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**A Difficulty in the Analysis of Women:
The Ravage Effected by the Relation to the Mother**

The practice of psychoanalysis draws attention to a real in the clinic that insists on coming back to the same place. This was already Freud's approach in 'A Child Is Being Beaten', for he identified the presence of one identical statement correlated to one identical source of sexual jouissance in the treatment of six different analysands. My work, too, focuses on the repetition of one identical element: the mother/daughter ravage as it comes to occupy some place in the transference.¹ This question proves to be a difficulty in the analysis of women already signaled by Freud.

At times of difficulty experienced in the analytic process when the ravaging relation to the mother comes to the foreground, the question of *semblant* becomes central. Jacques-Alain Miller's statement that 'the [analytic] act has its foundation in the *semblant*, yet does not support the *semblant*'² characterizes to perfection the subjective position of subjects whose treatment comes up against the obstacle of ravage.

The vacillation of the *semblant* is an essential trait of these moments of crisis under transference, when both the analyst and the analysis become grounded in some unbearable real. Thus stripped bare, the *semblant* is transformed into a lie or reduced to the level of a derisory framework that shatters under the assaults of this real, disqualifying the very function of speech. The area of ravage is thus a site that favors the vacillation of *semblants*, which is in itself a clinical problem. The 'ravage' of the female subject that Lacan mentions in 'L'etourdit' ('the ravage that in a woman is her relation to her mother'³) manifests itself in analysis as articulated to transference love. Although Freud uses different terms, he broaches this question towards the end of his life's work. He came to repeatedly underscore the importance of what he admits to having underestimated: the early mother/daughter relationship. He establishes the connection between this primary relationship and the stumbling block of every female analysis, i.e., *Penisneid*, which has made the feminist crowd rail against him since. One could also reread Melanie Klein's paper on envy in the light of this problematic of ravage. There are countless examples in the clinic. Moreover, the facts that Dominique Laurent puts together in her expression 'Queen of the night' (see also her text 'A Woman's Disidentification') have brought to light a new element of the problem with explicit reference to the transference to the analyst.

With some analysands, after many years of rigorous work has resulted in noticeable changes in subjective position, it sometimes happens that ravage enters the analytic relation—either in a new or more obvious fashion, yet always in accordance with the line of logic previously deployed by the subject. This experience necessarily questions the analyst's desire as Lacan introduces the concept in the section entitled 'How to act with one's being?' in 'The Direction of the Treatment'. Dominique Laurent's paper, just like the stories some analysands tell me upon coming to see me after a break down of the transference with another analyst (male or female) who had taken on the

face of ravage, shows how hard the struggle can be. Beyond anecdotal elements that one can analyze in terms of counter-transference, and hence resistance on the part of the analyst, this difficulty signals a point of clinical real that the analyst needs to treat seriously, i.e., structurally. Why is there a rivalry between this type of relation to the mother—qualified as ravage by Lacan and already identified in other terms by Freud--and the analytic discourse?

For Freud, *Penisneid* is the limit of analysis for female analysands. Ravage would then be a modality of *Penisneid* as deployed in analysis. Now, Freud turns *Penisneid* into what triggers the Oedipus Complex in the little girl at the time of the phallic phase: she ‘notice[s] the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize[s] it as the superior counterpart of [her] own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall[s] victim to envy for the penis.... She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it’⁴ The term ‘inconspicuous’, it must be stressed, is endowed with particular significance here. The little girl has it in this guise and it is in this guise that it becomes part of the feminine problematics for her, a problematics that also affects her mother. The mother’s valuables are inconspicuous: hidden in hidden locked cupboards, secret drawers, and objects beyond the pale of exchange that the mother keeps for her own jouissance.

Freud predicated female sexuality upon penis envy, highlighting as he did its ‘PSYCHICAL CONSEQUENCES.....’. Its first consequence is the ‘scar’, the mark of female narcissism. One can see here the brand name of the relation a woman has with the female body, placing the wound, the cut, at the core of the image under the guise of what sews it up. The second consequence is ‘jealousy’: according to Freud, this is the brand name of the fantasy ‘A Child Is Being Beaten’, which he attributes in this text to the female subject as the ‘left over from the phallic phase’. In his opinion, the point reconstructed in the analysis is the father as the one inflicting the beating and, consequently, the fantasy substitutes the father for the mother. The third consequence concerns the relation to the mother as the one responsible for her daughter’s lack, which she is also supposed to enjoy: this is the ravage. The fourth consequence is the reaction against onanism that, for Freud, opens the door to female sexuality according to the famous sliding of objects: the ‘sliding’ of female objects. Sliding is not exchange and thus comes to light rather through metonymy than metaphor and substitution.

In the next paper on ‘Female sexuality’⁵. Freud emphasizes again the hatred for the mother, a hatred comprising diverse reproaches including seduction, a hatred whose intensity he explains by invoking the intensity of the love that precedes disappointment. For Freud, then, ravage is strictly correlated to the destiny of the phallus for the little girl.

It is the same term ‘envy’ that Melanie Klein has in mind in *Envy and Gratitude* when she characterizes the point of impossibility in an analysis with a pessimism based on a primary failure of the relation to the maternal Other, a failure with paranoid overtones: ‘to bite the nourishing breast’-- the hand that feeds, and thus to cut short the relation to the Other that might be of support for the subject.

Lacan takes up again these Freudian elements only to refine them in his *Seminar V*, chapters 14, 15 and 16 in particular⁶. He reopens the issue of the phallic phase, questioning the sequencing of the three stages of the Oedipus Complex. The framework of his argument is one of desire: desire as organized by the law of the signifier in so far as it ‘partakes of a primary adventure, one that is inscribed at that point and that becomes articulated, and that we always associate with something originary that took place in infancy and that has been repressed. [...] The primary adventure that took place around infantile desire, essential desire, which is the desire for the Other’s desire, or the desire to be desired. That which inscribed itself in the subject during that adventure remains there permanently underpinned’⁷. The relation to this primary Other who is the mother becomes substituted for the ‘economy of gratifications, care, fixations, aggressions’—one recognizes here Melanie Klein—and focuses the subject’s destiny on ‘the subject’s primary dependency in reference to the Other’s desire. ... Here is what is being inscribed in the structure through the subject’s history: the fortunes and misadventures of the constitution of this desire as subjected to the law of the Other’s desire.’⁸

Here is how Lacan rephrases the question of the primary relation to the mother: for the subject, ‘what matters is to finally acknowledge—with reference to what is an *x* of desire in the mother, that which made it possible to become or not become the one who responds to it, to become or not become the desired being’. To become or not become the desired being, that is one of the characteristics of the challenge. The subject endeavors to know what determines the direction of the desire of the mother and to assess how to find a place in it. This dialectic includes a third term: the father, the ‘presence of a desired or rival person’. This third term enables or does not enable the child to be a child that is ‘demanded or not demanded’. Thus something enables the child to be signified beyond the imaginary captivation. This something is a symbol, a signifier through which the subject has to succeed in being recognized. Lacan then takes up again the question of *Penisneid* by differentiating between three modes: 1) in the sense of fantasy, with the wish that the clitoris be a penis: castration, i.e., symbolic amputation of an imaginary object; 2) desire for the father’s penis, i.e., frustration of a real object; 3) desire for a child by the father, i.e., real privation with reference to a symbolic object. For each of these modes the agent of the lack is important.

The child enters the signifying structure conversely to how the woman enters the social dialectic as object. Hence Lacan’s deduction that the child either abandons these objects by becoming an object of exchange, or keeps these objects beyond their exchange value. The phallus is thus what prevents the subject from satisfying the desire of the mother by becoming its exclusive object. On the one hand, we have the formation of the ideal ego and on the other the *jouissance* constituting the mother’s object.

For Freud as for Lacan this is an organizing structure, which picks up values inherent in each subject’s history. But in all cases where the mother/daughter figures the focus remains the phallic claim.

What is ravage from such a viewpoint? The mother, remaining the Other unblemished by the phallic exchange and symbolic law, also remains the only object of the only child. One response consists in being the maternal fetish. But this fetish is always superfluous since the traumatic Other (i.e., the Other of sexual satisfaction) is whole. Another response consists in wringing from the mother that which will never enter the non-existing symbolic exchange and that which, once wrung out, becomes junk.

In either case the ravage has something to do with the impossible phallic exchange, for something in the mother has bypassed the symbolic law that should have made her into an object in the structure of exchange. The mother hence tends to remain a real other and is interpreted as Other of jouissance. She thus calls for either impossible fusion or persecution.

For each subject fitting this conjuncture, the origin, or rather what Lacan calls the primary adventure of what took place around a similar infantile desire, is different. From this viewpoint, the ravage originates from a fault related, in what Lacan calls 'the triad', to speech.

Ravage is located in the field of the relation between subject and mother, the so-called field that includes both the Other of language and the speech relation. This field, which Lacan, insisting on the two modes of the genitive in French, called 'désir de la mère'--'the mother's desire' and 'desire for the mother'--comprises an obscure zone that is not saturated by the Name-of-the-Father and, as such, it has no defined limits.

It is thus not a matter of reducing the ravage to a dual relation to the mother. Freud had already spoken out on this point, but Lacan clarified things by demonstrating that the mother/child relation is situated in the symbolic field from the start. It is well worth bringing up this point again, for the sliding towards an autarkical relation between mother and child remains a well beaten track, even though it leads to a dead-end.

From the *Fort-Da* onwards the Other is present. The Other is present in the Augustinian vignette that Lacan likes to invoke as well, since the reference to non-speech introduces the very order of language. The particular aim of our research has thus little to do with some relation beyond the scope of discourse that would also directly interact with the real, which would lead us to identify ravage with psychosis. The aim is rather to specify the singular type of emergence of language in the subject.

I am thinking here of a remark by Lacan in *Scilicet, No 6/7*: 'The unconscious is structured like a language. With one reservation: that which creates the structure is the way in which language first emerges in a human being. This is what finally enables us to speak of structure.'⁹ He continues, 'Languages have something in common—perhaps not all of them because we can't know them all and there might be some exceptions—but this is true of the languages we encounter in treating the subjects who request treatment from us. Sometimes they have retained the memory of a first language which is different from the one they have ended up speaking.' Although what follows, with its reference to Freud's article on fetishism, indicates that Lacan is thinking about foreign tongues, it is possible to read the text in a radical way, arguing

that each subject first spoke a first language [*langage*], even though in the same tongue [*langue*]. The ravage relates to this particular fashion in which language first emerged for a subject. It touches upon the confines of symbolic marking: this is my first hypothesis. The treatments I derive my knowledge from enable me to qualify the specificity (in so far as it bears the mark in the reconstruction effected in an analysis) of what 'took place in infancy' that was of 'primary' importance.

This emergence can manifest itself in the guise of insults. Jean-Claude Milner¹⁰ writes about insults whose aim is that 'subjects are interpellated to bear a name whose content of ownership is reduced to pure utterance'. He adds, 'You are but what you are named and you are but in the moment of this nomination. Ownership stops with nomination.' One sees here the lack of durability, *pérennité* in French, which one might translate as *dadability* to convey the equivocality in this lack of the father function inherent in such a name, a name with no recourse other than to reach out for some stability: the stability of the object. And so we hear the object in various insults such as 'bastard, fuckhead, shit', etc. Instead of an anchoring, what we have here is the fixed object of jouissance that blocks, like a stumbling block, the metaphorical sliding of key signifiers, reducing as it does the subject to the object he/she was for the Other: negation of the lack in being and forced positioning as being *qua* object of refuse, i.e., junk.

The emergence in the guise of the critique of language the child has learned from some other is a critique that boils down to insult. Call it emergence of the subject in the guise of rejection: 'The one facing me is no longer my daughter', signaling the blotting out from the living a subject who was once the truly cherished object of the mother, a blissful state only glimpsed at the moment of destitution. Emergence, too, predicated upon the need to keep silent—the finger crossing the mouth that one associates with the blow upon what remains beyond speech.

The point these 'emergences' share, despite their being so different in origin and having lead to diverging structural fates as well as distinct symptoms, is first of all connected with experiences of speech with the sexual as traumatic, thus with the subject's experience of the drive. In all its occurrences the maternal Other's speech is associated with the discovery of an experience of jouissance. However, as a second characteristic, this emergence with its background of traumatic sexual jouissance, i.e., the marking of a body by a signifier, occurs at the time when the difference between the sexes emerges at the heart of the phallic function under the guise of an enigma. Finally, this emergence endorses the resolute belief in the all powerful uncastrated Other, in the Mother bypassing the lack of castration, and who presents the subject with a mortal alternative: either the rejection or the reintegration by the genitrix of her own product.

For each subject fitting this conjuncture, 'the primary adventure of that which occurred around infantile desire'.

For Freud, ravage is strictly correlated with the fate of the maternal phallus in the little girl. The category of demand, which Lacan clearly differentiates from desire, enables

him to be more precise about *Penisneid*, and his advances on the question of the phallus--that is, its separation from the penis as organ--and its definition, dating his early seminars, in terms of signification--that is, as a unit of measurement of the libidinal value of objects, and then as signifiers of desire--produces a change of perspective. Similarly, the reference to the structure of the language of the unconscious is rounded off with the mode of emergence of speech as underpinning the phenomenon of ravage that appears in the 'desire of the mother'.

Concerning this x of the mother's desire, our experience with the cartels of the Pass of the Ecole de la Cause Freudienne has been particularly instructive. We have indeed discovered that, whatever the structure of the female subject, whatever the contingencies of her history, whatever her particular symptom, there is a constant. The x of maternal desire would always take the value of death at some point in the analysis. The signified of the subject was the child whose death had been wished for. This clinical fact helps clarify the term of ravage.

After my first presentation at the study day for the AS of ECF in 2000, Eric Laurent pointed out that it was obvious today, as opposed to Freud's era, that girls have it, which does not prevent them from claiming it in a radical fashion—without limit. There is no limit to maternal fetishism: this is how I name the relation to the maternal phallus constructed by these subjects who have no other alternative than to either incarnate it or try to wrest it from the Other.

This is what is noticeable in those cases of ravage where the paternal function turns out to appease nothing: the father thus appears as if waiting on a maternal whim rather than as agent of her privation. In the treatments that I have in mind, what characterizes the father is always his impotence. This impotence derives from his jouissance in waiting on the mother. Besides, the clinic shows that the same configuration in the little boy produces particular dysfunctions of the sexual function. The father of the promise, and thus of the gift, who acts as a counterpoint to the demand, is afflicted by a sentiment of disbelief or else revives the pain of the theft suffered with reference to the mother. In fact, in *Ecrits*, Lacan calls this passage from the mother to the father transference.

When examining the ravage in light of the phallus, we can suggest that it is articulated to a masculine identification correlated to some unbearable femininity.

Lacan's breakthrough, however, allows us to consider things from a different angle, which is not an alternative, but is rather supplementary. Indeed, the mother's desire is far from being wholly saturated by the signifier. Besides her desire, there is some unknown feminine jouissance.

The disjunction that Lacan makes between mother, on the side of phallic universality, and woman, on the side of the inconsistency of the universal, allows us to move forward on the question of ravage. Wouldn't it be the case that ravage has another face that would not exclusively refer us back to demand and phallic desire, but also to a without-limits with particular reference to the feminine situation?

I have shown how in the unconscious the desire of the mother is supposed to become saturated by phallic signification, related as it is to the Name-of-the-Father.

There is, however, a leftover that escapes the phallus. Lacan first takes up this question in the Seminar *Desire and its Interpretation* in the sessions devoted to *Hamlet*. He evokes the jouissance without paternal limit of Hamlet's mother, whom he calls 'truly genital'. It is possible to see this as the eruption of a feminine jouissance that cannot be reduced to desire and that eludes the symbolic. The ravage can thus appear at the point at which the little girl perceives some enigmatic jouissance in her mother, a jouissance unchecked by the phallus. Hence these feminine subjects' recurring claims of maternal madness, of maternal unleashing against the order of discourse.

Freud referred to woman's primary castration as a scar and saw it as the mark of female narcissism. But the scar is a solution that neutralizes castration while integrating lack, that is to say, the symbolic as rim. Now, because this castration is primary it also results in an absence of limits. Moreover, the question of the body cannot be completely reduced to the scar in the clinic, with the scar being a phallic name given to the feminine that cannot be represented, to that which in the body eludes the symbolic.

Jacques-Alain Miller and Eric Laurent's work on a text that Lacan devotes to Marguerite Duras and Lol V. Stein throws some light on the question of ravage. It echoes the words of one of my analysands who called the analyst 'the traveling rep. of ravishing'.

My thesis is that the ravage is caught in the ravishing. This is where the speech of analysands and its inherent knowledge lead me. The first quality requested from an analyst is to allow oneself to be guided by this speech, which is, as Monique Kusnierek had pointed out in a paper given to AS of the ECF one night, precisely what anxiety and guilt often object to.

To ravish has two sides. On the one hand, it refers to theft, and in his Seminar of 3 March 1972 on 'The knowledge of the analyst', Lacan characterizes one of the two characteristics of female sexuality with reference to the phallic function as 'wanting to ravish it from the man'. On the other hand, it refers to a 'ravished being', i.e., ravishment that evokes the statue of Bernini's Saint Theresa to which Lacan indexes feminine ecstasies: it is now a matter of the other jouissance. Jacques-Alain Miller has put forward that ravishing is related to the body, and more particularly to the fact of *having* a body, which consequently can be ravished. Ravishing has as much to do with the register of having as it does with the register of being.

Of course, phallic logic is at work here. The mother proves to be an abductor of bodies. She is structurally so, one could say, since she speaks. But she is also an abductor of children, by dint of the fact of the care she provides. To be ravished means to be depleted of one's body, with the effect of jouissance ensuing the unlocalization. In all the treatments constituting the clinical real that fuels my argument, the irruption of the possibility of ravage in the transference coincided with an emphasis on the body.

In the relation of ravage—since it is a relation, and I would suggest a relation supplementing the sexual relation that does not exist—the subject is dispossessed of her place. This place that no longer exists can take the guise of speech and the subject

thus becomes reduced to 'silence'; or the guise of body, with the effect that the subject becomes 'one body too much'; or a dephallicized flesh, a 'black hole'; or the guise of wandering, phenomenon of depersonalization, of self disappearance. These modes are no doubt determined by the ways in which language has made its mark on the traumatic sexual experience.

Ravishing is thus a form of corporeal loss that cannot be symbolized by the phallic signifier, a non-reduction of captivating images to the main image of the body, a non-inscription of the body in the desire of the Other. I used to say, taking my cue as usual from an analysand's words, 'A little girl falls into a hole'. This 'no place in the Other' is not appeased by the paternal function, since what the subject attempts here is to short-circuit her way to this place through love without going via the promise. But there is no way to this impervious other on its non-phallic side. The choices left to the subject are two equally terrible outcomes: either heinous destruction or madness. As it happens, this alternative sometimes leads the subject to become fascinated with a partner who belongs to the category of mad women with a homosexual bent, or to define the mother in that way. The subject remains spellbound by a feminine jouissance whose consistency is extraneous to the phallus.

The question of the body or of the loss of the body unveils the narcissistic face of ravage. This narcissistic face is all the more compelling by dint of the fact that the female subject has not mourned the mother of the fetish, who has thus not entered the order of exchange. It is the phallus as signifier, rather than as fetish, that enables exchange, including the exchange of women. One of the characteristics of such subjects is indeed the trouble they have in their amorous lives (necessarily heterosexual in the Lacanian sense) consenting to offer their bodies in the symbolic exchange. This trouble is replicated in the sexual relation as well as in mothering. These subjects have trouble giving, and also lending, themselves. What they seek while finding it unbearable is a fascination, a captivating fusion. How does a mother give body? It is necessarily a flawed body, the body that goes through the transmission of those metonymic objects of the body in the mother/daughter relation. Contrary to this transmission, ravage can be seen as the consequence of ravishing and hence mobilizes the insatiable aspect of love rather than desire.

Now this body that falls in the relation to the impervious Other through speech, with the subject's strategy being to keep it so, draws particular attention to the question of the *semblant*. Here, too, the analysand's speech constitutes knowledge. The corporeal image doesn't quite cover up the hole, dephallicized as it is. Thus clothes can take on a particular value: as a veil over the body the subject does not have, or as a lie. 'The lady is beautiful in her green dress', says a little girl. 'No, the lady isn't beautiful', says the mother. 'The dress is'. This is a good example of ravishing and the concomitant consigning of clothes and accessories to the category of junk.

This junk is the *semblant* in so far as it is left out of the metonymy of objects originating in the body and imbued with the lack of signifier for the feminine, excluded from the dynamics of the symbolic exchange, i.e., the bond of discourse.

In 'L'etourdit'¹¹, Lacan defines the *semblant* with reference to the absence of the sexual relation, putting forward the idea that the phallic function is a hopeless mode of access to the sexual rapport, 'a function that is only valid through its faking'. With regard to the feminine subject, I suggest that ravage (with the specific treatment of the body outside discourse that it implies), is another hopeless mode of access. To quote Lacan again, it unveils 'the real of the shore [set up by the Name-of-the-Father] that, through the shipwreck of the *semblant*, "realizes" the rapport for which the *semblant* becomes a supplement-- however not more than the fantasy supports our reality.' Ravage thus unveils the real of this shore. When it is fantasy that supports reality, *objet a* is in the grip of desire in the partner. When it is ravage, it is the ravishing of the body by the partner that is imputed by the subject to this same partner in a 'lovehatred'.

What Lacan says in his Seminar *RSI*, establishing the parallel between woman as a man's symptom and man as woman's possible ravage, supports this hypothesis. A man is a ravage for a woman when he revives the lack of limit of feminine jouissance, a jouissance that is not saturated by the phallic function. 'There is no limit', says Lacan, 'to the concessions that each woman makes for *one* man...'¹²

To sum up, one could say that ravage comprises a phallic face of demand articulated on the desire of the mother, and a not-all phallic face predicated upon the ravishing of the body that is related to the difficulty in symbolizing feminine jouissance.

The three following points can hence be made: 1) ravage is predicated upon the mode of emergence of language in a subject, and thus refers to the primary Other; 2) ravage is located, at the time of the traumatic inception of the sexual, with regard to an instant satisfaction of demand by the mother, which neither excludes the phallic function, nor posits it in terms of exchange, and hence loss; 3) the ravage of the female subject is the consequence of the ravishing determined by the absence of the signifier for woman, an absence glimpsed by the subject upon encountering that which in the mother could neither be reduced to desire nor to the phallic signifier, but rather signaled the absence of limits. For the female subject, ravage refers to the real that is outside the body in sex; that is, the part of jouissance that cannot be reduced to phallic signification and halts, or rather brings the subject to a halt, alternatively in the hate love of unconditional demand and in her blotting out through the image of that which cannot be signified.

Finally, ravage occurs at the point where the *semblant* fails. It can thus be treated in analysis since the analytic 'act has its foundation in the *semblant*, yet does not support the *semblant*'. The *semblant* is stripped bare in the analysis, which eventually give the subject a chance to invent a name for herself, a name that she does not have for circumscribing the area of real at the confines of speech.

Translated by Dominique Hecq

¹ I broached the question in a paper given at the *Ecole de la Cause Freudienne* during the *study-day of the AS* where Eric Laurent and Pierre Naveau made important suggestions.

² Miller, Jacques-Alain, 'Cours du 26 janvier 2000', *Quand les semblants vacillent...*, texts preparatory to the study-days of the ECF-ACF, October 21st and 22nd, 2000.

³ Lacan, Jacques, 'L'etourdit', in *Scilicet*, No. 4, Paris, Seuil, 1973, p. 21.

⁴ Freud, Sigmund, 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes' (1925), *SE XIX*, p. 249.

⁵ Freud, Sigmund, 'Female Sexuality' (1931), *SE XXI*, pp. 221-43.

⁶ Lacan, Jacques, *Le Seminaire, Livre V, Les formations de l'inconscient*, Paris, Seuil, 1998.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁹ Lacan, Jacques, 'Conferences et entretiens dans les universites nord-americaines', in *Scilicet*, No. 6/7, Paris, Seuil, 1976, p. 13.

¹⁰ Milner, Jean-Claude, *Les noms indistincts*, Paris, Seuil, p. 108.

¹¹ Lacan, Jacques, 'L'etourdit', in *Scilicet*, No. 4, op. cit., pp. 14-16.

¹² Lacan, Jacques, *Television*, Paris, Seuil, 1974, p.p. 63-64.