

Things to be born(e)

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The title I chose plays on an equivocation that lodges itself in the gap between sound and writing, in the abyss between what is heard of what is said and what is written.

One letter added and one is no longer the master of one's own words. This is the stuff the unconscious is made of, and what psychoanalysts and poets work with.

The unconscious, that is, unconscious desire, means that there is no possibility for the speaking being, for the very fact that he speaks, to make One with what he means, what he wants, what he is or what he says.

At the mercy of the Other, we come into the world as and with things to be born(e). The irrepresentable foreign bodies in the unconscious, true holes in the fabric of knowledge, piercing of the real by the symbolic for what there is no name, Freud discovered them as sex and death.

How does a subject make do with this real and with the lack-in-being that results from it, is what introduces us in the myriad of possible versions of the mother as condenser of "all the values of desire and jouissance" for the human being.

The Freudian child was 'his majesty the baby'. A substitute that symbolically provides the woman of what she would have not received. The phallic value of the child gives it a function of 'plug' for the mother. He fills her up, he completes her, he allows her to finally 'have'. Normalised pathway for the access to femininity, in reducing the woman to the mother, Freud answers (not completely) his "what does a woman want?" She wants the phallus and she may access it via her child. When the wish 'to have a baby' does not include the desire 'to be a mother', the clinic of the maternal ravage may unfold.

The fact that reproduction may now be divorced from sexuality is just one of the ways in which the bypassing of the symbolic via science opens up to an unlimited whose consequences we receive, sometimes, in the form of the realisation of the worst.

However, Lacan refuted the thesis that reduced the child to a symbolic substitute of the gift longed for from the father. The Lacanian child is something else. It is above all an object. And a very real one, for he is animated. In this sense, it is Jacques-Alain Miller's thesis, "the function of the child as a stopper of the maternal lack must not make us forget his power to divide the mother. The child divides the subject who accesses the maternal function between her being of mother and her being of woman". This is why for some women the struggle as desiring subjects does not emerge until they become mothers (actually or potentially).

Because Lacan rejects the idea that the mother and the child form a unit, and he shows that she is never alone with him, as there is always the third element -the signifier of desire- that comes in between them, this division becomes at the same time that which allows for the child not to complete the mother and that which gives her insatiable character, her voraciousness.

I am not original. The quote I found is well known. It comes from Lacan's Seminar 17 of 1970 and it reads: "The mother's desire is not something that is bearable just like that, that you are indifferent to. It always wreaks havoc. A huge crocodile in whose jaws you are... One never knows what might suddenly come over her and make her shut her trap. That is what the mother's desire is".

What cannot be born(e) 'just like that', that to which one cannot be indifferent is the mother's desire. It is not the mother as such or her wish to be a mother. It is the relation that the subject incarnating the maternal Other has with lack and with its beyond. This is structural and does not depend on how good, bad, present, absent, warm or cold the mother may appear to be. Even when the desire to be a mother is present, the child does not resolve the question of how the subject relates to the jouissance that exceeds the phallic norm. This means that if the child is to inscribe himself in the structure of language as a desiring subject, the unnameable of sex and death have to remain unanswered for the subject mother.

This is why "it is crucial that the child does divide the mother. The anguished mother, the anxious mother is precisely she for whom the child fills up the lack too much". In other words, "she who as a woman desires very little or does not desire at all. If the child is not to be trapped – bribed, says Lacan- into the maternal fantasy, she must find the signifier of desire elsewhere, in a body other than that of her child". Sometimes it is the partner who refuses his body as a possible site where this signifier can be found, and the woman gives ground on her feminine being hiding beneath the clothes of the maternal care, or duty.

What is this child for this mother? It is one way of presenting the question. What is this mother for this child? This is the side that reminds us that, beyond being born as an organism into this world, the subject is born to his or her unfathomable decision of being, in the choice to consent

or refuse being plugged into a symbolic existence that includes, ineluctably, a loss. This choice, he or she too has to bear it.

The mother is blamed. The mother feels guilty. Too much, too little. Too soon, too late. Dislocated from nature, what bizarre desire gave origin to our existence dumping us in the anguish of time? For life contains death in it, and that is what every child is born to. It is both that the mother gives, and she has to bear this, even if she does not know it.

Poets know well that words can be used to border the void of the unbearable. True poets also know there are no opposites: irremediable ill from language our truths always lie, and our love is drenched in hatred. What we desire we fear and we reject... no wonder panic and inhibition are the signs of our times. Being is being split and the veils we craft are memorials of the horror we dare not to face. But precisely because of this, the unbearable for each subject may also be the place where he or she can breathe by asking: who am I?

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