

Possessed by Love

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Today we all speak about love. Lacan's formula "We are all mad, we are all delusional" is not without an echo in the oldest passion: We are all lovers, we are all mad. The maniacal relationship with love emerges in *Phaedrus* where four types of madness are discussed. Let's take up the poetic one. Socrates' opening statement "the best things come to us through God-given *manias*" stuns us.¹ His *apologia* of madness subverts Plato's idea of the State where the poets, and no doubt psychoanalysts, are banished. Madness implied possession, *katokoche*, inspired by the Muses, as my favourite ancient author Dodds reminds us.² Of the three Muses linked with the spoken word, *mythos*, only Erato, the loved one, invokes possession by the signifier in the act of love. This link was made by Lacan who evoked the One of love as partaking of the signifier.³ Love and speech conjoin in the act of creation: *poiesis*.

A frenzied poet, possessed by "true speech", was also a lover of the signifier that "brought blessings to the beloved".⁴ The lover possessed by language, e.g., Cyrano de Bergerac, could induce the poetic *mania* in the beloved. It was no longer the nose that led Roxanne but the poetry itself, detached from the subject and experienced as enjoying body. The poetic madness consisted in detachment from the predetermined *telos* and drew on the quality of possession *qua* the *vox* and, *ergo*, *qua* invocation. It is how "love is a god", as Lacan put it, i.e., "[...] reveals itself in the real".⁵ Or a *mania* is present in the real for the beloved.

This sheds some light on the grammar of possession. The verb linked to *mania* is in the middle voice: *mainomai*, "I am doing it to myself". Due to the subject being an object of action, the middle voice remains proximate to the passive one. For a lover, the *mainomai* of love, inspired by Muse Erato, lies in the madness of being loved. Since the middle and passive voices differ only in the future and past tenses, the scene of *mania* is designed for the poet *hic et nunc*. The symptom is being written in the present. Love's madness is felt first as *being loved*, which is what Erato's name carries. *Ergo*, love proceeds from inexistence. It is the cry in the solitary signifier that hooks, as Cupid shoots his arrow, onto the beloved. We're a step away from *erotomania*, a madness specific to psychoanalytic experience and, as Lacan proposed, to the feminine position. Isn't an assumption of being loved mad enough to be caught up in the poetic possession of the signifier which is the myth's real? Only the Muse of psychoanalysis remains nameless.

¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. W. Hamilton, Penguin, London, 1973, p. 46 (244a-b).

² Dodds, E. R., *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, London, 1951, p. 80.

³ Lacan, J., *The Seminar: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Norton, London, 1998, p. 5.

⁴ Padel, R., *Whom Gods Destroy – Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness*, Princetown University Press, Chichester, 1995, p. 85.

⁵ Lacan, J., *The Seminar: Transference, Book VIII*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Polity, London, 2015, p. 52.