

# A Reading of the Formulae of Sexuation:

## The Woman does not exist.

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### Introduction.

What does Lacan's statement 'The woman does not exist' mean? First, let us note that when he writes: ~~The~~ woman does not exist, the bar affects the definite article The and we know the use Lacan makes of the bar - it is a kind of negation. Here it affects the definite article which means that ~~The~~ woman does not exist; but a woman or women can exist in an indefinite way. We cannot attribute any universality to them because we cannot define them by one trait according to which they would belong to a set.

However, the trait written  $\Phi x$ , and which designates the phallic function, defines them as human beings, as it does men. The only difference is that this definition, this trait, is sufficient to determine the race of men, but not the race of women. Women go beyond this definition. They are and they are not defined by the phallic function because they are *pas-toute* (not-all/whole), says Lacan.

The word *exists* can be said of any element that can enter into a set defined by a trait. It belongs to the language of set theory. Thus it does not in any way have the meaning we give it in our common parlance, nor that given to it by various philosophical systems. Lacanian subversion indeed begins with language. Neither the words of the 'real', of 'subject', of 'submission', of 'signifier' etc.; neither that of 'It exists' have their traditional meaning in the Lacanian lexis. Yet it is these very terms which are also used in the most ancient philosophy, from which, moreover, Lacan borrowed them - not without sometimes subverting their use. We will therefore need to refer to it.

I.

Let us first come back to our formulae on sexuation where is written: it exists or it does not exist. For every  $x$ ,  $\Phi x$ , writes Lacan, in the formulae of sexuation in Encore:  $\forall x \Phi x$ .

This is enough to point out the order of humans.  $\Phi x$  is a trait from which the universal proposition authorises itself. But what does this trait  $\Phi x$  mean?

This proposition is established as any other proposition in set theory. One can put serviettes and handkerchiefs in a set, as long as these objects are characterised by an identical trait: a piece of material, for example. This is true of a handkerchief, of a serviette and of a cloth. However, they are different in other ways.

Similarly, for  $\forall x$ ,  $\Phi$  of  $x$ : signifies that any being, man, woman, child, old person, can be subsumed by  $x$  as long as it is characterised by the phallic function. The proposition therefore does not take into account the difference between the sexes. It

is a mathematical/logical proposition which I shall translate thus: Every human being is submitted to the phallic law.

What do the terms 'phallic function' mean? It means that the human being desires the phallus and gets off on it.

But what is the phallus? The phallus, indeed, cannot even be said to be the symbol of the penis, as the flag is the symbol of the nation. The phallus, although by definition brilliant, has never been seen by anyone, except as a representation. It is only present or absent. When it is absent, it is experienced as a castration, for it is somehow bound up with the penis after all; and when it is present, it is experienced as omnipotence, that is to say the contrary of castration.

But still, what is the phallus? Simply a riddle. The ancients called it a mystery and guarded it hidden away in tabernacles. Thus, it could be seen as always present, though invisible.

We cannot free ourselves from this knot of contradictions. Of necessity they lead us back to the formulae.

The sigla  $\Phi x$ , or rather the function it represents - the phallic function - is already contradictory in its very principle, as it defines itself by its own limit. There is a phallic function and there is a phallic *jouissance*, only in so far as they are limited by a limit which negates them. Obeying the phallic law is thus to accept that law according to which there is a limit to *jouissance*.

This is true of every universal proposition - that which authorises itself through the presence of a trait, in this case:  $\Phi x$  - for there is universalisation even if the process never stops. But one must not confuse universality and omnitude. To universalise a trait is to generalise it ad infinitum, and not to shut it within a closed set. The universal cannot be limited from the outside, by omnitude, the closed whole, but can only be negated from within by the absence of the trait in question. One has to suppose, therefore, that there is at least one trait which says 'no' to the phallic function:  $\exists x \bar{\Phi} x$ , in order to say that  $\forall x \Phi x$ , which means that each subject experiences symbolic castration through which he becomes a divided subject.

The no said to the phallic function has a name - omnipotence. And who is it that prevents one going around in circles? Apparently the Father. The question is to know which father. There are at least three: the father of the primal horde, the dead father, and the real (or procreative) father. Let us put aside the real father. Although indispensable for the others to be, he does not enter the picture once his procreative work is done. There must be a real father, the procreator, for the symbolic father (let us say, the dead father), and the imaginary father to accomplish themselves in their function. But he (the real father) cannot be confused with any of the others. Let us also ignore the dead Father which Christianity introduced as the Son of the Eternal Father. The father of the horde, it is true, was put to death by his sons. But he still remains the symbol of omnipotence, for it is his omnipotence which his sons had wanted to destroy. There thus remain two. The commentators on the formulae thus had a choice. There are those for the Father of the Horde and those for God the Father, the Everlasting. God is not submitted to death (in other words, to real castration); furthermore. He *jouit* in himself. He thus does not need to make love; and this is much more powerful, if I dare say, than enjoying all the women. As long as he does not need to know women, no object limits him. It thus seems legitimate

to me to make Him the negative exception,  $\bar{\Phi}x$ .

The eternal creator of all that exists (Pancreator) - God the Father – is without limit, and is therefore the One who says no to the phallic function. We shall see that it is towards Him (or His representative) that the desire of ~~The~~ woman will go.

I have just mentioned the word desire - it is true that we have not previously talked of it. It is the driving force of the phallic function which in turn manifests it (desire). But desire is the desire of the Other. It is thus limited by the very object which by definition escapes it. That which is meant to limit/castrate desire, is named Father. But we can see that the Father is useful. He is there for the needs of the cause. There needed to be at least one, which is written:  $\exists x\bar{\Phi}x$ .

It can be a certain Father, we have said. But the universal proposition  $\forall x\Phi x$ , because of the laws of logic, already necessarily included the exception on which it is founded. And there was apparently no need to take this detour through the paternal function, at least logically speaking. But the myth here covers only the logical function. It clothes it. Let us add that the Oedipal structure finds its necessity once again in the clinic.

Furthermore, the detour via the paternal function has certainly brought us back to our starting point, but it has also allowed us to posit a homology between the phallus and this third term which enters in every relation to maintain the desire between the subject and its object insofar as this latter is always other. This third term is the signifier.

It cannot be confused with the Other, nor with desire, nor with the subject, nor with his object. It is only that third element which metaphorises the difference and as such will leave a remnant called object *a*. Every human being is subjected to its law - it is the phallic law. It forces humans into language. Their first *jouissance* is of the signifier. It is the *jouissance* of speech; a depleted *jouissance*, and peculiar to humankind.

But already something stops women here. Only man seems to be in it. Does the human order first define itself by referring to man, in other words, by itself? And what about the woman - would she be that being who, in exceeding every definition, thus denounces any possible belonging to humankind? And was it not questioned in the Middle Ages whether women were capable of speaking, which is a minimum for beings defined by the phallic function!

The question of definition is already the one posed by Aristotle, for it seems to him that ~~The~~ woman cannot be universalised, since she cannot be defined by a single trait. But is it necessary to declare her non-human for being a stranger to the phallic function? It would be a totally negative definition. Furthermore, in view of the formula  $\bar{\exists}x\bar{\Phi}x$ , there is no *x* which can escape the phallic function. So what of the woman?

It is thus proposed that women, like any *x*, cannot say no to the phallic function. But not no only; nor yes only. If they chose, they would be denying themselves, for those who said yes would then claim to become men; and those who said no - what would they become? Gods the Father or Goddesses the Mother? Or Dianas of Ephesus maybe? But then the system would remain jammed in two halves, symmetrical and opposed - static.

But they say yes and no - this is my hypothesis. This and leaves the woman split. No trait defines her. It is a contingent mixture - impossible to universalise. Before discussing further this additional, and not disjunctive, and, I would like to take a detour via Greek mythology. Certainly, mythology does not prove anything. But it speaks, as do our fantasies, with a surprising persistence.

It also speaks like Aristotle. There must thus be some truth in the myth - the Pandora of Greek mythology illustrates this perfectly.

## II. Pandora

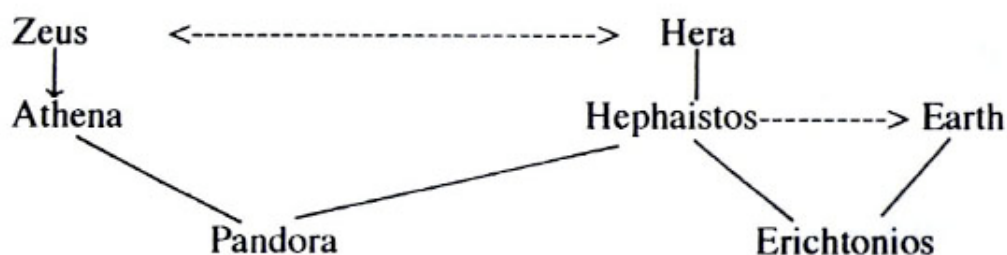
I take the following from Nicole Loraux in Les Enfants d'Athena. There, it clearly appears, at least to begin with, that The woman exists no more than with Lacan. But the male man does not exist either. There are only, on the one hand, *ανθρωποι*- the humans or humanoids (in the masculine, it is true) - and on the other hand, the gods. It is only later that these humans become men: *ανδρες* and women: *γυναι*.

Lacan would have said that there is no sexual relation between these, as the two are not of the same race. There is only dissymmetry between them. The *ανδρες*, the men, are born of the Athenian earth - they are thus Athenians. The women are not Athenians, nor Barbarians either. If man can be said to be the natural son of the soil, Pandora, the first woman, is but a pure artefact, a craft product, an effect of the imagination of Zeus and of the industriousness of Hephaistos. Zeus only wanted to punish Prometheus who had attempted to steal his fire for the benefit of the humans. The woman is thus an evil, conceived by Zeus for humans. A kind of scarecrow who would at the same time be seductive.

Zeus had already sired Athena, the armour-clad virgin, by himself. It is she who enveloped with a veil the monster created by Hephaistos, thus giving it life. She then reared it. Hera, the wife of Zeus, had had nothing to do with it. She had, by herself, given birth to Hephaistos to anger Zeus. Then at last it was Hephaistos who, with the Earth, gave birth to Erichthonios. Athena also took him into her care.

Pandora was not born, but was produced, as Aristotle said, and her grandmother was Hera. One can see how much preliminary work, how many detours and adoptions had been necessary so that at last men and women became specialised, if I may say so, and were then able to get on well enough to be able to procreate together.

Here is this strange geneology:



One cannot call this a family tree, for each one of the characters pulls it his or her way. Anyway, the first woman - more of a monster than a woman - was created by a

blacksmith according to the instructions of a god. She was called Pandora.

This monster herself initially gave birth to nothing but a horde, not to women; neither to a race of women, nor to a society.

Aristotle is very faithful to this myth. It is also according to him that woman was produced, not born, because a man can give birth only to a man and a horse to a horse. If a mule is born, it is because another variable (a donkey) intervenes and thus creates a mixed product. Man is form and woman matter. But only form is causal and is able to beget. Matter produces and is production.

Because of these origins, the human couple will always remain disjointed. However, it seems that Pandora was 'produced' (this is the appropriate word) precisely to reduce a difference. She reduces the pre-existing antinomy between Gods and Humans, which would otherwise be without issue. By the introduction of a third term, which she constituted, she laid the basis for the paternal metaphor before the event. Pandora the scarecrow, is already the big Other, forever barred and forever mythical. In other words, she is not yet human. This hybrid is necessary for the foundation of the human race, but remains alien to it.

Henceforth, human desire will shatter against this monster with a woman's face, a kind of female version of the Father of the Primitive Horde. Based on the male organ, man's desire is thus exposed to castration because it does not lay hold of its object: the woman. The woman, for her part, has more to do with the barred Other, as Lacan said; this big Other which she always is for man, and to which she aspires in order to integrate herself with the human order - the phallic order. Medea could be seen as a replica of Pandora. She too is wild, but discovers love and becomes a woman.

Alas her treason by Jason, of whom she had made her God, A, destroys her fragile humanity. She becomes a witch and magician again, but also savagely murderous.

However, since the epoch (beyond time) of myths, men and women have been able all the same to come together to procreate. The pyramid-shaped family tree, as we believe (mistakenly) it can be represented, demonstrates this and history proper began. Yet, the unconscious still affirms in man the desire to give birth on his own, even if he is not psychotic, and in woman to remain the mother of herself. Despite their imaginary and even delirious nature, these fantasies bear witness to something real: the impossibility of sexual rapport.

There is a moral to Pandora's story. Zeus should not have punished Prometheus, who had stolen his fire. Prometheus should not have wanted the fire of God - in other words the phallus - and should even less have wanted to steal it (but how could he have it without stealing it?). Zeus should not have sought revenge by inventing that seductive plague - Pandora. But had this not been the case, the advent of women would never have come about.

Pandora and the Father of the Primitive Horde - equivalent, I said, as procreators, maintaining power over their offspring - now live on only as fantasies of omnipotence or in nightmares. But these fantasies are virulent - procreation and power - the power to procreate and the power over one's offspring. This is precisely what the imaginary phallus and the word 'creator' embody. Thus by their very origin (mythical), woman is bound as is man to desire the phallus, that is to say, the power to create.

For the one as for the other, that desire comes up against its impossible satisfaction. Very luckily, for thus desire does not die - on the contrary. Without desire, humanity would very quickly be re-absorbed by Zeus and creation would be annulled. This fire is, on the contrary, maintained through the union of the Ones and of the *Pas-Toute*.

### III. The *Pas-Toute* does not exist

From the *Pas-Tout*, (taken from Aristotle: μη παντες), Lacan invites us to conclude with the (feminine) *Pas-Toute*. They would thus be called women, those creatures that say yes and no, yes or no, to the phallic function. Thus they do not allow themselves to be reduced to one trait, and each does not count as one. They therefore do not exist.

I would like to insist on: it exists, or she does not exist, which entails another implication. That is that three men plus one woman do not equal four men.

Lacan says that the number is the real. When a man begets, if a man is born, that makes one more man; if a man dies, that makes one less. And it is with good reason that that one designates one man more or less, because - and on that point, I return to Aristotle - only form can beget. It begets a similar form by which one can recognise the species. But when a woman is born from a man, Aristotle says, the species does not increase by one. The woman does not count as one. Thus she does not exist, as she cannot be counted. She does not enter into any numerical system. By not being all/whole she is not one.

If from the creative act of a man a woman is born, it is no longer possible to talk about procreation - one has to speak of production. This is what was said of Pandora. She was a manufacture, a craft product.

It is because woman is matter and matter has no form; a woman is thus a kind of mule, a monster, an accident, according to Aristotle; a man's symptom, Lacan said. She will invent for herself a mask of beauty to give the illusion of The woman, non-barred, and to cover up the real of death which a woman detains. What does this mean?

It means that she does not exist, but that she is. Thus, far from being either the negative exception or the pure nothing (the *ex nihilo* from whence the Creation came), she simply is; that is certainly what fascinates men. She cannot say anything about it because she escapes any definition which would reduce her. She does not add up to one, quite simply. But by a fitting turn, characteristic of psychoanalysis, not adding up to one is a jolly good symptom! ~~The~~ woman and the man will never add up to two, thankfully. Their odd couple is given up to desire without any ultimate satisfaction. ~~The~~ woman invents for herself a supplementary *jouissance* and the man devotes himself to the desperate collection of the greatest possible number of women, unless he can reconcile himself and recognise that object *a* - (which ~~The~~ woman challenges anyway) - for what it is and to convert himself to desiring desire, which is nearer to the real.

~~The~~ woman who does not necessarily make the detour via the object *a*, has less ground to cover in order to open herself to the desire of desire; she is nearer to the real.

And if the object *a* is merely the cork plugging a lack, ~~The~~ woman is all the more real in that she challenges it.

Thus, ~~The~~ woman obliges her partner to recognise the law of symbolic castration simply because she is the eternally Other, as she already is the Other for herself. This Other “who does not stanch herself with a Universe”, as Lacan said, appears in the Parmenides in terms very similar to ours. Its exposition of the couple could refer just as well to the sexual couple.

Naturally, there remains the option for the woman to play the man, like a hysteric for example, in order to make herself recognised as a one.

Then, indeed, she can believe herself to be one. But what does she gain - especially in the psychoanalytic field? No! Lacan has not made it easy for men. What exactly is the One? Either a number (the unitary trait of repetition), or the totalising One, which is mythical. It is this impasse which is at stake in the eristic joust (let us say dialectical) of Parmenides and of his interlocuter in the dialogue of the same name.

It is better to remain in the position called feminine, that of occupying the place of the object *a*, cause of desire in as much as it is a lack for the other. The object *a*, is not a number; is not a one; and even less a whole. The woman has perhaps a particular vocation to occupy this analytical position where the object *a* does not plug the lack, but on the contrary, maintains it in its position; whereas the man, marked with the sign of the One, has difficulty in renouncing this simply to become the occupant of an empty place.

Certainly; but this is not a natural position, neither for the one nor for the other, this position yet called feminine. And each will play their own part in it, following their own subjective position, regarding the object *a* which they have had to relinquish at the end of analysis; even as a woman, for ~~The~~ woman who is able to say yes to the phallic function also bears some relation to the object *a* as an object of desire.

Let us say that the more she exists as woman, the less she exists as an all/whole or as a One; and the so-called feminine position, which is that of the analyst, suits her all the better. But perhaps this natural suitability which makes things easier for her to begin with, makes them harder later on. For if a man is capable of destitution as a one, then the position of the object *a* as lack becomes necessary for him as the only possible engagement of his desire as analyst in a treatment.

In other words, it is necessary to distinguish position from condition. The feminine condition no doubt predisposes a woman to occupy the feminine position - that of the analyst as object *a* ; thus the less she exists, the better she occupies it; but this condition does not guarantee that she can maintain herself in this position. On the other hand, the masculine condition is an obstacle to the feminine position in *a*, because of its natural disposition to make a One. Even if the man has been able to drop the object *a* as cause of his desire, he can also strengthen himself in this place of *a*, which he is for the other and the fall of which has enabled him to lay the foundation of his own desire as analyst.

Thus, the man who exists and ~~The~~ woman who does not, do not have anything to envy in each other in this regard. The separation of the sexes is doubtless also an operative factor on this level. There would be no feminine position without the prior affirmation of the difference between the sexes in either's subjective assumption of their own sex.