An introduction to Françoise Collin’s ‘Name of the father’

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In 1973 the philosopher Françoise Collin (1928–2012) founded, with Jacqueline Aubenas, the first French-language feminist journal, Les Cahiers du Grif. Collin was also a writer of fiction and récits (Rose qui peut, Le jour fabuleux, 331 W 20, Le Rendez-vous), a poet (Le jardin de Louise, On dirait une ville), a public intellectual and an essayist (Je partirai d’un mot, Le différend des sexes). She introduced the work of Hannah Arendt into France (L’homme est-il devenu superflu? Hannah Arendt), and was the author of a watershed work, the first study of Maurice Blanchot (Maurice Blanchot et la question de l’écriture). She was a vigorous feminist activist, producing numerous anthologies, conferences, seminars, translations (Gertrude Stein; Woolf’s The Waves), essays on contemporary gender politics, and on new women artists and writers.

She had specialized in phenomenology, training at Louvain, before her first publications – poetry and novels – appeared with Éditions du Seuil. Merleau-Ponty and particularly Lévinas would continue to be critical (and criticized) points of reference, as would psychoanalytic theory. Her first work of philosophy was her book on Blanchot, whose writing of the disaster, and treatment of writing in its relationship to impossibility, were for Collin an ‘absolute force’.1

It was characteristic of Collin to espouse thinkers whom she assiduously destabilized and challenged. Thus it was no accident that her gesture, as a Blanchot expert, was later to confront his work with that of Hannah Arendt, and with a different relationship to the disaster:

One could see these as two bodies of work in relation with the disaster, the ontological and/or the historical disaster. … They are the bodies of work of ‘surviving’ [du ‘survivant’]. But the term is interpreted differently. Blanchot asks how to maintain the relation with the disaster. Arendt asks how to survive the disaster, how to live together [vivre ensemble] after the disaster.

She argued that Blanchot and Arendt offered truths which were conflicting, but which also supported and called to each other: ‘Blanchot’s truth stands in no need of correction. But it sustains, it even calls to, another truth: that of Arendt, that of the event.’ Collin’s aim was not to amend Blanchot – and certainly not, she said, with voluntarist optimism. Confrontation was not correction. Thus thinking of our relation to impossibility, death and the disaster did not invalidate (to the contrary, in Collin’s sense it ‘called to’) a thinking of the relationship to birth as critical to life, as offering a constant relationship to the possible, the new, and the beginning.2

Arendt also stimulated in Collin’s theoretical work questions that would be important for her feminism: ‘how to think plurality?’ ‘How to live together?’ Her characteristic mode of challenge to the thinkers she most appreciated manifested again when both Arendt and Jean-François Lyotard provided Collin with the resources not only to ask how to think the différend but also how to think it from the perspective of sexual difference, as Le différend des sexes (1999). She argued that the différend, and a thinking of the historical and ontological disaster, could characterize crimes against women in genocidal contexts, hate crimes and violence targeting women. A register of catastrophe was also embedded in the historical pursuit of human rights as rights of ‘Man’, given the traditional exclusion of women and others by those rights.3

Collin was dismayed by the slow pace of integration of sexual difference as a ‘philosopheme’ within contemporary French university studies, particularly in disciplines such as philosophy and political theory. She considered it an obstinate delay, particularly when compared with the state of studies in many fields in Anglo-American scholarship. In addition to an edited volume devoted to feminist approaches to epistemology and philosophy of science (Le sexe des sciences, 1992) and a co-edited volume offering some of the
first French translations of Anglo-American philosophers such as Carole Pateman, Martha Nussbaum, Nancy Fraser, Catherine MacKinnon and Judith Butler (Repenser le politique: l’apport du féminisme, 2005), Collin co-edited a voluminous critical anthology Les Femmes de Platon à Derrida (2000). Reconstructing a vast dossier on the preoccupation with the role and nature of women and sex in the canonical writings of philosophers and political theorists going back to Plato, Collin repudiated the view that these questions, and attention to them, should be seen as merely ‘feminist’ or marginal. Collin was a critic of the French education system’s hostility to innovation, perhaps explained by its centralization and pretensions to universalism. But universalism, argued Collin, was really a form of ‘double particularism’. It embodied the excluding habits of nationalism and the long and complex traditions through which the knowing subject had been tacitly sexed as masculine.4

Collin’s repudiation of the posturings and hypocrisies of a false sex neutrality also inflected her sympathy with the more frankly sexed character of Lacan’s writing on sexual difference. In her eyes, Lacan and Freud did not pretend that a speaking and writing subject was detached from its masculinity. They allowed complex, ambiguous, problematic but also problematizing ways of understanding that masculinity. It was typical of Collin to give her most engaged and curious attention to a number of figures she might have been expected to repudiate: characteristic to have engaged concertedly with Arendt as a Blanchot scholar, with feminism as an Arendt scholar, and similarly with Lacan as a feminist. Many in the feminist milieu with which she engaged were not keen readers of Lacan, and Collin did not assume that Beauvoir was a point of reference among psychoanalytic communities engaging with Lacan. She might have taken a degree of mischievous satisfaction in arguing – as she does in the 1999 essay translated here, ‘Nom du père, On de la mère: De Beauvoir à Lacan’ – that certain paths taken by Lacan were ones that had been opened by Beauvoir.

If Collin devoted herself to feminism, she also had a taste for deflating its passions, its pretensions, its ideologies, its risks, its security borders – to a degree equal to her vigorous and lifelong commitment to it. This, for Collin was the form of active engagement par excellence. Hagiography was as foreign to her disposition as irony was dear. After the French philosopher Sarah Kofman’s death, Collin organized an important memorial conference on her work and published the resulting collection of essays. Valuable essays on Kofman by Derrida and Nancy, and many others, were produced for this occasion and thanks to her efforts. Among them, Collin’s own piece was brilliant and unique. She valued the malicious eye of Sarah Kofman, and took care to mention it, warmly and publicly. In the terms of a writing of the disaster she considered Kofman’s autobiographical depiction of her childhood as a young Jewish girl, hidden during the French Occupation. She took care to present Kofman not as a maximally sympathetic figure, but as capable, (particularly as a young girl, particularly as a victim) of scenes crueller, said Collin, than Sade’s visions.5 The keen eye brought to the subtle forms of Kofman’s mercilessness was Collin’s form of solidarity with her. Her memorial essay on Kofman was also the occasion for a simultaneously generous and uncompromised response to her work.
A feminism hoping to form la communauté des gagnantes would disavow its constitutive impouvoir. Not to minimize injustice, nor its importance in Beauvoir’s work, Collin emphasized a generalized, ontological damage that exceeds justice. This is why, in addition to The Second Sex’s ‘on ne naît pas femme, on le devient’, Beauvoir’s concurrent depiction of ageing, suffering and the experience of being cheated (Beauvoir’s ‘j’ai été flouée’) were so important to Collin. They were interpretable as fundamental, not contingent, to existence, and to every feminism.

Collin insisted that redress for imbalances of power could be sought, all the while affirming an ontological impouvoir: politically, poetically and, as she argued in ‘Beauvoir et la douleur’, philosophically. She spoke for a feminism invigorated, not debilitated, by the force of its irony.

Notes
Thanks to Sylvie Duverger for many details provided, including online resources for Collin’s publications and interviews.
2. Ibid., pp. 143, 142.
3. Ibid., p. 11.
7. Ibid., pp. 7–8.

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From Beauvoir to Lacan

Françoise Collin

To Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragossa, perched on her column, ‘But there is something more, a jouissance beyond the phallus.’

If I take a few aspects of the thought of Jacques Lacan, and investigate their relation to Simone de Beauvoir around one specific point, I have no intention of making him out – against received opinion – to be a feminist who didn’t know it and even less of turning him into a disciple of the author of The Second Sex.¹ My aim is simply to indicate how the ‘question of women’ is introduced into his reflection on the basis of a chapter of Beauvoir’s book. And by ‘the question of women’ I do not mean the question about women – psychoanalysis cannot shut up ‘about’ women – but the question that comes from women, whether they formulate it or not: women as question. Moreover, this question was explicitly put to Lacan by the psychoanalysts of the first wave of feminism who attended his seminars in the 1970s. But if he received it head-on at that point, it was because it had resonated with him much earlier. And everything leads one to think that he had already seen it emerge in The Second Sex. So it is a historical point as well as a point of doctrine that I will try to deal with briefly here.

Born or made

When the question of women comes up in Lacan’s discourse, it always seems to provoke a feeling of unease in him. He generally responds to this feeling with defensive sallies where he displays his position as a (masculine) man. These are like the symptoms of the displacement that his thought undergoes, of his development, for in fact Lacan allows himself to be interpellated by this upsetting question, even as he protects himself from it, and protects himself from it precisely to the extent that it interpellels him.

These sallies have a frankly misogynist quality. They generally consist of putting women in their place – which is not his – and in talking about them in the third person: ‘In no way do I have a disrespectful judgement of these beings, let those persons be assured’ (my emphasis) he says at one point, which illustrates the matter sufficiently. But this is just after having asserted that the ‘unbelievable’ manner in which woman is treated in discourse and more particularly in psychoanalytic discourse comes from the fact that she is most often only seen as the ‘object of (masculine) desire’. As if it was necessary to compensate with a reductive movement for the audacity of what he had just put forward. So that he seems to incarnate just what he has announced if not denounced in others: ‘The most famous things that have come down to us about women in history are literally what one can say that is infamous.’ ‘She is called woman and defamed.’²

Simone de Beauvoir and Jacques Lacan met each other through common friends (Georges Bataille – whose wife, Sylvie, Lacan later married – and Michel Leiris) towards the end of the war, or more precisely in 1944, according to Elisabeth Roudinesco.³ They were present with others during the public reading by some of them (including Beauvoir) of a play by Picasso – Desire Caught by the Tale – in Leiris’s apartment. Beauvoir seems already to have read Lacan’s early texts and to have consulted him before the publication of The Second Sex. Lacan estimated that it would require at least five or six months of interviews to sort out the problem; Beauvoir abandoned the idea. She only devoted a short chapter of the Second Sex to ‘The Psychoanalytic Point of View’ and quotes Freud rather than Lacan.

But what Roudinesco’s biography does not reveal is that Lacan almost certainly read The Second Sex on its

¹ Translated from ‘Nom du père, On de la mère: De Beauvoir à Lacan’, Lectora 4, 1999, pp. 23–35. With kind permission. On in French can mean ‘one’, ‘we’ or ‘they’ and can even cue a translation into the English passive voice. The contrast Collin is drawing is between the definite signification of a ‘name’ and the indeterminacy of the ‘on’.

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publication, having been notified about its appearance; indeed the book was not likely to have escaped his legendary curiosity. And there are such correspondences between the references essential to his reformulation of the feminine and those – much earlier – of Simone de Beauvoir, that he could only have borrowed them in order to follow his own path. Thus at one point, he follows the steps of the author of *The Second Sex*: the moment when he analyses the figure of the mystic. The meeting goes no further but it merits reflection since it touches on a decisive point.

Before analysing the effects of this encounter, however, it is necessary to stress that Lacan never denied or ignored the socio-historical conditions of the sexual relations that were otherwise, if not exclusively, the object of Beauvoir’s reflection. If he attempted to elucidate their structural relationship, he did not ignore their conjunctural variations. Whether in his early texts – on the family¹ – or in the later seminars, this parameter is present just beneath the surface. One can see this, for example, when he analyses courtly love at length – as he analyses Greek love, elsewhere. For if courtly love makes sense, for Lacan, beyond its historical moment, it is nevertheless well identified as belonging to it. As Lacan (reader of Lévi-Strauss) writes:

The style of this story simply shows the effective position of woman in feudal society. She is strictly speaking what is indicated by the elementary structures of kinship, i.e., nothing more than a correlative of the function of social exchange, the support of a number of goods and of signs of power. She is essentially identified with a social function that leaves no room for her person or her own liberty, except with reference to her religious rights.³

Lacan confronts this instrumental and social function with the different but no less negative use that is made of ‘her’ in courtly poetry where ‘the Lady is never characterized by any of her real, concrete virtues’ because in this poetic field ‘the feminine object is introduced by the very singular gate of privation, of inaccessibility’ and ‘emptied of all real substance’ in favour of ‘the pleasure of desiring, or more precisely the pleasure of experiencing unpleasure’⁶ – the pleasure of desiring that belongs to men, not to women.

Nor does Lacan miss the opportunity to pick up and comment on Ernest Jones’s reflections on whether women are ‘born’ or ‘made’. He stresses that Jones ‘does not seem to note, in this regard, that the Oedipal defile manufactures – if this is what is at issue – men no less’: the question is posed for both sexes, even if what ‘made’ means is different in each case.⁷

We might assume that we hear here, in Jones’s English, the formula that so often identifies Beauvoir’s thought, even without reading her books: ‘on ne naît pas femme, on le devient’; ‘one is not born a woman, but becomes one’. Woman is not ‘born’ but ‘made’. Nevertheless one should not be too hasty to identify the two positions because what Jones or Lacan means by becoming a woman or man is, as the latter says, the work of the ‘Oedipal defile’ rather than a social operation. The articulation of the two nevertheless merits reflection, and the alternative of ‘born’ or ‘made’ as Lacan and Beauvoir each present it in their different terms, outlines a problematic dimension – both serious and persistent – of sexuation.

**The figure of the mystic**

Lacan makes a qualitative leap in his reflections with his approach to mysticism. In his seminar of 20 March 1960, ‘Love of One’s Neighbour’, he already makes an opening – hesitant and still rather ironic – towards mysticism:

No doubt the question of beyond the pleasure principle, of the place of the unnameable Thing and of what goes on there is raised in certain acts through which they provoke our judgement, as when someone [on] tells us, for example, of a certain Angela de Folignio who joyfully lapped up the water in which she had just washed the feet of lepers; I will spare you the details … or when someone [on] recounts that – with quite as much spiritual reward – the blessed Marie Alacoque ate the excrement of a sick man.⁸

The female mystic is here characterized as one whose jouissance is nourished by the horror of the unnameable rather than leading towards pleasure. Her position is otherwise not elaborated; the beyond of pleasure is not yet ‘beyond the phallus’ as it will be formulated later.

But who is this ‘someone’ [on] who brings these acts to our attention, this ‘someone’ [on] whose proper name Lacan fails to supply? A rereading of the chapter on mysticism in the second volume of *The Second Sex* allows us to identify Simone de Beauvoir. In fact, she has recourse to precisely these two examples, and in the same terms: ‘We know that Marie Alacoque cleaned up the vomit of a sick woman with her tongue’ and ‘Saint Angèle de Foligno tells that she joyfully drank the water with which she had just washed the hands and feet of a leper’⁹. She also evokes other names, such as that of Teresa de Avila, referring to ‘the statue of Bernini which shows us the saint swooning in an excess of sudden delight’, the statue that will
inspire Lacan’s later seminar, *Encore*, in 1973 – at the moment when the women’s movement is at its height – leading his heirs and publishers to put the image of Bernini’s famous work on the cover of their edition of the seminar. Thus the relation of Lacan’s text to Beauvoir’s is not merely general and accidental: it takes up from it its principal points.

It is nevertheless important to emphasize not just the interest that Beauvoir had in the dimension of mysticism and her erudition on this matter (as on many others) but also the location of the chapter devoted to its discussion: at the end of the third part of volume II, just before chapter 4, which, in conclusion, defines her political perspective under the title ‘Towards Liberation’. The figure of the mystic appears here as a form of affirmation of the feminine figure, or a mode of expression of her freedom, albeit a freedom not yet transcended by the moment of liberation, which can only be collectively accomplished, by its inscription in the social. Mysticism is perhaps a form of purely individual ‘salvation’ that ‘has no purchase on the world’, as Beauvoir writes. She nevertheless sees with great lucidity how through the mystical position a woman both annihilates and recovers, at the same time, her body and her jouissance, and finds a form of articulation that goes from ‘contemplation to action’, going as far even as its foundation. For her it is not a question of an extreme form of subjection that provokes a pure, ecstatic passivity: God is an alternative to the figure of the master and not another disguise for him. Beauvoir stresses that one can discern here a figure of ‘transcendence’; ‘the bodily mimicry can be enveloped in a surge of freedom’, she writes. And about Teresa de Avila, at least, she specifies that it would be wrong to interpret her emotions as a ‘simple sublimation of sexuality’, a ‘redemption of femininity’ which seems nevertheless to characterize some of her ‘lesser sisters’. She is, like Catherine of Sienna, of a ‘quite virile type’, Beauvoir says in a note – and we know that in her writing this characterization indicates a rupture with conventional femininity. For these major figures at least, the position of mysticism is a way of going beyond the relations of mastery and servitude which characterize sexual relations, but in a movement that is sufficient to itself and cannot be a common leaven for social transformation. To attach oneself to God is to escape submission. So there is action – and not just passion – in mysticism, but a singular action. And we understand that mysticism is not a political position in the sense defined in ‘Towards Liberation’: it has ‘no purchase on the world’. The fact remains, however, that the texts of these mystics reached Beauvoir, and so challenged her that she wrote an important chapter of her book on ‘the second sex’ on them. This seems to indicate that their existence is not exhausted in pure singularity, that it has left a trace, that it broached – even overturned – the symbolic apparatus where women find themselves assigned to their place.

If in 1960 Lacan took up the examples of Marguerite Marie Alacoque and Angèle de Foligno with a certain amusement, slightly disgusted but nevertheless testifying to their having outlined a path for him, when he returned to them thirteen years later at the moment of feminism’s apogee, it is in another state of mind. Teresa de Avila will now allow him to make a fundamental move, which he will express in terms of a jouissance ‘beyond the Phallus’. It is then that he makes a real breach in the phallocentric, phallogocentric and totalizing thought that he had inherited from Freudian doctrine and enters resolutely and explicitly into a new conception of the difference between the sexes and, at the same time, of Truth – and this link is important. He stakes out this advance with the term ‘not-all’: woman is ‘not-all’, traversing the order of the all, the whole, but exceeding it. In this operation, God, as the (Big) Other, is dissociated from the Father, at least to the extent that he is not the mouth-hole god of the theologians – another version of the Father – but the god-hole of mysticism, who is attested to in ‘language’ not in the ‘service of goods’. ‘There is a hole there and that hole is called the Other. At least that is what I felt I could name it, the Other, qua locus in which speech being deposited founds Truth and with it the pact that makes up for the non-existence of the sexual relationship.’
The Name of the Father

For a long time psychoanalysis has seemed to support the traditional hypothesis of a division between the sexes and the articulation of one sex – the ‘second sex’ – with the other. The centrality of the phallus, founded on the empirical reality of the penis to which women can only relate as something which they ‘lack’, has been the object of numerous critical engagements by women. This sexual distribution inscribed in dogmatic analysis has been questioned all the more as Freud himself finally admitted that he did not know what a woman was, not because, as Lacan would write ‘The’ woman (Woman) does not exist, but because she evades his investigations. It seems, then, from the founding texts, that it is a man – that is, a human being of the male sex – who thinks and speaks, first of all on the basis of his own self-analysis as man and son: what is said in the texts about women does not have the same status as what is said about men, even if this rests – in a second stage – on the analysis of numerous patients. One can read this admission in Freud and more explicitly in Lacan: ‘when one is a man one sees in one’s partner that which is one’s own support, what supports one narcissistically’, he writes in relation to Freud. Now, when founding concepts are what one might describe as ‘blown off course’, during their elaboration and articulation, the results are no doubt irreversible. At best one might proceed to their erasure, for example by accentuating the difference between the penis and the Phallus to which both sexuated individuals would relate. Psychoanalysis is founded by a male subject – a subject of desire – and from his position. And at no point does it claim that the sexuated position is indifferent, even if the ‘feminine’ and the ‘masculine’ can be appropriated by beings of either sex, by the sex other than the one to which the term has been first attributed. What is said of one sex can certainly be supposed of the other, but what is not a matter of indifference is the meaning of the attribution that is made in either case: women also are phallic; men also are hysterics.

This to-ing and fro-ing characterizes the whole of analytic thought and is undoubtedly unavoidable in the treatment of the question of sexual difference: there are thus two of them and there is one of them, at the same time. Sexual characteristics are at the same time interchangeable and specific. The advantage of Lacanian thought over so-called post-modern thought is precisely that it remains suspended in this fertile contradiction, when postmodernism generally makes an economy of two – that is man and woman – in the interest of the indifferent difference of the ‘feminine’.

The originary dissymmetry of the conceptualisation is problematic. When we read Lacan’s text (or Freud’s) we do not read a text detached from the person who is speaking and writing, but rather a text where the masculine character of the subject of discourse as well as the speaking subject (since the term of the subject is curiously conserved) is constantly betrayed or avowed. What Lacan can and does do is to return to this originary dissymmetry and ‘retouch’ it – touch it again – without being able to refound the doctrine. It resists, so much so that even if a female analyst takes it up, she can only do so through excess: she is introduced into it rather than modelling it, the subject of speech without being the subject of discourse in which this speech is inscribed and which she displaces. This characteristic is undoubtedly the case whenever women enter scientific or symbolic discourse, but it is even more paradoxical when it rests precisely on the irreducibility (a minima) of sexuated positions. And when Lacan, at various points, interpellates women psychoanalysts, summoning them to speak themselves, he seems to presuppose that speaking the difference between the sexes can only be a half-saying, if not a dialogue, and that this half-saying is still lacking in psychoanalysis.

‘Being introduced into’ rather than constituting has certainly become a feminine – even feminist – ‘methodology’, a ‘cunning of the feminine’ or hysterical position, but it is at the very least a singular cunning, where we do not know if it consists of women ‘giving ground on their desire’ – accepting loss in order to win, giving up their ‘pound of flesh’ – or, on the contrary, sustaining their desire.
Lacan is conscious that this chunk of the science of desire, if there is one, was a chunk that Freud skirted around. So he writes, in 1973:

What I am working on this year is what Freud expressly left aside: Was will das Weib? ‘What does woman want?’ Freud claims there is only masculine libido. What does this mean if not that a field that is not negligible is ignored. That field is the one of all beings that take on the status of woman.

He quickly adds his usual catty afterthought to this remark: ‘assuming that that being takes on anything whatsoever of her destiny’. The formulation is such that in designating actual women, it covers also every speaking being that is put or puts itself in that place (we have already emphasized the ambiguity that persistently holds sway over the designation of sexuated positions and allows their double meaning room to play). And it is to this dark continent that he will devote himself by elaborating the distinction between the Father and the Other, or between the Father, God and the Other. Because ‘Woman has a relation to the signifier of the Other, insofar as, qua Other, it can but remain forever Other.’ That is to say, the Other does not enter into the regime of the totality of the One, where the law of opposites holds, does not belong to the register of phallic jouissance that Lacan suddenly qualifies as the ‘jouissance of the idiot’ to which the practice of masturbation attests. At various points he challenges the Freudian idea that woman’s relation to castration is based on a privation (the lack of the penis) and he explicitly distinguishes these two terms: the relation to lack is not determined by a natural ‘having or not having’.

If Lacan often declares himself to be the disciple of Freud, whom he designates as ‘the father of all of us, the father of psychoanalysis’, his protestations of fidelity have to be accepted, but must include the quite ferocious criticisms that at the same time (or later) he addresses to this ‘father’. First, these focus – and with great vehemence – on the anthropological description (which he calls naturalized) of the murder of the father described as the ‘father of the horde’ in Totem and Taboo: ‘As if there has ever been the slightest trace of him, the father of the horde. We have seen orangutans. But the father of the human horde? We’ve never seen the slightest trace of him.’ It is according to these terms a ‘cock and bull story’. And he speaks no less ironically of the way this tale stages the prohibition of incest and the appropriation of all the women by the father:

And then they all decide with one mind, that no one will touch the little mummies. Because there is more than one of them, to top it off. They could exchange since the old father had them all. They could sleep with their brother’s mother, specifically, since they are only brothers through their father.

In some sense the ‘murder of the father’ in its Freudian version covers over the unacceptable: the death of the father, his mortality, and mortality as such, the impotence of power; ‘he who enjoys all the women is inconceivable to imagine, whereas it is fairly normally observable that being enough for one is already quite a lot’.

**From the Father to the Other: the little hole**

However, generally, Freud’s concentration on the relation to the father leaves Lacan sceptical and seems tied to Freud’s blindness and deafness concerning women. He psychoanalyses it rapidly: ‘And it is just because he loved his father that it was necessary to grant him a stature, to the extent of granting him the size of the giant of the primal horde.’ He brings together Freud’s relation to the father and the ‘uxoriousness’ of his relations with women. Manifestly there is something over which Lacan stumbles and which he seeks to, if not transcend, then at least apprehend otherwise. He writes: ‘someone could have got a little bit excited about this paternal metaphor and known how to make a little hole.’ And he adds: ‘It is what I have always desired’ (my emphasis). He continues: ‘that someone should make some progress, make a trace for me, begin to show a little path. Anyway, be that as it may, it has never happened and the question of Oedipus is still intact.’

But not altogether, however, because Lacan is really in the business of making this ‘little hole’ in the paternal metaphor and in the question of Oedipus, all the while pretending not to, just at the moment that he goes back to the question of ‘feminine jouissance’. But we should not forget that it was already concerning this central point that he had worked on the Freudian corpus. In substituting the Name of the Father for the Father of the Horde, for the orangutan, he detaches the signifier from masculine reality in an important way, he detaches the Father from the Name, he detaches the Father from the signifier; he disarticulates them in the articulation of his formula. The ‘Name of the Father’ introduces the Name, jettisons the Father in favour of the Name.

In the context of Encore, Lacan makes further progress. It is not simply a question of denaturalizing the differences but of reformulating them by taking into account a splitting of the difference between the
sexes. It is a farewell to the One, to which the emergence of the concept of the Other bears witness – the Other which is not an other nor the other of the One. This Other has a relation to what Lacan calls ‘the other sex’; that is to say, that which is apparently not his at the moment when he speaks (but which he will claim nevertheless). And what is proper to this other sex is not to be, or not only to be, of the order of the All [du Tout], were this to be a lack of All, but rather ‘not-all’; in her essence woman is not-all. In fact, in relation to phallic jouissance, she enjoys [connait] a supplementary remainder and not – Lacan insists – a complementary one, which would take us back to the order of the all and of lack, of privation. In fact he specifies: ‘It is not because she is not-all. She is not that at all. She is fully that. But there is something more ... a jouissance ... beyond the phallus’ the peculiarity of which is that she experiences it but does not know it, because it is not, and cannot be, an object of knowledge. So Lacan makes this little hole in the Father, as he desires to: he calls it God, or the Other. Not the God mouth-hole of theology but the God Hole of Teresa of Avila.

Certain so-called women attest to this Hole, not only in their postures but also in their texts. And it is here that Lacan returns to the example of the mystics, and alights on the case of Teresa of Avila, who was at the heart of Simone de Beauvoir’s chapter. Nevertheless, throughout his long development, he cannot avoid the sarcastic tone that he adopts when he touches on these matters in general and in particular on points concerning women. ‘Woman knows nothing of this jouissance … in all the time that people have been begging them, begging them on their hands and knees … to try and tell us, not a word!’ But ‘there is nevertheless a little connection when you read certain serious persons, like women, as if by chance.’

This supplementary jouissance to which the mystics attest is not in fact parallel to phallic jouissance: it is not part of the phallic economy and is not its alternative – it exceeds it. Woman, as the mystic evidences, takes in the phallic function: ‘she is fully in it. But there is something more.’

The formulation is important, subversive even. Because the ‘more than’, the ‘extra’, passes through the phallic function in order to exceed it. That is to say, there is a modality of desire which goes beyond, exceeding the phallus, that makes a ‘little hole’ in the Father, a little hole of the Other, or of God (we do not distinguish here). Men and women are determined in relation to the phallus – the Freudian position is maintained in this regard – but there is more. The dimension of the Other comes to supplement the dimension of the Father.

So Lacan – going beyond Beauvoir, along the path that she had opened up but not then followed – somehow splits the register of desire. Splits without making it double, without distinguishing, without severing: ‘one sees the “cross-sightedness”’ he says. ‘There you have it, the register of the Father and the register of God – that does not make two Gods but it doesn’t make just one either.’

This, then, is the point where Lacan opens the road to a thought of what he will call ‘the feminine’, which is not foreign to the masculine but is not identical with it. What escapes the phallic even whilst referring to it is no longer thought in terms of lack (as in Freud), but in terms of exceeding. The One of the Freudian phallic law, where sexualisation is marked in quantitative terms of positive and negative – of more and less, as in Aristotle – is surpassed.

The feminine position as a relation to the Other is first located in women. But Lacan recalls that, on the one hand, certain men are situated on the same side as them, and, on the other, that certain mystics can be situated on the side of the phallic function – like Angelus Silesius.

It is not necessary to be a mystic to occupy this position and Lacan himself claims it: ‘And add the writings of Jacques Lacan because they are of the same order’, he writes, placing his own œuvre in this register opened up by mysticism, the order (or disorder) of the ‘more than’.

This remark is a good indication that what is said of ‘jouissance’ as more than phallic jouissance is not just swooning but is inscribed in the text, even supporting the weft of the text, in so far as Truth is not reducible to a knowledge of the object, to a thesis, in so far as it functions as what Lacan calls ‘La langue’ (and what in another way Derrida calls différence – with an α: the movement of differing, already enunciated by Blanchot): a fundamental experience of the writer. This jouissance in/of the text: also revealed, in its own way, by analysis, ‘that is the objectivation of that which the speaking being spends its time speaking of in vain’. Writings, and Lacan’s writings in particular, are woven, at one and the same time, by what refers to the phallic function and what refers to the more than: they are at the same time under the watch [garde] of the Father and the inattention [mégarde] of the Other. I would prefer to say that they are deployed within the ambiguity and indecision of the Father and the Other, between Father and Other. Speaking, writing are between knowledge and non-knowledge, between
knowledge and Truth – for Truth is not science – both at the same time.

Thus Lacan – unlike some of his contemporaries – will not assert that writing is feminine, because the Father and the Other are neither complementary nor separable: writing is made up of both. What is held under the sole watch of the Father or abandoned to the pure inattention of the Other cannot be written. If he claims for himself here the feminine position of the more than, and if we can follow him along this path with the light irony that he himself practises, it is because the form and style of his work overflow the relation to knowledge – the constitution of a science – that is exercised there. In this work, nearly all of it spoken before being written down, there is a point of inspiration that escapes the phallic order to run, as literature runs, in its drift, something which is accorded to loss, and not to the cunning of loss where ‘whoever loses wins’ but to pure loss. Because saying [le dire] has a relation with God [dieu] – Lacan invents the word dier: saying, writing, has a relation with the Other, induces what he calls ‘the God hypothesis’.

So, in Lacanian thought, the Father of the Horde first slips towards the ‘Name of the Father’ as signifier. But God, or the Other, is another signifier. Or rather the same one as the Name of the Father said otherwise – but this ‘otherwise’ matters.

**La pas toute passe par tout**

Simone de Beauvoir – who opened the way to this other order of assertion, which dissociates itself from, without abandoning, the phallic law to answer to the voice of the Other in swooning and action, in serenity and fury, in jouissance – Beauvoir will, in the end, recall that whatever the importance of this opening, it remains in the order of singularity and cannot be negotiated in the form of a common law.

The relation to the Other is not the principle of a new social organization, not of a new status for women. The gush of freedom is not the guarantee of liberation, and it is liberation that first and foremost concerns the author of *The Second Sex*. Without putting it in precisely these same terms, Beauvoir is occupied by the debate – or the vicious circle – that Hannah Arendt did make explicit: the debate between freedom and liberation. That is, one needs freedom in order to liberate oneself, but liberation is necessary for the exercise of freedom. One does not do without the phallic economy; the so-called feminine position does not dispense with it. When Beauvoir frames her last chapter and entitles it ‘Towards Liberation’ she recalls, in Lacanian language, that the not all [pas tout] – or woman as not all [pas toute] – is only such by traversing the all, on pain of otherwise being simply ‘less than’. And there woman is not nothing at all; she is even fully within the phallic order, which is the order of liberation, where the claim of equality may appear and which we therefore cannot do without. But there is something more. Which is no doubt what prevents Beauvoir from succumbing to the fascination of access to the universal that would consist of women ‘becoming man’. Not because she wants to inhabit the artifices of femininity but because she never ceases to say in the tacking of her text that ‘the feminine’ cannot be reduced to the effects of masculine domination.

Beauvoir’s œuvre, without lingering on mysticism, is nevertheless occupied by the question that it inscribes. If she sometimes thinks the becoming of women as an assimilation to the order of men, to what she calls the universal appropriated by the masculine ‘man’, she always retains something that cannot be reduced to this over-ordered order, to this pseudo-universal. What she calls liberation is not access to the masculine position, but that of the not all that passes through the all in order to be not all. The not all that passes through the all [*La pas toute qui passe par tout*]: that is, Beauvoir’s woman, between freedom and liberation.

It goes without saying that Lacan’s thought cannot be reduced to that of Beauvoir; yet at one moment, at least, Jacques and Simone meet, or more exactly, Jacques, reading or rereading Simone, twelve years, then twenty-five years after the appearance of *The Second Sex*, finds within it a fertile point for his own thought, as well as a subtle opening on to the commandment of the One of the phallic law, which however does not replace the One by the Two. And drawing his thread from this reading, he gives back (‘a hundredfold?’) what he has taken from it.

In this confrontation, one cannot forget that Beauvoir’s articulation of her problematic took place immediately after the war – 1948 – and in the framework of dialectical thought, in the grip of the horizon of the All. Lacan’s problematic articulation – in 1960 and especially in 1973 – was still in dialogue with the dialectic but belonged to a philosophical register which had succeeded it, which one calls post-structuralist or post-modern: along with Heidegger, at least, he had broken with the idea of the All. Moreover, between 1948 and 1973, in the course of twenty-five years, women had also shifted ground: it was with the women of 1973 that Lacan recalled Beauvoir ‘the mother of us all’ (Gertrude Stein). But without citing her, without even naming her.
For ‘A huge crocodile in whose jaws you are – that’s the mother’ and ‘One never knows what might suddenly come over her and make her shut her trap.’

The son, if he sneaks away, will not close his trap for a long time. Except when it comes to the Name of the crocodile, to his ‘One’.

Translation by Philip Derbyshire

Notes

2. ‘Ce qui de plus fameux dans l’histoire est resté des femmes, c’est a proprement parler ce qu’on peut en dire d’infamant. On la dit-femme. On la diffame.’
6. Ibid., p. 152.
8. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 188.
10. Ibid., p. 689.
11. François Balmès has analysed the relationships between Lacanian concepts – the Father, the Other, God – in a seminar given at the Colloquium ‘“God is Dead”: Today’, which he organized in January 1998 under the auspices of the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris. It was in this same setting that I presented the elements of what I am developing here under the title ‘Hole and mouth-hole’.
12. One might ask if, in another context, Levinas is not operating a similar distinction in the relation or non-relation of ‘Totality’ and ‘Infinity’ of the Jewish God and the God of the Theologians in *Totality and Infinity* (Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh PA, 1969).
16. Ibid., p. 124.
17. Ibid., p. 13.