



LOVE AND RAVAGE (SUFFERINGS)

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Abstract

If there is a term in Lacan's teaching that teaches about this conjunction between love and disaster, it is *ravage*. That is what I want to address. The certainty of loving comes along with the anguish of loving. In other words, there is no love without suffering. Even country singers know that the myth of the other half, of *true love*,¹ is an ideal and that the reality of love is quite another.

The analyst may have something to say about love because his job is guided by transference love. However, he only apprehends it "from within," always from some specific place where the analysand puts him in the transference. In this way, he never has a panoramic view of it, as an observer, which is always a position of pretended domination, of the master.

Therefore, it is better to discard from the outset any pretension to understand or explain this passionate phenomenon that is love.² In fact, love is just like that, it turns any master precarious, since no one has a general point of view or a precise definition of it, unless one is so far removed that he gets lost in the love experience.

Better to begin with the simplest: when you love, you know that you love. What Lacan says about certainty is valid here. It is something "that self knows," but "it is enough that attention be focused on this for one to be outside it."³

The conjunction between love and a certainty without much explanation draws an entire lively and passionate universe. Nevertheless, it seems to bring to this experience a space where love and anguish meet. After all, there, you never really know where you are stepping. There is always the risk that, suddenly, everything seems to fall apart, and we find ourselves without father, mother, or neighbor, in a devastated land, not knowing how to go on.

¹ In English in the original.

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² Regarding "love is passionate," cf. Jacques Lacan, *Les non-dupes errent*, *Seminar XXI*, lesson of 12 March 1974, unpublished; and Marcus André Vieira, *Os destinos da pulsão: sintoma e sublimação* (Rio de Janeiro: EBP-Rio, Contra Capa, 1997).

³ Jacques Lacan, "Preface to the English Edition of Seminar xi", *The Lacanian Review* 6, Fall 2018, 23.

If there is a term in Lacan's teaching that teaches about this conjunction between love and disaster, it is *ravage*. That is what I want to address. The certainty of loving comes along with the anguish of loving. In other words, there is no love without suffering. Even country singers know that the myth of the other half, of *true love*,⁴ is an ideal and that the reality of love is quite another.

Although love is a whole world, there are different ways of being in love. There are many. Let us call romantic love this ideal that two can "make One." Since Aristophanes, in *The Symposium*, the explanation for why we are so badly made takes an epic form: it is because we would be the other half of an original orange.

From the analyst's point of view, always dealing with the missed encounter, this way of being in love seems a delusion doomed to failure. There is nothing to indicate that there would have been an Eden in which we would have been whole, except our desire for it to have been so. However, this ideal precisely veils this inexistence. Thus, since Freud, we have assumed that there is no way to recover lost *jouissance*, simply because this Eden never existed. This part of lost *jouissance* is irretrievable, not because we once ate the apple, but because it is precisely the part of ourselves to be lost for us to become people, to become the cultural beings that we are.

Lacan says that all pain resides in the fact that what is aimed in love is exactly this beyond what one is, beyond being – exactly what disappears when we appear in the world.

It is because of this that sometimes love is passion. Passion is a "limitless pursuit" because it is not satisfied, it is not resolved by what the loved object is or by what it would give. It aims to achieve, to obtain from the loved object what they do not have, namely that which—at least in the field of narcissism—is not, nor can it be.⁵

Having discarded romantic love, we are then left with passion-love. Better that way, because it is by aiming at the netherworld that love can change the world. It is through passion-love that both Freud and Lacan approached love. They called it desire.

In the Freudian sense, desire is what aims beyond the image, it is the Other thing.⁶ The point of view of desire also highlights how, beyond being, an obscure object is distributed between two poles, masculine and feminine. Desire lives off the search for an impossible recovery of *jouissance* supported by the belief in a complementarity between genders that does not exist. In other words, it depends on the inexistence of the sexual relation, but in its very movement it leads us to think that this is possible. At the same time, the impossibility of the relation perpetuates it.

Everything would be fine if people did not enjoy. The idea firmly stands that someday, if we willingly seek, we will be happy finding our soul mate, while the lost part of ourselves insists on running away, unreachable. If there was only the search for an impossible satisfaction, we would be forever tied to sexuated, identitarian pathways, in which this search is structured for each one according to one's phantasmatic structure. It happens, however, that from time to time, one enjoys. This is what renders the real of lack relative. For an instant, the impossible happens.

⁴ In English in the original.

⁵ As Lacan states: "to love is to love a being beyond what she or she appears to be." Cf. Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 1*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1988), 276.

⁶ It is through desire that Freud approaches love, not as an ideal state of the soul (*Liebe*), but as fascination, capture, movement (*Verliebtheit*), cf. Marcus André Vieira, 1997, *op. cit.*

We come close to the dissolution of ourselves, beings of desire that we are, at this point of jouissance, of the lack of lack. This is the point where Lacan locates anxiety. It is not the lack, but what happens when the lack comes to lack.

This will be the point whereby devastation enters the love scene. I shall briefly return to some reference points on the theme of jouissance, when lack is lacking, when - in contrast to desire -lack pushes us towards ravage.

Lacan will situate and explore the universe of love and anxiety not just in the difference between beings, male or female, structured around lack and castration. On the contrary, especially since his *Seminar XX*, he will situate it in the difference between jouissances.

On the level of jouissance, pleasure, anxiety, and abyss can intertwine without limitation. If jouissance is life that takes us without lack setting a limit to it, it should be the opposite of what Lacan calls phallic jouissance, of pleasure, because the latter is a loss of jouissance. Pleasure does not occur without that recoil, that yielding that leads to a more or less peaceful life. Indeed, pleasure is always a retreat from the abyss. It is when we have that momentary feeling that we have arrived there, called by Lacan sexual jouissance or phallic jouissance, of which the most accurate example is what we call orgasm. Pleasure ensues when we give up, when we exchange the infinity of jouissance for the taste of it in our mouths.

The Other jouissance is that of “losing oneself,” which can insinuate itself in the misplaced search for love, like a thrust without direction or harbor, and which opens onto an anguished infinity without place. It is when you are “out of your mind,” “without rhyme or reason,” to take the words of Jacques-Alain Miller.⁷

Freud recognized the paradoxes of the feminine jouissance (which we call opaque, or even jouissance of the One) from the side of those who are sexuated by the “no” (without direct access to phallic jouissance), the women of his time. In those whose hegemonic structure is that of “not having”, the feeling opens up that the suffering of love is not because there is no jouissance of the couple (as a whole), but because the beyond of this jouissance ex-ists, as not-all jouissance.

Love phenomena paired with anxiety are located here, but without the limit that anxiety still keeps, that of a “self.” It is love as an “out of mind” mad passion, of a limitless race. Check out Hilda Hilst's micro poem:

Who are you? I asked desire.

*He replied: lava. Then dust. Then nothing.*⁸

I read it as a moving portrait of ravage, wasteland. However, in our community, it turns out that devastation, “ravage”, has gained a conceptual status. It is a noun and not just an adjective. It is not reduced to the phenomenon; it is not just the wasteland in the experience of love. In fact, the land is never completely devastated. This “lava, dust, nothing” of ravage could not be for us the end of the world, absolute banishment, desert of the real, simply because there is nothing in the real itself, neither devastation nor even desert. Nobody lives in the real.

⁷ Jacques-Alain Miller, *L'Un tout seul*, year-year, *L'orientation lacanienne* (annual course delivered within the framework of the Department of Psychoanalysis, The University of Paris VIII, lesson of 6 April 2011).

⁸ Hilda Hilst, *Do desejo* 2, (São Paulo: Globo, 2004) 15. “Quem és? Perguntei ao desejo. Respondeu: lava. Depois pó. Depois nada.”

So, we assume that ravage is an index of a position, a way of being in relation to the jouissance of the body. In other words, ravage is “not without” the Other. But what is the Other of ravage?

I remember Lacan’s two passages on ravage. He places the male partner as the Other of ravage in one passage and the mother in another. For a woman, someone not supported by phallic jouissance, a man could lead her to ravage by refusing to be Other, since he is only capable of thinking about objects and fetishes. Furthermore, the mother, sustaining an impossible identificatory matrix, in rivalry, could become the daughter’s partner-ravage, because she too is dealing with the not-all.⁹

What is there in common between the two situations that is not just related to the feminine condition in the theater of the sexes, but to a position based on it?

I propose to endorse Marie-Hélène Brousse’s thesis: ravage is the effect of a position that consists in expecting more “substance” from some object than from the Other and its names.¹⁰ It is not to expect this subsistence from the Father, as Freud thought, but from an object, which is nothing like the fetish as is the case with phallic jouissance. It is not a phallic object, like the beauty of a body or its qualities. It is an object that embodies an opening to a beyond (phallic) jouissance and which, for this reason, becomes more valuable than the Other. This is what happens in the example she gives of her analysand, for whom sleeping without her husband in their bed meant to be thrown into a melancholic void. The body by her side was enough, nothing more, but at the same time this body is her Other, more than the Other. Her body is formless without that body at night.

What partner should be the analyst to separate the analysand from this total object? From this Other of ravage? I believe that the destructuring is so radical that this question can only begin to be answered if we approach the otherness at stake not as that of an object, but as that of the *sinthome*. The analyst here is an object taken in the transference as object of the analysand’s fundamental fantasy, we can agree. However, it is better to take him as a partner-*sinthome*, by also making himself the recipient of the jouissance that does not fit in the fantasy.

Like an analysand who lost herself in devastation after her husband left her for a younger woman. She only abandoned the ravage when she managed to leave relatively aside that absolute object, the husband, by allowing herself to register an unusual bodily sensation. A simple waterfall bath began to condensate a mode of “tactile” eroticism of the skin as a whole, without passing through the gaze. The gaze had been a condition for her phallic jouissance: it fixed her to her lost

⁹ Lacan used the term *ravage* in two moments of his teaching to refer to: 1) the daughter-mother relationship in “L’Étourdit”: “On this basis the Freudian elucubration of the Oedipus complex, which makes the woman a fish in the water, in that castration is with her from the start (*Freud dixit*), contrasts dolorously with the fact of the ravage that is for the woman, for the most part, the rapport with her mother, from where she seems indeed to expect more substance than from her father -which does not go with him being second, in this ravage. Jacques Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 465; 2) a relationship between man and woman, in his *Seminar XXIII*, “[...] One can say that for a woman, man is anything you please, specifically an affliction that is worse than a *sinthome*. A ravage, even.” Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A.R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 84.

¹⁰ cf. Marie-Hélène Brousse, *Mulheres e discursos* (Rio de Janeiro: ContraCapa, 2019), 15.

husband's gaze and to the gaze of other women, for whom all she could be was a wrinkled old lady, a waste.

I suppose that this new "skin" eroticism is more on the side of a jouissance of the *sinthome* than of the fundamental fantasy. And I suppose that I have been able to be in some way a partner to this jouissance, that helped its stabilization. A side that will only be verified as such at the end of the analysis, but which presents itself here as a stabilizing horizon in relation to ravage.

So, one last paradox: will the *sinthome*, which is absolutely groundless, provide a ground? As an open conclusion, I propose an image of this paradox in its relation to ravage: "*A Mulher do Fim do Mundo*" (The Woman at the End of the World), a song by Elza Soares.

You must listen to the song, let yourself be taken by it, since the lyrics only say a small part of what Elza Soares' immense voice sings. One listens to the absolute intensity of a whole tragic story that is a little like that of our black people, but contained, or better, directed towards the very experience of singing as this jouissance that makes the ground. And the name of the ground, here, is not the house, the streets of the city (so dangerous), but the avenue. The avenue, is where *de carnaval* takes place, is almost a metonymic name for it. It is this place where the woman at the end of the world left everything, all, but at the same time it is the place where she will remain until the end of time. Just singing. Is she ravaged? Yes and no. There, in between the avenue and the jouissance of singing in the avenue, she found a way to establish and assert herself without having to rely on her history and identity by singing and singing and singing . . .

*On the avenue I left it there
The black skin and my voice
On the avenue I left it there
My speech, my opinion
My house, my solitude
I threw it from the top of the third floor
I fell flat on my face and got rid of the rest of this life
On the avenue it lasts until the end
Woman at the end of the world
I am, and I will sing until the end
Woman at the end of the world
I am, and I will sing until the end [. . .]*

Translated by Renata Teixeira. Reviewed by Florencia F.C. Shanahan.