

Medea¹

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From an impossibility determined by an articulation of semblants, we can conclude that *there exists* or *there is*. That's the case in mathematics. It all depends on the method of construction that is authorized.

Under what conditions is it legitimate to state *there is* (il y a)? Or, as Lacan condensed it, to say, *there's* (y'a)?³

For example, the test of the pass is supposed to respond to the question of knowing whether *there's an analyst*. From the jamming together of semblants in the waning of an analysis, is "some analyst," as real, brought into existence? Or should we stick to the aphorism of Charles Trenet, *There's Joy*.

And by what right could we say, *Now, there's a woman* (Ici y'a d'la femme)?

At the Congress of last Sunday, our friend Colette Soler posed the question of what Lacan means by "a true woman." I immediately proposed an answer that is, for me, the analytic response: "a true woman" is not a mother.

¹ ["Médée à mi-dire," *La Letter Mensuelle* 122 (1993): 19-20.—Translator's Note]

² This note is a rewritten extract from my course in the Clinical Section in Paris, *On the Nature of Semblants*. I took up the theme of Medea in a lecture given in March of 1992 in Buenos Aires, then in Barcelona, which was published in Spanish by Hilario Cid Vivas in the *Correo Andaluz*. I provided a sequel on the theme "mother/woman" when closing the conference *Madre Donna* in Rome (to appear in Italian in the proceedings).

³ [This piece plays upon the French expression *il y a*, 'there is'. It seems to me that Miller is especially interested in expression as followed by a partitive. This nuance is difficult to capture in English, and at the end of the next paragraph, the connection between "some analyst" and "some joy"—from the title of Charles Trenet's song "Y'a d'la joie"—is entirely lost.—TN]

In psychoanalysis, a mother is one who has. She only falls under that concept insofar as she is plentiful. A true woman, on the other hand, at least as Lacan makes her possible existence flicker, is one who doesn't have—and who, by this “not having,” makes something. Thus all the special affinities that she maintains with the semblant. And thus the kinship between her functioning and that of the analyst, such that I wrote last year, on the basis of the *Transference* seminar, $\$ \rightarrow (a)$, making something out of nothing—the nothing of the subject—making an object that is a semblant. When that happens, it isn't without effects in the real.

Let's get to the point: A true woman is always Medea.

Medea kills the children she had with Jason, children she loves, but not to the extent of consenting to be their mother. She is fallen from the place that she held in the desire of her man. The feminine act, as Jean-Louis Gault has put it, is to tear out what is most precious, the *agalma*. At the same time, she hits the man where he lacks (*dans sa béance*). Her act, in effect, is not care; it is neither to nourish the man or to protect him. It's to strike him. Her threat—to be always able to do it.

A true woman is the subject when it has nothing—nothing to lose. A true woman, according to Lacan, doesn't retreat from anything, before any sacrifice, when what is most precious is at stake—she doesn't retreat from anything, where the man, obsessed, tangled up by what he has to lose, unable to advance, diverts the gaze, moves on to something else. That's what makes Freud say, women don't have a superego.

That's also why Lacan compares Madeleine—not Proust's madeleine that melts in his mouth when he drinks tea, but the Madeleine of André Gide—to Medea. In a passage in his *écrit* “The Youth of Gide,” Lacan devoted several lines to Euripides's *Medea*. On page 761, he writes, “Poor Jason who has gone off to conquer the Golden Fleece of happiness—he doesn't recognize

Medea!”⁴ Gide doesn’t recognize his Madeleine—abandoned for Yves Allégret—who sacrifices without flinching their sublime correspondence, the fruits of their love.⁵

Medea allows us to see what happens when “some woman” (*de la femme*)⁶ lurking inside the mother emerges, when the logic of the signifier *woman* prevails over *mother*, when castration overcomes the having that masks it.

We have to get used to this: *becoming a mother* and *being a woman* don’t overlap at all. Thus the affliction that Lacan expressed in rather crude language: “They all want to have a litter.” So, is there no other path for a woman than the “wish for a child,” the will to maternity? Is having a child the most authentic path for femininity? Well, according to Freud himself, the child is nothing but a substitute.

We must also wonder when a man fusses and frets about getting the woman he loves pregnant. Wouldn’t this be so that she can be a bit more mother, which gives him some safety? But *not* to make her pregnant, isn’t that better—when perhaps what he himself wants is to be that child? We won’t make any recommendations. There’s an inconsistency.

The non-existence of a sexual relation is a result of an inconsistency. It must go through that inconsistency to be isolated as the logical consistency of object (*a*)—“fallen from an obscure catastrophe”—all the more obscure since we’ve learned to recognize in it the inconsistency of the Other.

—Translated by Dan Collins

⁴ [Bruce Fink’s translation, from the complete English *Écrits*.—TN]

⁵ [Apparently a slip. Madeleine Gide burned her correspondence with André in 1918 when he abandoned her to take a trip with Marc Allégret. Yves Allégret was a film director and Marc’s younger brother.—TN]

⁶ [Again in the partitive sense.—TN]