time". She has the idea that it is the fault of the doctors, of the hospital, that there is an error in care. The theme is hardly touched upon, there is no major delusion here, but she reminds us very precisely of the circumstances that her mother's death could not have been prevented.

Since then, she launches calls for help. The proper names of the legal bodies that appear are all "impossible representatives of the father", according to Freud's expression. Her call for help to one father [*un père*], to something that acts as a paternal function as Lacan puts it, finds no address. She can only repeat herself.

She herself has of course devoted her life to looking after children, first the blind, then the Ddass, then the ASE.<sup>2</sup> This can be deduced from the circumstances of her birth. She devoted herself on the model of her sister, in the position of the Ideal. She did so with this delusional and megalomaniacal side that institutions

<sup>2</sup> TN: Ddass: Department for Hygiene and Social Affairs [*Direction départementale des affaires sanitaires et sociales*]; ASE: Child Social Support [*aide sociale à l'enfance*].

allow: "The institution is me!". It is the institution itself that is in charge of the children in France, it is she who watches over them, who denounces them. She denounces the disturbance of the world to the point of announcing the colour in what concerns her daughter: "I am going to kill her, I am going to kill myself, you will be warned". She is very passionate. Afterwards, on the other hand, she can connect [*enchainer*] very calmly about all her readings on the beyond. Deep down, she has a good rapport with death.

The passionate pathological kernel with her daughter is uncompromising [*intraitable*]. Anything that can be called a third party, an instance of arbitrator, mediator, etc., does not work. She herself has ideas, the creative character of a paranoid, invents institutions, solutions for herself: she (her daughter) is placed in a foster family and then a mediator is created. She would gladly participate in the invention of an institution: SOS beaten parents. Everything comes to the point of demonstration: "I have not been helped".

In the family, the relationship to death is shared, there is a clear rejection of care. The three children suffer from this, whether the girls or the boy.

### The Scenario of the Phantasmatic Murder

The announced "murder" of the girl is a paranoid fantasy. It touches the core of the enigma of the mother/daughter relationship which is infanticide.

Behind the paranoid crime of passion, there is the fundamental crime, infanticide, an enigma that arouses passion [*passionne*] by its indecipherability. Infanticides question civilisation. The last infanticide that has aroused passion in France is the death of little Gregory. Everyone gave their opinion, Marguerite Duras in particular. Three or four judges were used. These are the dramas that reveal a fundamental enigma. It is Medea who returns to us.

She also says it can save the smallest girl. The crimes are always done for the best reasons. There is no crime in humanity that has

not been done to save others. When we hear that to take care of the world, to manage the problems of society, women are gentler than men, more negotiating, less prone to anger because they have fewer aggressive hormonal circuits, we must never forget infanticide, which condenses the enigma of love. Just as in feminine love, the crime of passion is the central point, so in maternal love it is infanticide. Women do not have perversion in the male sense, on the other hand, they have infanticide. They do not have perversion because they have children, said Lacan to condense the problem.

### Altruistic Suicide

This patient evokes the fact of "dying with her daughter", "killing herself with her". It is the altruistic infanticide, which has the same form as altruistic suicide. A case that has recently aroused the French, even more than the psychiatric experts, is the case of Jean-Paul Romand. This subject succeeded in passing himself off as a doctor for a long time. It is one of the great cases of delusional mythomania. It ended in an altruistic suicide. It is the paranoid male crime. To save his parents, his wife, and his children, to make them avoid disillusionment, he kills them, so that they do not suffer. It is the excellence of the altruistic suicide, of the murder. On the other hand, he himself then tries to commit suicide and fails. Afterwards, he continues the debate with the Other, he continues to maintain himself in speech: book, documentary, etc.

Our patient is not in the same register. The difference is that the one who has passed to the act has not spoken to anyone, did not announce his project *urbi et orbi*. He did not live in permanent violence anymore. That said, the fact of announcing it is not enough to guarantee that she will not pass to the act. It allows a certain number of measures to be taken, to make a sort of apparatus with a request, with an Other from which "it will come", avoiding the unmitigated clash of passion between her and her daughter. However, it must be noted that a step is taken [*franchi*] from the moment a child is born. There is an acceleration. The call to the Name of the Father, from the moment there is a child,

becomes more pressing. There is the call for something to come for the mother-daughter relationship to be put in order. It does not respond, nothing responds, it is the abyss.

Crimes of passion, those of the paranoiac group, are highly motivated, contrary to the crimes of the schizophrenic group, which are "unmotivated", it could be said. This is extremely motivated, there's every reason and it is announced. What makes the subject that by killing the other kills himself, thus finding a certain pacification? This is the question that Lacan wanted to resolve in his thesis. After the passage to the act, whether the subject actually kills himself, whether he commits suicide after the crime or not, the subject goes through a moment of death. This is very striking in the case of Althusser's crime. After twenty years of a passionate affair with a woman, Althusser kills her and then enters a time of subjective death. *The Future Lasts a Long Time* is a book written from the point of view of the dead.

Subjectively, he is dead on the day of the crime. He can well comment on his sayings, works, on what he did, from the point of view of the dead person. In the subjective moment when the object of passion condenses [*concentre*] all, the whole being of the subject, by touching the other he kills himself. Whether in psychosis the crime is on the paranoiac side or on the schizophrenic side, whether it is absolutely motivated or whether it is unmotivated, in any case the subject assaults himself, strikes himself. There is no longer any symbolic safeguard which can articulate anything, there is the pure imaginary tension that is resolved around the real at stake, of this passion which overflows the erotic imaginary tension.

Beyond infanticide, the history of great psychotic crimes is always fascinating for civilization. For example, that of the Papin sisters, of which every decade a play is made, a film, a work of art, etc. At the time, it had aroused the passion of the society of the 1930s. Lacan had written "in the heat of the moment" a contribution on "The crime of the Papin sisters" to enlighten opinion. These "good" models liquidate the family for whom they worked,

provoking a shiver of terror in the French bourgeoisie. The whole of good society said to itself: "We can't have domestic servants anymore." This is similar to the panic that recently gripped the United States when a British babysitter killed the baby in her care by beating him because he was screaming. These phenomena crystallise social anxiety. The Papin sisters are a crime situated on the schizophrenic side. One of the sisters entered a state of stupor after the crime. She "died" that day. She killed something inside her.

In a sense the structure of the phenomenon is the same. By killing the other, the subject kills himself. In some cases, the second death joins the first death, i.e., the subject kills himself physically and does not simply achieve subjective death.

All this is evoked by the case, but it is only an evocation. The problem is that, since 1995, this woman has done everything to not be followed and avoids any structural psychiatric treatment. She succeeds in causing panic, with this deluge of proper names, this string of calls for justice. Moreover, she says: "I don't suffer, and I saw Dr A. who told me: 'You don't belong in psychiatry'". He may not have told her in the sense that she uses the term. Obviously, she mobilises everything: the National Education, the Ministry of Justice, psychiatry. She crosses the ministries. There should be an inter-ministerial ethics committee to follow the question.

### The Mad Love of Her Mission

Yet she also says: "I am not accusing anyone. I am fully responsible". It is especially when the reproaches of the brothers and sisters towards the father are summoned. She takes the full defence of the father. There is a very striking gap between the reproaches she makes to the symbolic representatives of the Law and the absence of any reproach towards her husband and father. It is enough that she has to deal with a father in her reality to have nothing to reproach him for. On the contrary, the judges are all incapable, like the inspectors. None of them do their job. She knows secrets about the administration that prove it.

She also has a mission to save her family. She cannot delegate it to someone else. We can say that the mother, on her deathbed, gave the elder sister a mission. She herself has a very strong imaginary identification with her sister. By identifying herself, through a kind of imaginary prosthesis, with the Ideal, she has chosen to save the other. It is in this way that she married her husband. She says quite rightly: "It is undoubtedly because of the affective lack". This is extremely accurate. The problem is that this is of no use to him. This is the point of distinguishing foreclosure from other possible modes of "repression". You can explain to her all you want that it is her father who is the problem, but this will not make sense. What will come back, with regard to the father, is a hole, a neutrality: "I am not accusing anyone". Her family history, the dream, does not stir. The whole passion is summoned in the recourse to the Other of the law, the names that come in this place, and on the passionate rapport to the object. This is why it is useful to distinguish between repression, foreclosure, and disavowal.

There is an acceleration in the sense of the accomplishment of her mission through the transmission of the covenant from her mother to Santa. The covenant was passed on from the mother to the elder sister whose mission was to protect. The covenant has now reached her. There is something here that is precise. The acceleration of esoteric readings to "prepare for death" goes towards this sense and is not necessarily a good thing.

This also meets the question of the child in danger. Her grandson, her daughter's son, is eight months old. But she says she lost her mother when she was nine months old. It is a kind of perpetual present. The child in danger, the attempt to save the child, the death of the mother, are a repetition of the circumstances in which she was born. It is a kind of fantasy that has the status of the fantasy in the psychosis of being an open sky.

In this sense, this subject makes us hear in a very particular way what "dead love" means to which Lacan refers us in the psychotic passion.

Translated by Bogdan Wolf  
Revised by Nicolas Duchenne