

## FREUD AND LACAN ON LOVE: A PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION

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It is clear that I went into medicine because I suspected that relations between man and woman played a decisive role in the symptoms of human beings [...]. The ultimate truth is that things do not work between man and woman.<sup>1</sup>

Lacan 1976, 16

The terms with which thinkers have attempted to understand the incredibly complex human experience of love are highly varied and have shifted considerably over the course of time. In addition to the Eastern traditions, which I will not address here, there are at least two major Western traditions – the Greek and the Catholic – both of which have evolved considerably over the millennia.

In the Catholic tradition, an opposition is made between “physical love” and “ecstatic love,” but, according to Rousselot (1907), physical love was not understood in the Middle Ages as corporal or bodily but rather as “natural love,” the kind of love one finds in nature between mother bear and cub, for example (“natural love” was apparently the term preferred also by St. Thomas Aquinas); sensuality was apparently not included under the heading of love at all. It should not in any way be assumed that all of the theological thinkers within the Catholic Church even at one particular moment in time would have agreed with the opposition between physical and ecstatic love, finding it adequate to cover all aspects of love.

The Greek tradition, on the other hand, provides us with the well-known term “Eros,” which seems to cover a broad spectrum of experiences, much like Freud’s term “libido” which, as Lacan (1932) suggests, is

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of Lacan’s work here are by me.

an extremely broad theoretical entity that goes well beyond the specialized sexual desire of adults. This notion tends rather toward “desire,” antiquity’s Eros understood very broadly – namely, as the whole set of human beings’ appetites that go beyond their needs, the latter being strictly tied to self-preservation. (256)

Nevertheless, Freud, like many other analysts after him, tried to define some of the components of libido, and was led to use numerous different terms at different times in the development of his theory – “love,” “desire,” “affection,” “cathexis” – and even to define each of those terms somewhat differently from decade to decade.

Let me thus make it clear at the outset that I make no pretense here of extracting some single coherent theory of love from Freud’s work or from Lacan’s work, much less from the two combined; instead I shall try to explore and compare and contrast the many different attempts to discuss love by both authors. Let me also mention at the outset that the experience of love is examined for the most part by these two thinkers from a male perspective, and we shall have to either extrapolate or completely revise their notions of love to accommodate a female perspective, assuming that there is a distinctly female perspective.

### *Narcissism and Love*

In 1914, Freud takes up the subject of love largely from the perspective of narcissism. He sees love as involving a transfer of libido from the subject’s own self or person (*Ich*, not yet *das Ich*) to another person, a transfer he refers to as a cathexis or an investment. Such an investment can be made for a variety of reasons, as we shall see, but note first that the investment is revocable – that is, it can be taken back at certain times as need be. Note too that when such an investment is made, the subject’s own self is less highly invested, or as Freud puts it at times, his self-regard diminishes, the idea being that each subject only has a certain amount of libido at his disposal and thus if some is transferred to an object less remains for the subject. (It is not terribly clear here whether Freud thinks of the object as a representation in the subject’s psyche or as a real object in the “outside world”; his language would seem to suggest the latter, in which case it is not clear how the libido passes “outside” the subject.)

In this first detailed discussion of love, Freud (1914) strenuously upholds the distinction between ego-libido (libido invested in oneself or one’s person) and object-libido, even though the sum total of both of them must always

remain constant in his system (an increase in object-libido necessarily leads to a decrease in ego-libido and vice versa; there does not seem to be any room here for the notion that both object- and ego-libido could grow simultaneously).

$$EL \text{ (ego-libido)} + OL \text{ (object-libido)} = C \text{ (constant)}$$

The first form of ego-libido Freud discusses he terms “primary narcissism”; it is the kind of concern for itself that every animal has, insofar as it considers itself to be worthy of being alive, meaning worthy of eating and of defending itself (activities associated with the “ego instincts”). To Freud, libido attached to oneself does not pose any sort of special problem in terms of how it got that way – it is automatic. In Lacan’s work it is more elaborate, not automatic. In Freud’s work, we might call it “animal narcissism.”

When one becomes attached to or makes an investment in an object, one’s narcissism declines: some of the libido attached to one’s own person flows over onto the object. Should one lose that object, the libido invested in it flows back, like a fluid, to oneself, leading to what Freud calls “secondary narcissism” (strangely enough, associated by Freud with schizophrenia, though more commonly with ordinary physical illness which makes one decaject or divest from those around one and focus all of one’s attention upon oneself).

According to Freud we choose objects of two fundamentally different types:

1) If we choose someone who resembles or reminds us in some way of the person who looked after us as children and satisfied our earliest needs, we make what Freud calls an “anaclitic”- (or “attachment”-) type object-choice (love is here, as it were, propped up on need). The object may resemble the original (that is, the early caretaker) in several ways or in but one: name, eye color, hair color, or smile, for example. Falling in love is based here on confusion of the object with a preexisting ideal image we have in our heads: we equate the partner with our mother, father, or some other primary caretaker.

2) If we choose as an object someone who resembles us instead of resembling some other person, we make a “narcissistic” object-choice. The resemblance here may be quite global or involve nothing more than the primary sexual characteristics, the object chosen being of the same sex as the subject. Falling in love here is based on the confusion of self with other, on the virtual identification of self with other (me = other).

These two different kinds of object-choice lead to two different situations as concerns narcissism or self-regard:

1) If we fall in love with someone who resembles one of our earliest caretakers, our ego is depleted: we are at the lowest level of ego-libido and at the “highest phase” of object-libido. The main examples of this are a male subject who falls in love with a female who reminds him of his mother – she does not necessarily resemble him in any way and is of the opposite sex – and a female subject who falls in love with a male who reminds her of her father: he does not necessarily resemble her in any way and is of the opposite sex.<sup>2</sup> In these cases, the object is felt to be everything and the subject to be nothing.

$$\text{EL (virtually zero) + OL (constant) = C (constant)}$$

Naturally, however, the object does not fully coincide with the mother or father, and this will be discovered in due time, presumably leading some of the object-libido to flow back to the ego.

2) “The state of being in love” does not deplete the ego of libido, however, when the object chosen is similar to oneself, for one is essentially in love with oneself in the other or with the other in oneself (me = other).

$$\text{EL = OL = C}$$

As Lacan puts it in Seminar XX, “*elles se mêment dans l'autre,*” they love each other as the same” or “they love themselves in each other” (p. 79/85). In Freud’s view, men tend to love, to invest their libido in objects, whereas women need to be loved, not to love. Freud’s view here leads to the following:

Man: EL = zero, OL = C

Woman: EL = C, OL = zero

Although the association between women and cats who are standoffish and wrapped up in themselves is a longstanding one, there still seem to be plenty of women who feel a need to love and not simply to be loved! (Does Freud restrict women to loving either themselves or children, but not men?) In any case, Freud introduces here a curious facet of love, which would seem to apply not only to

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<sup>2</sup> More complex configurations may exist in the case of homosexual object-choice, for the object chosen resembles both oneself and an early caretaker.

men, which is that we human beings are attracted to people (women and children, for example) and animals (cats, for example) that show little or no interest in us. Are we then interested in anything that seems narcissistically wrapped up in itself (its interest in itself pointing the way for our own interest or desire?) or are we interested in these things precisely because they seem inaccessible? Do we pursue them because they shun us and wound our own narcissism? Do we pursue them because they seem the most valuable – valuable precisely because they are so difficult to win – because we suspect that we will never win them? That would seem to be the obsessive’s unwitting goal. He loves them because he can rest assured that they will not love him back, love him in return. He cannot then be overwhelmed by their love, something the obsessive is often likely to be. Since women are defined by Freud as wrapped up in themselves, they can be loved safely by obsessives (anaclitically). Yet the basis for anaclitic love is object-choice based on a past loving figure. This leads to a paradox: the man who makes an anaclitic choice essentially selects a woman based on her similarity to his mother, but with the important difference that this woman cannot love him, for she simply wants to be loved. The contradiction is that she will not give him the real satisfactions that were supposedly at the basis of his object-choice.

I’ll leave that as an open paradox here, and will confine myself to suggesting that Freud provides us here with something of an obsessive theory of love, allowing us to speculate about what a hysterical theory of love might look like. (Giving what you do not have?)

The more usual Freudian case would seem to be less all or nothing, as follows:

Man:  $EL (1/3C) + OL (2/3C) = C$  (constant)

Woman:  $EL (2/3C) + OL (1/3C) = C$  (constant)

The quotient of ego-libido ( $1/3C$ ) comes to the man from the woman as if from his mother, and to the woman ( $2/3C$ ) from the man as if from her father.

It might not be too unfair to suggest that *Freud’s anaclitic type of object-choice is made with a view to “real satisfactions”* – even if the choice of object is fostered by one or more symbolic or imaginary traits, the emphasis here seems to be on the search to find anew the kind of satisfactions one experienced with a caretaker as a small child – whereas *the narcissistic type of object-choice is made with a view to imaginary satisfactions*, so to speak, or perhaps even with a view to avoiding a decrease in primary narcissism. It involves wanting to see oneself reflected in the other, and is imaginary in that the other is thought to be the spitting image of oneself, or at least like oneself in some important regard. In any case, the first seems to emphasize the real, the second the imaginary. (This

is curious because Freud's earlier papers on love, that I will discuss further on, seem to emphasize the symbolic.)

Nevertheless, Freud already introduces a possible symbolic component here insofar as he indicates that narcissistic object-choice can involve the choice of someone who is like you now, someone who is like you were before, someone who seems to be the way you would like to be, or someone who was once part of yourself (unless he is referring to Siamese twins who become surgically separated, I guess he is thinking of mother and child). It is especially the part about "someone who is the way you would like to be" that introduces the question of ideals – that is, the ego-ideal – which shifts things to the symbolic register.

### *Love for the Ego-Ideal*

At an intrapsychic level, Freud (1914) suggests that when the ego-ideal forms (based on our parents' ideals, their approval and disapproval, and what we think we need to be to be loved by them), libido is displaced onto it, and we obtain satisfaction from fulfilling the ideal and dissatisfaction when we do not live up to the ideal. He refers to the ego-ideal here as "imposed from without" (100), presumably by our parents, suggesting thereby that it introduces a kind of alienation: something grafted upon us that we can perhaps never achieve or live up to, a kind of asymptotic project. It is not so automatic a process, I would suggest, however. We have to accept these parents too to assimilate their ideals. We may nevertheless continue to feel it is a sort of foreign body, something grafted upon us. In certain cases, we come to love the ideal more than ourselves; we feel that we are worth nothing next to our ideal, nothing without our ideal; if we cannot realize it, if we must give it up, we are indeed nothing whatsoever.

We feel miserable when we do not live up to it, we have low self-regard or low self-esteem (the term that has had such galloping success in the United States), and can often only find a way out by finding a love object who we think embodies those ideals: we put a lover in the place of the ego-ideal and love the person in the place of that ideal. Freud suggests here that the choice of lover is often based on narcissism, for the goal is "to be [one's] own ideal once more ... as [one was] in childhood" (100). This harks back to the "primary narcissism" theme whereby we all supposedly take ourselves to be her/his "majesty the baby" right from the outset. Here one seems to want to love someone who is like oneself but better than oneself. Freud refers to this as a "cure by love" (101), the problem that is cured presumably being the libidinal depletion of the subject, for Freud writes, "in the last resort we must begin to love in order

not to fall ill” (85). This curious claim would then seem to apply to men more than women. Note, however, that this foreshadows problems for both men and women. For men, the beloved woman is put on a pedestal: ideals are projected onto her (for example, beauty, purity, truth, and love) as the man tries to put and keep her in an idealized position. She is not chosen to satisfy his needs like his mother did here but to be his better half, be what he feels incapable of living up to. This impedes his sexual interest in her. Problems arise for the woman too should she take the bait and identify with the position she is put in by men: frigidity, according to Lacan (1966, 733). What if she puts him in the place of her ego-ideal? Is he loved by her then as (a more perfect) father? Is he put on a pedestal while she takes herself to be worthless? Freud does not expound upon this.

Even though Freud introduces the notion of the ego-ideal here, he nevertheless seems to situate the choice of an object that embodies that ideal as a narcissistic choice, perhaps simply because it is based so entirely on *one's own* ego-ideal, not on the beloved's ego-ideal.

### *Love Triangles*

#### *“A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men” (1910)*

The symbolic dimension is emphasized more strongly by Freud in two of his earlier papers on love, the first being “A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men” (1910). Here Freud outlines a specific type of obsessive “male love” (as opposed to “normal love”) in which a father-like rival must be present for a man to fall in love with a woman. She is uninteresting to him without this formal, structural, symbolic condition, which is obviously related to the Oedipal triangle (see Fink 1997, Chapter 8, for an example). Freud indicates that the man needs to feel jealous and has “*gratifying impulses of rivalry and hostility*” toward the other man. The relationship to the woman alone is not gratifying enough for him. A man may have a whole series of such attachments, showing that it is not the particular women he gets involved with who are important but rather *the structural situation itself*. Should a woman he is interested in leave her boyfriend, fiancé, or husband, the triangle falls apart and the woman is no longer of any interest to him.

This is where Freud introduces his famous Madonna/whore dialectic. The mother, who was formerly seen as a pure Madonna-like figure, falls from grace when the child learns the facts of life and realizes that she must have had sexual relations with the boy's father. Suddenly she is seen as not so different from a

whore. According to Freud, this often leads to a rescue fantasy: that of finding a whore and restoring her to her earlier state of purity.

Freud suggests here that in “normal love” only a few characteristics of the mother as a prototype are found in the object chosen by the man. However, in the “male love” of the type he outlines in this article, the mother-surrogates are very much like the mother (though perhaps primarily due to their structural situation). I will simply raise a few questions about Freud’s formulation here: The mother had been imbued with tons of libido and then lost a lot; the “fallen” women he becomes interested in do not have much and need to have it restored? Or is it that after the mother’s fall, all libido went to the old ideal image of her and the male tries to redirect some of that to himself? If he rescues a woman, does he himself become worthy of love again? He was no longer worthy because of his mother’s fall? When she fell he fell? Is there no constant total level of libido here? Did object-libido not get transformed back into ego-libido?

*“On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love” (1912)*

Historically speaking, this article at times seems quite dated (in particular, its discussion of the Viennese bourgeois household), and yet certain aspects of it seem to still hold true. “Love” here is at first distinguished from “desire,” which Freud seems to reserve for sexual desire (183), but then perhaps the two are confused in *Trieb*, “drive,” which is always rendered in the English translation as “instinct,” and perhaps designates the *global* libidinal investment one makes in an object, regardless of how it is distributed between (“attachment”?) love and sexual desire.

Freud makes it clear from the outset that something is rotten in the state of Eros or in *la carte du tendre*: “We must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual drive itself is unfavorable to the realization of *complete satisfaction*” (188–89). This might be viewed as a forerunner of Lacan’s famous claim that “there’s no such thing as a sexual relationship.”

An example Freud provides is that of a man who is inclined to make an anacletic object-choice, that is, a choice based on a resemblance between a woman and the man’s mother; he has a strong sensual tie to his mother and sister (182) and, *due to the prohibition of incest*, he becomes impotent. What seems to happen here is that the affectionate current remains active, and the man is able to choose a woman like his mother, but the sensual or sexual current becomes utterly and completely repressed. Since to him the only suitable love object is a woman like his mother or sister, and yet all sexuality with such a woman is prohibited, sexual desire in the form of erections in the object’s presence are

impossible. The new love object is equated in his mind with his mother or sister for all sexual intents and purposes.

Freud suggests here that in “the normal male” the affectionate current (love) and the sensual current (sexual desire) have to combine or fuse (180). However, according to Freud this rarely happens; indeed, he suggests that impotence due to psychical causes is very widespread, especially if we consider cases of *partial impotence* (now generally referred to as erectile dysfunction or ED, reminding us of Oedipus) and men’s tendencies to select lower-class wives (184–85), the latter presumably not resembling the men’s bourgeois mothers. The solution of choosing wives who are of lower-class extraction than the men’s own mothers presumably allows sexual desire to appear separately: the men do not love these wives as they did their mothers, and there is no real combination or fusion of love and desire here; they desire these lower-class wives but do not love them *per se*.

Hence the two components of Eros here are:

- love: affectionate current, attachment, anaclisis
- desire: sensual, sexual

And the usual configuration of love and desire for men with partial impotence is as follows:

- 1) love for a bourgeois woman (Madonna); desire impossible
- 2) desire for a low-class woman (whore); love impossible

Here there seems to be some sensual tie to the mother who is also loved, but also some possible sexual desire for other women as long as they do not become love objects; if they become love objects over the course of time, they evoke the mother; if they become esteemed like the mother, impotence results. Hence the importance of continually *debasing the sexual object* so that she never seems worthy of esteem like one’s mother. Things only work out as long as love and desire remain separate. Freud’s implicit assumption here seems to be that if love and desire fuse later in life (on the post-Oedipal, not preoedipal object), there is no need to repress one of them or leave one of them out of the Eros equation. Qualifying the more usual case, however, Freud says, “where they love they do not desire and where they desire they cannot love” (183).

There are, thus, two different possibilities here: In the first case, in which we see total impotence, there has been a total fusion of love and desire for the mother, and desire becomes repressed due to the prohibition of incest; here, then, love persists but desire is impossible. In the second case, in which we see

impotence with women who are like the mother but not with “lower-class women,” there has been only a partial fusion of love and desire for the mother. Note that, although Freud says early on in the article that it is normal for love and desire to fuse, their fusion cannot, he seems to indicate here, involve or center around the mother. It would seem that the fusion of love and desire – that is, of the affectionate and sensual currents – must not occur before the prohibition of incest occurs but only afterward, after the mother is given up as the primary love object. In 1921, Freud makes it clear that he thinks this fusion should take place in adolescence, thus after the resolution of the Oedipus complex; but what then brings about the fusion? Hormones? Socialization? Freud does not tell us how or why such fusion occurs.

Freud’s conclusion here regarding men is as follows: “Anyone who is to be really free and happy in love must have surmounted his respect for women and have come to terms with the idea of incest with his mother or sister” (186). It would seem, in other words, that a man must stop putting women on a pedestal, stop seeing them as Madonna-like figures (I assume he does not mean that a man must lose all respect for women, although some might disagree with me here; does respect for a woman automatically put her in a class with the mother and sister?), for in such cases he cannot desire them sexually. The second part of Freud’s sentence would seem to suggest that a man must come to terms with the fact that sexuality with a woman always involves some incestuous component; and incestuous impulses invariably appear in every analysis, assuming it is taken far enough, whether or not there has been direct sexual contact between siblings or parent and child.

It is not entirely clear how we should characterize this configuration from the standpoint of the imaginary, symbolic, and real. Freud suggests that the choice of an object like one’s mother is an anaclitic object-choice, and yet the mother here is idealized, placed on a symbolic pedestal, as it were. This idealization seems to be primarily symbolic, insofar as it is not based on a resemblance with oneself at the level of images (physical resemblance), that is, of the imaginary, but rather on culturally valued characteristics leading to “respect”: social position and rank, respectability, and so on.

Now what does Freud say about *women* in this article on a supposed *universal* tendency to debasement in the sphere of love? He says that women have little need to debase their sexual object (186), but he says almost nothing as to why. Don’t they love and become at least partially attached sexually to their father? Is it because they do not have to give him up really? Because there is no real need to repress their love for him? Just a gradual transfer from one man to another, perhaps? Or is it rather that love, in the majority of instances, remains attached to the mother while sexual desire targets the father?

Whatever the case may be, Freud suggests that women often need there to be a prohibition to get sexually excited; this showed great foresight regarding a whole series of French films in which a man's wife or mistress can only get excited if they make love in public places where it is not allowed and where there is a risk of getting caught. Freud says that this leads in women to love based on certain structural conditions involving prohibition or "forbiddenness" (186). But Freud does not really say why. Is it that the prohibition of incest has not been very strong and must be evoked or provoked?

Freud foreshadows some of Lacan's comments on the courtly love tradition when he says here that men create their own barriers to love so as to heighten its pleasures (187). "If sexual freedom is unrestricted" satisfaction is not full: indeed, it never is. Education is such that satisfaction never is full. Civilization is self-defeating to some degree in this respect: education of the "love drives" only happens at a cost, that cost being "a sensible [that is, palpable or tangible] loss of pleasure" (189-90).

To recoup some of that loss, it would seem that we erect barriers so as to heighten our pleasure; does this explain in any way women's often-remarked fascination with "bad boys," guys who presumably do not fit the mold of their own idealized father figures? Or are those bad boys simply new editions of their own fathers who were not terribly idealizable in the first place? In certain cases at least, it seems that for a woman to desire, there cannot be much resemblance between her *beloved* ideal father and a man for whom she can feel sexual *desire*; perhaps she too cannot so easily love and desire in the same place, cannot so easily love and desire the same object. To be sexually excited, she has to be with the wrong kind of guy, a guy who has been around a lot, who does not treat her like a princess the way her father did, for the latter would lead to love, not desire. He must not give her a respectful, loving look, but rather an insolent, lustful one.

Before turning to Lacan on passion, let us consider how Freud formulates the drive-component of love. In 1921, Freud suggests that sensual love "is nothing more than object-cathexis on the part of the sexual drives with a view to directly sexual satisfaction, a cathexis which expires, moreover, when this aim has been reached." He also refers to sensual love here as "earthly love" (112), and indicates that it is uninhibited in its aim. "Earthly love" seems thus to correspond to what he earlier called "sexual desire." The investment in the object here is short-lived, and disappears as soon as sexual satisfaction is achieved. He goes on to say, however, that when prohibited, sensual aims become repressed and often give rise to "aim-inhibited drives" (111-12), referring to affectionate love as just such an aim-inhibited drive. Affectionate love here seems to involve idealization of the object, attention being paid to its spiritual merits as opposed to its sensual merits.

Note that *affectionate love is not considered here to precede sexual love, but rather to result from the inhibition of sensual love*. Earlier in Freud's work, these had seemed to be separate currents that were somewhat independent from each other; here it would seem that it is due to the prohibition of certain real satisfactions that a kind of symbolic idealization occurs, leading to *an affectionate current which is secondary*, not primary. Idealization, as we see it in courtly love, would thus seem to involve sublimation of the sexual drives. This 1921 formulation is rather different from what Freud had said earlier: "affectionate love" before was either anaclitic or narcissistic.

*Passion: The Ideal Ego and the Ego-Ideal*

The phenomenon of passionate love (*amour-passion*) [is] determined by the image of the ideal ego.

Lacan 1966, 344

Owing to constraints of space here, I will confine myself to a discussion of Lacan's earliest formulations on love and passion. I will assume that the reader is familiar with Lacan's work in "The Mirror Stage" and "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis" where he emphasizes the formative, defining role of images in the animal kingdom, and points out that in many species a significant developmental process requires seeing something: an image of a member of the same species. He postulates that in human beings, the ego first forms between the ages of six and 18 months on the basis of images one sees of oneself in the mirror (or any other reflecting surface), or of images of children similar in age to oneself. And he suggests that the ego as precipitated in the mirror stage has a certain quantum of love or libido attached to it, which he refers to as narcissistic libido. Unlike Freud, he does not think that we cathect ourselves automatically, like animals do. In his revised version of the mirror stage in Seminar VIII, Lacan (1991) suggests that the mirror image is internalized and invested with libido because of an approving gesture (a nod, for example, related to Freud's *einzigster Zug*) made by the parent holding the child before the mirror or watching the child look at itself in the mirror. It is owing to the parent's recognition, acknowledgment, or approval that the ideal image of oneself seen in the mirror (the "ideal ego") takes on such importance. It is not internalized unless it is *ratified* by a person of importance to the child, and this ratification instates what Freud calls the "ego-ideal" (*Ichideal*).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For discussions of the earlier and later versions of the mirror stage, see Fink (1995,

*Narcissus*

Let us briefly consider the case of Narcissus. In the myth, Narcissus is not interested in girls – he is not interested in the nymphs, whether Echo or any of the others. A maiden who is shunned by him prays that he will be made to feel unrequited love, and indeed he does. He becomes so enamored of his image in a fountain, thinking it is a water-spirit living in the fountain, that “he cherished the flame that consumed him, so that by degrees he lost his color, his figure, and [his] beauty ... He pined away and died” (Bulfinch 1979, 121).

The image of himself that Narcissus sees is just that, an image, indeed the kind of image that is the stuff of the mirror stage. He does not endow the image with such symbolic qualities as honesty, integrity, intelligence, or what have you, but rather simply with beauty. That beauty fascinates him; he is captured by it as certain predators are captured by the peacock’s eyespots on its feathers or the rabbit is by the weasel’s mesmerizing look. It captivates him, it hypnotizes him, he can do nothing but gaze at it. There is a kind of mortal passion or fatal attraction here for this image, for this beautiful reflection of himself that closely – oh so closely – resembles himself. It is still more ideal than he is insofar as it is totalizing, that is, shows him virtually all of himself at once, creating a harmonious whole that he can never get a glimpse of in any other way.

The problem for Narcissus is that he is unable to take this image into himself, to introject it, to internalize it the way one does through the help of the Other in the mirror stage. Even when one is able to internalize it, one remains alienated from it insofar as one can only approach it asymptotically, as Lacan puts it; one always remains at some distance from fully inhabiting this ideal image of oneself. Nevertheless, in Narcissus’ case the image remains exterior, outside himself in a sense.

*Sibling rivalry*

A 1922 paper by Freud, “Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality,” seems to have played an important role in Lacan’s work on love; it is no doubt significant that Lacan (1932) himself translated this particular paper by Freud into French. In this paper, Freud notes an interesting contrast between something that occurs in certain cases of homosexuality and something that occurs in paranoia. In certain cases of homosexuality, we find, Freud tells us, a situation in which brothers who initially rived with each oth-

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1997, and especially 2005).

er for their mother's attention later become "the first homosexual love-objects" for each other (231). Owing to the repression of sibling rivalry, love displaces from the mother to the brother with whom one rivaled. Early antagonism turns into affection:<sup>4</sup>

manifest love for sibling  
repressed hatred for sibling

What strikes Freud here is not so much the reversal of hostility into love, which is common enough, but rather that it is precisely the opposite of what happens in paranoia where it is the person who was originally loved who later becomes the hated persecutor. Love turns to hate in paranoia, hatred to love in this case of sibling rivalry. Note that there is a gain in ego-libido here: object-libido attached to the mother returns to the subject who falls in love with someone like himself.

Lacan comments on this in his paper on the Papin sisters in *Le Minotaure* 3/4 (1933–34), written a year after his translation of Freud's text was published. He says, when "the forced reduction of the early hostility between brothers occurs, an abnormal inversion of this hostility into desire can occur" giving rise to "an affective fixation still very close to the solipsistic ego, a fixation that warrants the label 'narcissistic' and in which the object chosen is as similar as possible to the subject; this is why it takes on a homosexual character."

In other words, whereas Freud perhaps saw this reversal of hate into love among brothers as a nonpsychotic path to homosexuality (nonpsychotic insofar as it involves repression, a specifically neurotic form of negation), Lacan, at this very early stage of his work, emphasizes the importance of the "*solipsistic ego*" in such cases. He mentions that all of the persecutors of Aimée, the psychotic woman whose case he discusses at length in his doctoral dissertation (1932), were duplicates or stand-ins for her first persecutor, her older sister, whom she also loved earlier on in life. He suggests here that a reversal of love into hatred

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<sup>4</sup> Freud (1922) also describes here another way in which homosexual object-choice may come about: he mentions a boy who is fixated on his mother and who, a few years after puberty, comes to identify with her and takes as his love object a boy around his age at the time the identification occurred. For many years thereafter, perhaps, it is boys of that age that attract him—in one case of my own, a homosexual male was particularly attracted for some 20 years to boys between around 15 and 17 years old, his moral scruple here being that they were minors, under age. Freud qualifies this as a solution to the Oedipus complex which involves remaining true to his mother while retiring in favor of his father by not competing with him for his mother's love (230–31); this is similar to the explanation he provides in a reversed form regarding the famous case of the "young homosexual woman."

occurred in her case, leading to her dramatic assault on an actress who was one of the stand-ins for her sister. The series of her persecutors is made up of “the doublets, triplets, and successive ‘printings’ of a prototype [of her older sister]. This prototype has a twofold value, both affective and representative” (253). Consider a few of the comments he makes about Aimée:

The future victim [a famous actress of the time] is not her only persecutor. Just as certain characters in primitive myths turn out to be doublets of a heroic type, other persecutors appear behind the actress, and we shall see that she herself is not the final prototype. We find Sarah Bernhardt, who is criticized in Aimée’s writings, and Mrs. C., a novelist whom Aimée wanted to accuse in a communist newspaper. We thus see the value, which is more representative than personal, of the persecutor that the patient recognized for herself. She is the stereotypical famous woman, who is adored by the public, newly successful, and living in the lap of luxury. And although the patient attacks the lives, artifices, and corruption of such women vigorously in her writings, one must highlight the ambivalence of her attitude; for she too, as we shall see, would like to be a novelist, have a place in the footlights, lead a life of luxury, and have influence on the world. (164)

In a word, the women who become her persecutors are women who live the kind of life she herself would like to lead. They are the very image of a woman worthy of love in her eyes; they are what she feels she would have to be in order to be loved by herself, to be as loved by herself as she loves others: they are her ideal. Lacan goes on to say, regarding one of the persecutors, Miss C. de la N., that “the person thus designated was both her dearest friend and the dominating woman she envied; she thus appears as a substitute for Aimée’s sister” (233). A bit further on he says,

this type of woman is exactly what Aimée herself dreams of becoming. The same image that represents her ideal is also the object of her hatred. She thus strikes in her victim her *externalized ideal*, just as the person who commits a crime of passion strikes the only object of his hatred and his love. (253)

He even goes so far as to use the expression “internal enemy” (237), at one point, to designate the person she attacked (although the context is slightly different). He says that in striking this famous actress with a knife “*she struck herself*,” and that it was precisely at that moment that she felt relief, manifested in her crying, the delusion abruptly dissipating (250). There is an obvious con-

fusion here between inside and outside, internal and external. This is part of what Lacan refers to as the “fraternal complex” (261), a term found again in Lacan (1938, 47).

Lacan (1932) suggests that “these people ... symbolize ... Aimée’s ideal” (263):

The main persecutor is always of the same sex as the subject and is identical to, or at least clearly represents, the person of the same sex to whom the subject is most profoundly attached in his affective history. (273).<sup>5</sup>

Lacan even comments in a footnote here that although many authors have provided case histories in which this is true, few of them have realized how regularly this is the case. He mentions that shared delusions almost always involve mother and daughter pairs or father and son pairs (284).<sup>6</sup>

### *Les complexes familiaux (Family Complexes)*

Long before Lacan comes up with the idea that parental approval is necessary to the internalization of the ideal ego in the mirror stage and before he formulates the notion of the symbolic, he hypothesizes an initial mother-child unity which is lost at the time of weaning (1938). It is at the moment of weaning that the child loses the “unity of himself” – a unity he had apparently found in his nondifferentiation from his mother, in his sense of forming a whole with her (a sense that is only constituted retroactively, of course, when it is lost), or at least with her breast (“the imago of the maternal bosom dominates all of man’s life,” 32). He suddenly finds himself to be a fragmented body and experiences a “tendency [that is, an impulse of some kind] ... to restore his lost unity”; he attempts to restore that lost unity by relying on the “imago of the double” (44), a “foreign” image or model: the image of another person. (Lacan does not seem to tell us why it happens in this way.) Lacan calls this the “intrusion complex” and he proposes that it is “from this very stage that one first begins to recognize a rival, that is, an ‘other’ as an object” (37) – this seems to be his first use of the term “other” in this way.

This “intrusion complex,” which is most common, according to Lacan, when there is only a very small age gap between the children in question, in-

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<sup>5</sup> Lacan (1932) also suggests that “narcissistic fixation and homosexual drive thus stemmed in this case from points of libidinal evolution that were very close to each other” (264).

<sup>6</sup> He mentions something quite similar in Lacan (1938, 49).

volves “two opposite and complementary attitudes” that children seem to be required to adopt: seducer and seduced, dominator and dominated. The small difference in age between the children involved means that the subjects have to be very similar to each other in size and capabilities. “The imago of the other is linked to the structure of one’s own body, especially the structure of its relational functions, by a certain objective similarity” (38).

Lacan does not see the positions of seducer and seduced, dominator and dominated, so much as choices, but rather as established by nature – by instinct, one might say, since these same positions are found in many other species. He suggests that they are at the origin of sadomasochism (40): both parties are required to play these roles whether they like it or not and both parties relate equally to both roles, at least at the outset. The sense we have of the other at this stage is, he claims, entirely imaginary (38): the other is not fundamentally different from ourselves.

The kind of identification with the other that is at work here leads to a situation in which aggression toward the other is tantamount to aggression toward oneself; Lacan even refers to the role played by masochism in sadism as an “intimate lining/doubling [*doublure intime*]” (40).

Lacan characterizes the child’s world at this stage as “a narcissistic world” and says that it “does not contain other people [*autrui*]” (45). As long as the child simply mimics another child’s gestures, faces, and emotions through a form of transitivity, “the [child-]subject is not distinguished from the image itself,” that is, from “the image of the semblable,” that is, from a person very like himself. “The image merely adds the temporary intrusion of a foreign tendency” – that is, a tendency borrowed from another – to the child’s preexisting tendencies. Lacan refers to this as a “narcissistic intrusion,” saying that “before the ego affirms its identity, it is confused with this image that forms (or shapes) it, but that alienates it primordially” (45). (Insofar as there are not two fundamentally distinct objects present here, except from the outside observer’s vantage point, it is not strictly correct to talk about “intrusion” here, intrusion requiring that there be two separate objects, one of which encroaches upon the space of the other.)

Lacan goes on to try to explain how this primordial confusion of self and other is overcome through jealousy, it being rivalry for a third object that triangulates the situation and introduces a pact or agreement between the parties; we have here Lacan’s early attempt to use the Hegelian master/slave dialectic to go beyond the struggle to the death, an attempt which is given up once Lacan realizes the symbolic’s important contribution (the *einzigster Zug* from the parent) to the mirror stage. Whereas Lacan initially attempts to bring the symbolic pact into being out of a purely imaginary dialectic, he later gives up such an effort as futile.

Nevertheless, even taking into account Lacan's revised views of ego formation in Seminar VIII, we can still accept his notion here that "the ego is modeled" on "the primordial imago of the double" (48). He suggests that we see its importance later in life in a number of different cases, including homosexuality and fetishism, and in paranoia where it plays a role "in the type of persecutor, whether outside or inside" (48).

In other words, Lacan does not restrict the influence of the "fraternal complex" to paranoia – where it leads to "the frequency of themes of filiation, usurpation, and spoliation, [and to the] more paranoid themes of intrusion, influence, splitting, doubling, and the whole set of delusional transmutations of the body" (49). There may well be an important role played by the "fraternal complex" in other diagnostic categories as well.

Lacan suggests that psychoanalysis allows us to see that the "elective object of libido at the stage we are studying is homosexual" and that love and identification fuse in this object (38–39). In his dissertation, he points out how often the persecutor is someone of the same sex as the patient, suggesting that the whole question of "repressed homosexuality" (301) or of a "defense against homosexuality" in the psychoses might actually be related to *the passion tied to the image of someone who looks very much like oneself* (a-a').<sup>7</sup>

He goes on to propose that

this early ambiguity [presumably, the fusion of love and identification] is refound in adults, in the passion of jealousy in love relations and it is here that one can grasp it best. One must recognize it, in effect, in the powerful interest the subject shows in his rival's image: an interest which, although it is asserted as hatred – that is, as negative – and although it is motivated by the supposed love object, ... must be interpreted as the essential and positive interest of this passion. (39)

In other words, the passionate interest in the other woman in hysteria, for example, is based less, Lacan would seem to be suggesting here, on a passionate attachment to the man who is supposedly the true object of her affections, than on a fascination with the other woman (who she takes to be a rival) as the imago at the core of her own being. Lacan does not emphasize this facet of things when he discusses the dream of the butcher's wife many years later, but it is perhaps an important facet to keep in mind anyway (see, for example, Lacan 1966, 452). It might be thought of as playing a role in Dora's fascination with Frau

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<sup>7</sup> Here love turns into hate, and punishment of the other translates into self-punishment.

K., insofar as the latter represents Dora's own femininity. Indeed, women's concern with the question of femininity, of what it means to be a woman, may well be related to this fascination with the imago of another woman. (Perhaps something similar could be said of men's attempt to fathom what it means to be a man: see "Logical Time.") Or the frequency with which another man is present in their sexual fantasies with a woman, where it seems there has to be a struggle with another man to make it interesting: a brother-like rival or father.

This preliminary exploration has probably raised more questions than it has answered, but given the constraints of space here it is impossible to even begin to attempt to answer some of these questions with Lacan's later formulations on courtly love, beauty, and so on. I hope to address those in an upcoming book on love.

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