

Man, Woman and Love

Inga Metreveli

Man, woman and love.... Do these first two signifiers, “that are altogether related to the ‘curcurrent’ (*courcourant*) use of language”¹ rhyme well with each other, and what does love have to offer?

In his Seminar *Encore* - and it is precisely in this "Encore!" that we can hear the inexhaustible demand for love, Lacan notes: "Love is impotent, though mutual, because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One, which leads us to the impossibility of establishing the relationship between ‘them-two’ (*la relation d'eux*). The relationship between them-two what? - them-two sexes."²

It is possible to extract a hypothesis: the pain of love comes from this impossible absolute union with the other to be One, to fulfil this famous myth of Aristophanes which proclaims the Unity of two halves finally reunited. It's easy to see why love can be so painful.

Despite this disappointing vision of the powers of love, what are the declinations in men and in women and, finally, could it nevertheless create a bond between them?

To begin with, let's take a look at the table of sexuation presented by Lacan in the same seminar.

The formulae of sexuation on the man's side of the table indicate that he who is situated as a man in the sexual field, by virtue of having undergone the operation of castration, finds himself in the logic "*for all x*" and inscribes his mode of enjoyment entirely under the phallic signifier.

The phallus is thus placed on the so-called masculine side of sexuation, but women also have access to it. The difference to men is that they inscribe themselves there as *not-all*. On this point, Lacan goes beyond Freud's postulate that only the phallus is operative in the process of sexual difference. The subject who inscribes itself as a woman in relation to sexuation, splits itself in two by relating to the phallic signifier as well as to another signifier, $S(A)$, where the barred A signifies the fundamental lack in the Other of knowledge, which relates precisely to the absence of the signifier to say what The Woman is. Lacan points out that women also have to deal with ‘supplementary’ jouissance, but in order to access this other jouissance, they must first pass through ‘the parade of signifiers’, in other words through the phallic function. In this way, women are split between phallic jouissance and Other jouissance, which means that it is possible for them to have access to a jouissance without limit.

¹ Lacan J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XX, *Encore, On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, New York-London, Norton, 1998, p. 35.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

What does love have to do with these formulas? “[W]hat makes up for (*supplée au*) the sexual relationship qua non-existent [...] is, quite precisely, love”³, says Lacan, but it is not the same “making up” for the two sexes.

Not all beings in the table of sexuation are deprived of the phantasy with respect to their relationship to the partner - as can be seen in the lower part of the table of sexuation, where the phantasy is formed on the borderline between two versions of sexuation. In his article *On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love*⁴ Freud distinguishes two often contradictory currents in man - tenderness and sensuality, which can be translated as love and sexual desire - with the need to belittle the value of the loved object in order to be able to desire it. This is how Freud describes the painful side of such a divergence, which is very much in evidence in our practice: "Where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love."⁵ In Seminar XXIII, *The Sinthome*, Lacan goes even further, when he speaks of the Φ “which may as well be the first letter of the word phantasy”, saying that man “ultimately [...] makes love with his unconscious”⁶, while believing that he has access to his love partner - hence perhaps the origin of the famous feminine reproach that her partner never perceives her as she is.

While the phantasy is found on the border between the two sexes, it should be pointed out, that the object of lack is found on the feminine side. "One only really loves from a feminine position."⁷ Love feminises, whether the subject is a man or a woman, because it makes him or her appear to be lacking and in search of the answer to this lack in the partner.

For the woman, who is deprived neither of the phallic signifier nor of a phantasmatic version of the question of what she lacks, there is yet another place, described above, that of the S(A), from which she awaits the answer to her feminine being.

In his book *Analysis Laid Bare*, Jacques-Alain Miller speaks of the love partner as a symptom and offers the following definition: “the couple relationship supposes that the Other becomes the symptom of the *parlêtre*, that is to say, a means of his or her jouissance.”⁸

³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴ Freud S., “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love” (1914), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XI*, London: Hogarth Press, 1964.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁶ Lacan J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book XXIII, *The Sinthome*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A.R. Price, Polity, 2016, p. 107.

⁷ Miller J.-A., Interview for *Psychologies Magazine*, <http://ampblog2006.blogspot.com/2008/10/millerqui-suis-je.html>

⁸ Miller J.-A., *Analysis Laid Bare*, WAP Libretto Series, New York, Lacanian Press, 2023, p. 70.

If, on the masculine side, this jouissance is taken in the logic of "*for all x*", it "necessarily determines the partner-symptom of the man starting from [the object] *a*"⁹ ; on the other side of the table, that of the feminine *parlêtre*, "the *not-all* determines the partner-symptom [...] as barred big A, $\bar{A}$."¹⁰

Hence, following Lacan's words, Miller notes that "the partner-symptom of the man has the form of the fetish," - which refers us to the phantasmatic form of such love, - "while that of the feminine *parlêtre* has an erotomaniac form."¹¹ Love on the feminine side requires the speech of the partner which proves that he loves her - hence the erotomaniac form of this love. But since the true feminine partner is the Other, the barred Other, this speech is never enough, hence the dissatisfaction, and even the various forms of the pain of love that ensue.

Finally, in his very last teaching, Lacan introduces the concept of the *sinthome* into the relationship between the sexes with the following logic: a woman is a *sinthome* for a man, whereas the converse is not true, since there is no equivalence for the *sinthome*. "There is no equivalence" - this is the condition of possibility for a woman to be a *sinthome* for a man, and it is therefore the only support for the sexual relation in the speaking being. We must still specify, says Lacan, what the position of the man is for the other sex, not only non-equivalent but "worse than a *sinthome*."¹² And precisely, one of the worst positions of the man for a woman - which we encounter particularly in the clinic of psychosis - is his real incarnation in the silent place of the Other.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.75.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Lacan J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII, The Sinthome*, op. cit. p. 84.