Perverse Mothers or Mad Wives?
A Lacanian Commentary on Nahaleh Moshtagh’s “The Repression of the Bad Oedipal Mother in Psychoanalysis”
Alireza Taheri, PhD.¹

Abstract
In this paper, the author provides a Lacanian commentary to Nahaleh Moshtagh’s clinical piece studying the under-explored terrain of perversion in mothers. In so doing, the author translates the language of “malignant narcissism” (Kernberg) and “narcissistic perversion” (Racamier) into diction commensurate with the spirit of Lacan’s return to Freud, a discourse strictly aligned with modern science’s rejection of pre-modern moralizing worldviews (Weltanschauung). The paper argues that cases of “malignant” mothers may concern what Lacan named the feminine or “Other” jouissance. Unlike phallic jouissance which takes place within the bounds of what is socially receivable, this Other jouissance breaks the order of social norms. In the spirit of Lacan’s analysis of the myth of Jason and Medea, the author argues that the category of “perverse mothers” may be supplemented by that of “mad wives”; in other words, it is in the name of the jouissance of femininity that the phallic jouissance of maternity (baby = phallus) may, at times, be cruelly sacrificed. A mother’s passive compliance with a father’s manifest perversion may, beyond the possibility of her own perversion, testify more truly to a subject consumed by the flames of feminine passion (e.g. Medea and/or Antigone). Perversion or psychosis, understood in the strictly structural sense, name the structure of Dr. X (Nahaleh Moshtagh’s clinical case) rather than that of his passive mother. This case involves a psychotic who could not say “No” to the Other’s jouissance. Lacan christens this inability with the name of “push-towards-woman”, namely the process by which a subject gives up any possibility of protest in order to make of him/herself an abject entity in the service of the Other’s jouissance.

Perversion maternelle ou folie féminine? Un commentaire lacanien sur “Le refoulement de la mauvaise mère œdipienne en psychanalyse”
Dans cet article, l’auteur fournit un commentaire lacanien à l’écrit clinique de Nahaleh Moshtagh portant sur le thème, peu exploré, de la perversion maternelle. Ainsi, l’auteur traduit le langage de « narcissisme malicieux » (Kernberg) ou « perversion narcissique » (Racamier) en un langage mieux adapté à l’esprit du retour de Lacan à Freud, notamment un discours égal au rejet de tout « Weltanschauung » moralisant. L’article argue que les cas de mères « malveillantes » concernent ce que Lacan nomme l’Autre jouissance, c’est à dire la jouissance féminine. Contrairement à la jouissance phallique, qui a lieu dans les paramètres de ce qui est socialement recevable, cette autre jouissance perturbe les normes sociaux. Suivant l’analyse lacaniennne du mythe de Jason et Médée, l’auteur conclut que la catégorie de « mère perverse » peut être complémentée par la catégorie de « folie féminine » ; c’est au nom de la jouissance féminine que la jouissance phalique de la maternité peut, parfois, être cruellement sacrifiée. La passivité d’une mère accommodant la perversion manifeste du père peut, au-delà de la possibilité de la perversion propre de la mère, témoigner plus correctement à un sujet rongé par la passion féminine (ex. Médée et/ou Antigone). La perversion ou la psychose, prises au sens strictement structural, nomme la structure du Dr. X (le cas de Nahaleh Moshtagh) plutôt que celle de sa mère passive. Ce cas concerne un homme psychotique incapable de dire « Non ! » à la jouissance de l’Autre. Lacan désigne ce procès avec le nom de « pousse à la femme », c’est à dire un procès par lequel un sujet abandonne toute possibilité de protestation afin de devenir l’objet méprisable au service de la jouissance de l’Autre.

¹ Toronto Psychoanalytic Institute and Society
In “The Repression of the Bad Oedipal Mother in Psychoanalysis”, Nahaleh Moshtagh explores the taboo of feminine perversion as it manifests itself in what is hailed as the holiest of all loves, that of a mother. Paraphrasing Hendrika C. Freud, Dr. Moshtagh reminds us that maternal love is a rather modern invention. The evident implication is that ideologically suspicious notions such as the “maternal instinct” should be deconstructed as the effects of discursive production rather than inscribed in “nature”. With the de-medicalization of psychoanalysis completed by Lacan’s return to Freud, the reference to “nature” is replaced with an orientation that takes discourse and language as its starting point. Lacan’s preference for the term “drive” (“pulsion”) rather than “instinct” directs psychoanalysis out of its “biologic straying” (Laplanche; 1999) by re-aligning it to the function of speech and language (Lacan; 2006). If all “instincts” are in fact “drives”, namely the effects of discourse on the human body – “the echo in the body of the fact that there is speech” (Lacan; 2005) – then the so-called “maternal instinct”, hitherto the object of ideological mystification, also falls from grace thereby losing its sanctity and inviolability. Henceforward maternity too could be linked to perversion.

Perversion is often dismissed as a male phenomenon with little attention paid to its possible manifestations in women and even less in mothers whose love, especially for their sons, is left unquestioned in its alleged purity and sanctimony.2 The clinical experience, however, testifies otherwise as it reveals that sexual perversion has as little respect for sexual difference as the hysteric’s sexual ambiguities and/or “constitutional bisexuality” (Freud; 1905). The infamous debasement of the object in the realm of love (Freud; 1912) has become a cliché of the male sexual urge with examples in the media ranging from Jian Ghomeshi’s sadistic exploits, Tiger Woods’ adventures and Schwarzenegger’s escapades with his maid. Meanwhile, the popular mind envisages the female psyche preoccupied with fantasies of romantic walks on the beach followed by a candle lit dinner on Valentine’s Day. The clinic, however, forbids the observant analyst to bathe comfortably in these clichés. Women, no less than their male counterparts, may split their amorous life into a marriage with an idealized husband (a male Virgin Mary of sorts) and a secret lover debased to a mere sexual instrument. While films such as “The Duke of Burgundy” and, more famously, “The Piano Teacher” have begun demystifying the taboo of feminine perversion, the analytic community still lags behind in confronting this subject.

Lacan was not afraid of the idea of female perversion and, more specifically, he insisted on the idea that maternity is intrinsically “perverse”. This idea is indeed entirely Freudian in inspiration if we recall that for Freud (1917) the baby stands for an equivalent of the phallus. In other words, for Freud, the mother may use the infant as a prop warding her against castration. The child gives the mother a sense of completion such that lack and castration are circumvented and a feeling of narcissistic wholeness is achieved. Just like the fetishist for whom the foot or the heel of the shoe compensates for the mother’s missing phallus (1927), the child may function as such a crutch for his/her mother. However, one must here bear in mind that the idea of a general perversion of maternity is altogether distinct from the idea of perversion as structure. Freud and Lacan are clearly not arguing that all mothers are perverts in the structural sense. Rather they are pointing to the idea that varying traits of perversion, in the sense of a denial of castration entirely commensurate with neurosis, may be found in a mother’s relation to her child. The extent of this perversion, amongst other factors, will be pivotal in determining whether the child will accept the Name-of-the-Father and develop a neurotic structure. An overly perverse mother deriving too much satisfaction from her maternal role will inhibit this process and pave the path towards a foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and a consequent psychotic structure.

Where the literature cited by Dr. Moshtagh speaks of the mother’s “narcissistic perversion” (Racamier) or “malignant narcissism” (Kernberg), a strictly Lacanian perspective will eschew the language of narcissism in

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2 Even Freud (1930, 113) could not resist this cliché when he argued that “aggressiveness … forms the basis of every relation of affection and love among people (with the single exception, perhaps, of the mother’s relation to her male child)”.  

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favour of the concept of the disavowal of castration. For Lacan (2006), narcissism is a general unifying structure of mental life having to do with the mirror stage and the constitution of the ego as an image of the self and the body. As such, narcissism constitutes a “fundamental passion of the soul ... that imposes its structure on all ... desires, even the loftiest ones” (Lacan; 2006, 188) and which, therefore, cannot be isolated to certain cases of pathology alone. If one were to distinguish a “normal” or neurotic narcissism from a “pathological” or perverse narcissism we could say that the “healthy” variety would consist of a self-image where the possibility of lack would not be obliterated. By contrast, the perverse or psychotic tendency would consist of maintaining an image of the self wholly unblemished by any shortcoming. A mother’s use of her child as a prop for maintaining an idealized self-image would therefore involve a perverse disavowal of lack, namely a kind of “pathological” narcissism where castration is inoperative, something that will gravely hinder the process of separation/differentiation for the child. The paradox of the ego, if I may put it that way, consists of the fact that as an image of the self and the body it may only sustain itself efficiently when supported by lack or castration. In other words, only an image that is neither entirely consistent nor completely whole has any chance of holding water. The fate of every idealized self-image is that of drowning its subject like the hapless Narcissus whose self-infatuation deafened him to the cries of Echo’s love.

In this way, we may bridge the terminological gap between Lacan’s notion of the disavowal of castration and Racamier and Kernberg’s ideas on narcissistic perversion and malignant narcissism. This translation of diction has, to my mind, a great advantage over Racamier and Kernberg’s language. By relinquishing the language of “malignance” and its emphasis on “self-centeredness, greediness, and exploitative behavior toward others”, we may avoid the pitfall of moralizing psychoanalysis, a discourse that is strictly contemporary with the “death of God” (Nietzsche) and co-extensive with the inexistence of the Other (Lacan) as a possible locus of universal ideals, injunctions and/or interdictions. Psychoanalysis is born out of modern science’s insistence on contingency (Koyré; 1957) where the appeal to any form of necessity (moral or otherwise) is tantamount to ideological obfuscation. Lacan thus reminds us that “morality ends at the level of the id, which doesn’t go very far” (Lacan; 1998, 87). The danger of aligning “pathological narcissism” with moralistic notions of “greediness and exploitation” is that psychoanalytic theory risks thereby regressing to a pre-modern discourse akin to religion. Freud’s (1933) insistence that psychoanalysis should not be reduced to a Weltanschauung or worldview has as its principal consequence that, as heir to the modern scientific revolution, psychoanalysis cannot become the source of values through which one may prescribe normative ideals. The aim of psychoanalysis is, rather, to reveal the illusions at work in various ideologies, be they scientistic, religious or simply personal (e.g. the family romance).

These clinical cases concerning a mother’s “silent” partnership with the father’s manifest perversity may involve something more than the question of a mother’s possible perversion. As Dr. Moshtagh has perspicaciously argued, we need to inquire about “the type of pleasure this mother got out of the disavowal of her child’s sexual abuse”; where are we to locate her unconscious satisfaction? In Lacanian parlance, we need to determine the type of jouissance at stake for the mother. Within a family setting, a woman may find herself divided between the position of mother and wife – two radically different subject positions corresponding respectively to the masculine and feminine sexual positions. Where an older essentialist ideology would ineradicably link femininity to maternity, for Freud and Lacan, by contrast, a mother is a “man” (recall baby = phallus). As a man’s sexual partner, however, she is feminine. According to Lacan, the jouissance of femininity is of much greater magnitude than the phallic jouissance of masculinity; it is, according to his diction, a jouissance “beyond the phallus” (Lacan; 1998, 74). Lacan makes use of the story of Jason and Medea to show this discrepancy. The couple were happily married with three children until Jason abandoned Medea for another woman. Left with tremendous rage, she killed the three children to avenge herself. From this story, Miller concludes that “behind the mother there is always a Medea” (Miller quoted in Žižek; 2012, 594). Thus, from a Lacanian standpoint, a mother’s cruelty towards her children involves a sacrifice of her position as mother (her
phallic desires) for the sake of the greater jouissance of femininity involved in being a wife. Racamier (2014), by contrast, speaks of a “phalloid mother”, namely a “woman … capable of using her own children as hostages, instruments of revenge and guided missiles”. The problem here is that little is provided in the way of an explanation; the author contents himself with a moralistic attack on these mothers as veritable incarnations of evil. The question that remains is why – in the name of what jouissance? – such mothers readily exploit their children. Mothers silently colluding with a perverse father may be so involved in trying to guarantee their own feminine jouissance in relation to the man that a sacrifice of the maternal duties becomes inevitable. For instance, the jouissance of the wife of a perversely abusive father may consist of living with a kind of “primal father” who bows to no laws.

Lacan’s hypothesis regarding an Other (feminine) jouissance that is supplementary, rather than merely complementary, to the order of phallic satisfaction allows us to consider such cases of maternal cruelty through a veritably psychoanalytic lens without the unnecessary hindrances of the moralistic baggage carried by the notion of “malignant narcissism”. Indeed, the actions of such Medea-mothers are repulsive to most sensible ears and beyond what is tolerable to ordinary understanding. However, the reason for this inadmissibility should not be sought in the jargon of morality regardless of how laudable notions of “concern”, “conscience” and “care” may seem by contrast to “hate”, “superego” and “antisocial tendency”. One must always remember that feminine jouissance breaks the phallic order. As such it is always experienced as radically subversive of the values of our social bond based on the phallic measure. The phallic order of everyday life forbids access to this jouissance that it deems shameful and vile. Psychoanalytic discourse, however, must resist this censorship and open the space for encountering this illicit jouissance. According to Lacan (1992), the notions of beauty and the good form the last two barriers protecting us from the real. In light of this, it may be argued that the tendency to obfuscate the psychoanalytic understanding of such extreme cases with the language of morality (i.e. the language of the “good”) testifies to a fear of confronting the real of the feminine jouissance, a jouissance which breaks through the moral and aesthetic barriers that constitute the frame of the phallic order of our social bonds. So long as we speak moralistically we fail to understand the feminine. Moreover, we also fail to come to grips with the complications of maternity insofar as all mothers (not only the “malignant narcissists”) hide a Medea. Medea-mothers are precisely not “phalloid” insofar as they act in the name of a nameless jouissance beyond phallic signification. If, Lacan (1998, 103) has argued that Woman is an objection to phallic totality then our only means to access her is to put aside all cherished universals in order to gain insight into this most singular jouissance. The language of morality here functions as the infamous “phallic obstacle” preventing man from gaining access to the boundless realm of the feminine, something akin to a moralizing “premature ejaculation” through which man hastily terminates his contact with woman, namely this subject who, in the words of Badiou, has “a more abrupt right to inhumanity” (Badiou; 2000, 280).

With regard to the case of Dr. X, the first question that we need to ask concerns this young man’s passivity to his father. This question may provide us with a clue about the mother’s jouissance. Is this boy really homosexual or is he enacting his mother’s fantasy about her husband’s masculine omnipotence? The boy’s entry into puberty and manhood (not to mention his high intelligence and admission into medical school) may threaten her sense of her husband’s virility – what better way to counter that than to have her son reduced to such passivity! The father-son perversion may help uphold the mother’s desire for the father in the wake of the threat of the son about to take his place as the new bearer of the phallus. Insofar as the young man’s playing with his father’s penis (his passivity to the father) may represent a secret collusion with his mother’s jouissance

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3 With regard to the idea that the phallus represents an obstacle on man’s path to reaching woman, Lacan says: “Phallic jouissance is the obstacle owing to which man does not come, I would say, to enjoy woman’s body, precisely because what he enjoys is the jouissance of the organ” (Lacan; 1998, 7). The moralizing tendency in psychoanalysis, I would argue, represents a kind of phallic obstacle barring the analyst from exploring the “dark continent” of feminine jouissance.
one should say that, strictly speaking, perversion (or psychosis) is on the side of the son. The structure of perversion, as distinct from isolated traits of perversion, involves the subject’s self-instrumentalization for the sake of the Other’s jouissance. Unlike the neurotic who is able to say “No!” to the Other’s jouissance, in perversion and, more radically, in psychosis, the subject fails to put forward a hysteric revolt. The subject thus remains bound to the “sexual service of the mother” (Lacan; 2006, 852). A neurotic subject, by contrast, is capable of refusing the mother’s jouissance. Here the son’s incestuous bond with the father testifies to the failed revolt of psychosis. The subject cannot say no to the Other’s jouissance and thereby willingly accepts to make him/herself the object of its realization. Deleuze (1991) erroneously located a subversive quality to masochistic perversion. What he failed to see was that from a strictly psychoanalytic perspective the pursuit of jouissance constitutes a failure of subversion and subjectivity. For there to be a subject there needs to be a first “No” against jouissance. Deleuze and Guattari (1973) later fell prey to another error when they put forward the idea of the subversive potentials of schizophrenia. In both cases, the mistake lies in positing the notion of a subject of jouissance. The idea of a subject of jouissance represents the height of a fetishistic fantasy insofar as there is a subject only when jouissance is negated or repressed.4 Strictly speaking, jouissance belongs to the structure (i.e. the Other) rather than the subject. In Kant With Sade, Lacan took great pains to distinguish the transgressive nature of Sadian perversity – where the subject remains riveted to the Law and to the duty of guaranteeing the Other’s jouissance – from Freudian psychoanalysis, a discourse veritably directed towards a subversion of the Other’s hold through which a genuine advent of subjectivity may take place. Psychoanalysis, with its insistence on the primacy of castration, teaches that neither perverse transgression nor psychotic delusion can ever amount to a veritable subversion. By maintaining an incestuous relation with his father, Dr. X remained enslaved to Other’s jouissance and thereby failed to differentiate himself as a subject.

At a manifest level, the case of Dr. X concerns a homosexual urge. Indeed, taken literally, the word “homosexuality” points to the desire for someone of the same sex, which is what is at stake here at one level. Strictly speaking, however, the homosexual inclination, be it in relation to the incestuous object or to the butcher, obfuscates a more important tendency, namely the mechanism that Lacan aptly christened with the name of “push-towards-Woman” in order to describe a process through which the psychotic subject increasingly gives up his masculinity for the sake of guaranteeing the jouissance of a tyrannical Other. The most famous example of such a transformation into Woman is, of course, afforded by Daniel Paul Schreber who sacrificed himself for the jouissance of a cruel divine Other. The ubiquity of this phenomenon led Freud (1914) down the erroneous path of positing a link between homosexuality and psychosis. According to Freud’s (1911) “grammatical” model, various forms of psychosis (paranoia, erotomania and delusions of jealousy) could be traced back to the various vicissitudes that a homosexual tendency (“I love him”) could undergo through different grammatical changes (e.g. inversion of subject and object, change of verb, change of subject gender etc.). As interesting as this linguistic model is from a Lacanian standpoint, its error consisted of seeking the aetiology of psychosis in a certain kind of object choice (i.e. homosexuality) when the true diagnostic key should have been sought in an imagined injunction by which the big Other demands of the subject a sacrifice for the sake of its jouissance. With the recognition of Freud’s error, Lacan moves away from the homosexual aetiology of paranoia towards the concept of feminization, something already prefigured by Freud’s notion of Verweiblichung. The lack of phallic signification due to the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father leads to the push-towards-Woman. Paranoia is thus more of a transsexual phenomenon than it is a homosexual one.

4 I here rely on Samo Tomšič (2015) critique of Deleuze’s celebration of the alleged subversive potentials of masochism and, with Guattari, the equally naïve praise of schizophrenia. Tomšič argues that the universality of castration (as a fact of structure) means that the idea of a “subject of jouissance” – having access to jouissance without the hindrances that would allegedly only plague the neurotic – is a strictly fetishistic illusion.
From a Lacanian standpoint, symbolic castration involves the recognition of three points of impossibility or absence: 1. There is no big Other. 2. There is no such thing as a sexual rapport. 3. The Woman does not exist. For the psychotic subject these three lacks pointing to structural deficiencies in our symbolic order are utterly intolerable. As a result, the psychotic subject will sacrifice him/herself for the sake of making good these deficits at the level of the symbolic. Regarding the first point, Dr. X. continues to believe in an Other that exists. The figure occupying the place of big Other will waver throughout the vicissitudes of his libidinal life. One crucial instantiation, for instance, may be found in the women ("whores") in whom he assumes an unfaltering jouissance that he is left to envy to homicidal extent. His obsessive concern for the possible damage his homosexuality may cause to his mother’s reputation testifies to yet another sacrifice for the Other. Secondly, in his pursuit of the butcher, Dr. X is adamant to make the sexual rapport possible by creating a relation with neither lack nor frustration. The money he spent taking the butcher’s family on vacation and paying his mortgage testify to his attempt to create a rapport where the common dissatisfactions of neurotic relations could be eschewed if not entirely foreclosed. Unlike his neurotic counterpart, the psychotic subject cannot accept the idea that love involves the “gift of what one does not have” (Lacan; 2001). Lack is therefore interpreted as a manifestation of pure poverty that must be covered over and filled in with grandiose gestures of generosity with very little space for the “heroism of lack” (Zupančič; 2000) through which the neurotic has learnt that every loss is accompanied by something gained, even if the reward is little more than the wisdom achieved through mourning. Thirdly and lastly, Dr. X is preoccupied making sure that the Woman does indeed exist, be it as his father’s midnight “hand-maiden” or as the butcher’s servile “head-servant”.

The fact that castration is not symbolically inscribed means that the subject may still feel forced to be the phallus for the mother. This is where the key to feminization should be sought: “… unable to be the phallus the mother is missing, there remained the solution of being the woman men are missing” (Lacan quoted in Gherovici; 2010, 180). The push-towards-Woman is not a desire. Rather, it is an injunction to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the Other’s jouissance. Dr. X’s hatred of women, raised to homicidal pitch (his wish to become a “serial killer”), may also be understood in light of his push-towards-woman and emasculation (Entmannung). The explanation for his murderous impulses should not be sought in the logic of an alleged “inverted Oedipal complex” but, rather, as a manifestation of “the suicidal aggression of narcissism” (Lacan; 2006, 174) where the subject strikes at another (in this case, the women he calls “whores”) in whom he has projected the image of his own degraded and debased masculinity. The structural fact of alienation means that “all sorts of things in this world behave like mirrors” (Lacan; 1988). What this alienated subject of foreclosure will not see is that it is “precisely the kakon of his own being that the madman tries to get at in the object that he strikes” (Lacan; 2006, 175).

Castration is a symbolic inscription on the imaginary of the body or ego. More accurately, castration is the inscription on the body that makes possible the constitution of the ego – it is that bit of lack that paradoxically holds the image together (recall Narcissus whose unblemished self-image led to his drowning). Symbolic

By contrast to neurotic fantasy, a delusion does not involve the subject’s desire. What is at stake in a delusional belief is the idea that the big Other takes the subject for such and such. The psychotic subject is incapable of refusing the place the Other has made for him/her. He/she cannot say “No!” thereby creating a lack in the Other in order to access a modicum of freedom. The following joke about a madman taken for a morsel of grain beautifully illustrates the primacy of the Other’s injunction in psychosis: “A madman saw himself as a morsel of grain. Having come to understand that this was a delusion, his psychiatrist was able to discharge him. But as soon as the man stepped out of the hospital, he sprinted right back to his psychiatrist’s office. “Goodness! What’s happened?” Panting, out of breath, the man stated, “My God! I’ve just met a hen!” “But you know by now that you’re not a morsel of grain!” -- “Oh, yes, doctor, I know very well! But does that hen?” (Allouch; 2015, 112).
castration, as the necessary correlate to the successful accomplishment of the mirror stage, provides the body with an envelope granting it the minimal beauty and lovability required to save it from abjection (here beauty guards against the real). What we see in the psychoses, however, is a subject literally identified with the abject (the pure object a as waste product without its shell), a body reduced to putrid flesh or, in the case of Dr. X, “raw meat” to be manhandled fiercely by the butcher’s “big, powerful, hairy hands”. Dr. X’s fear of looking old and ugly – at the youthful age of 30 – further attests to the lack of a consistent self-image that would successfully hide the horror of his abjection. The many surgeries, his strict dietary restrictions and the black clothing are additional testament to his struggle to hide and correct a self that he deemed as unworthy as that of a miserable harlot pursuing men “disgusted by the thought of even touching him”. Moreover, these practices also testify to the subject’s desperate efforts to erase from the body all the markers of sexual difference (e.g. thinning himself out to the point of sexual indeterminacy). Unaided by the Name-of-the-Father, the psychotic subject, “martyr of the unconscious”, bears the burden and trauma of sexual difference single-handedly with the meagre solace afforded by the transformation of the body into an undifferentiated mass of flesh (a monochromatic anorexic stick) living dead to the world in the homogeneous realm outside sex.

The father was a man broken by alcohol, incapable of placing any limit on jouissance through the power of his own word; he could only put an end to the incestuous bond through an appeal to the authority of the university and the prestige associated with the symbolic investiture of “doctor scientist”. Evidently the Law regulating relations between generations was inoperative. The mother’s discourse did not lift the father to the status of bearer of the phallus and herald of the symbolic Law forbidding incest. Her desire lay likely elsewhere, perhaps in relation to the God to whom she prayed every night. If, as Dr. Moshtagh rightly suggests, we are to explore the mother’s jouissance then we must refrain from cluttering our path with the moral language of “malevolence” as if the aim of psychoanalysis were to restore the kernel of “Good” resting in the heart of Being. Freud and Lacan have taught us to relinquish the fool’s gold of morality and recognize that the ethics of psychoanalysis lies beyond good and evil, namely in the unlawful regions of feminine jouissance embodied by the tragic figures of Antigone and Medea. If, the “truth in a woman ... is measured by her subjective distance from the position of motherhood” (Miller; 2000, 17) then these Medea-mothers, far from standing in the place of a “passive perversion”, embody the locus of the production of the deepest truth. The analyst seeking solace from this truth in the ideal of the “Good” is like “poor Jason” who “has gone off to conquer the Golden Fleece of happiness”; they are men blinded by the phallus unable to “recognize Medea” (Lacan; 2006, 761).

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