

FEMININE SEXUALITY

Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose
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FEMINISM AND PSYCHO-ANALYSIS: the daughter's seduction

Jane Gallop
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To many socialists and feminists, psychoanalysis remains an esoteric area, too inaccessible to be of any use in understanding our everyday political struggles. Add the name of Jacques Lacan, the late French psychoanalyst, and its accessibility seems even more remote. Yet psychoanalysis is one of the 20th century's most important philosophical revolutions, a revolution no less radical in its implications than the work of Marx.

Sigmund Freud's views of human sexuality are as controversial today as they were in his own lifetime. Part of the controversy was initiated by other psychoanalysts and followers, such as Freud's biographer Ernest Jones, Karl Abraham and Karen Horney, who all disagreed about Freud's assumptions on the nature of female sexuality. These psychoanalytical debates of the 1920s and 30s have resurfaced, re-cast with a new urgency and motivated by a new force, namely feminism. Feminists have been no less critical of Freud's views than the psychoanalysts just mentioned: Juliet Mitchell's earlier book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* is by far the best and most readable account of the debate between Freud and the feminists.

However, something was missing from that book, something rectified by these two new publications, namely Freud's so-called 'French Revolution' associated with Jacques Lacan and his school. *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* by Jane Gallop is quite a demanding book, offering a Lacanian perspective on some of the chapters in this historical debate. The book edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose offers us a collection of new translations from the work of Lacan and his school, the Ecole Freudienne, and provides two very useful introductions to this whole area. In this review I will indicate a few of the contours of the debate, rather than comment too much on the specific content of the books.

Freud's work gave us a complex theory of sexuality which was original in at least two important respects. First, Freud radically extended the field of sexuality beyond simply normal, adult heterosexuality into infantile or childhood sexuality and to what we

normally think of as the 'perversions'. Secondly, he opposed the view that 'the sexual' was simply a natural and given instinct, just like hunger. To Freud, we are *made* male and female, we come to *acquire* our sexual identities through the process of what he called the Oedipus complex. Early on in Freud's thinking he tended to discuss the little girl's development in the same way as that of the little boy. However, in his later writings, he directed his efforts at understanding what was specific about the girl or what was specific about the nature of femininity.

Consider a couple of implications of Freud's discoveries. First, feminists are obviously opposed to the ideology which assumes that women, in their identity and status, are determined by nature rather than society. An ideology which says we are determined by nature is a reactionary one because it means things cannot be other than what is ordained by nature. Psychoanalysis offers us one of the ways of understanding the social acquisition of our sexual identity and the difficulty which is inherent in achieving it; sometimes that difficulty can become a neurosis. At the same time, psychoanalysis warns us against viewing 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as social roles which are then more or less consciously adopted by males and females.

Secondly, the Freudian view that there is not a simple normality to our sexuality, given at birth, enables us to rethink non-heterosexual relations: not only 'gay' relations (Freud regarded the homosexual as neither degenerate nor ill) but the whole gamut of pleasures and sensuality associated with sex, including mothering. Psychoanalysis is often accused of normalising indi-

viduals, making them fit into a rigid order. In the 1950s, many Marxists condemned psychoanalysis as 'bourgeois ideology' or as individualism. But, if we look deeper, we can see how Freud actually contested a rigid division between the supposedly 'normal' and 'abnormal' and he certainly rejected contemporary psychiatric notions of 'degeneracy'. These points should underline how crucial and radical a theory psychoanalysis is. Lacan's version of Freud equally stands opposed to the idea that psychoanalysis is about restoring people to a single norm or normality.

Psychoanalysis has transformed what it means to talk about the personal and how we *become* a person in the first place. Here, one is reminded of the slogan of modern feminism, 'the personal is political'. This slogan is an important one because it quite rightly challenges previous tendencies of putting 'the personal' into some kind of political quarantine and concentrating on supposedly more real and objective types of struggle. We now realise that the personal is every bit as real and significant in politics as anything else. What I think needs to be extended in this particular slogan is some recognition that the personal not only include *conscious* and *experienced* wishes or needs, but also *unconscious* wishes. Hence the contribution of psychoanalysis. Now it may seem a weird and elusive idea that we could ever 'reform' the unconscious, but I would suggest that we can be helped to understand what politics is about if we take the unconscious into account. For example, the *hold* of conservative ideologies around, say, the family or authority, can be partly explained in terms of the symbolic meaning which these ideas involve, evoking our *own* past family experiences and authority figures. Perhaps fascist ideology was successful to the extent that it too managed to evoke powerful images of the 'motherland' and the leader as a Father.

The psychoanalysis and feminism debate cannot be easily settled or terminated: the ground it covers is a vast one. Feminists will continue to have some major reservations about using Freud and will question some of his central concepts, of the Oedipus complex, of castration, of the theory of the difference between male and female. I would add that books such as these help us to decide whether the Freud being criticised is not sometimes a caricature and simplification. Whatever conclusion we come to, it is undeniable that we still have much to learn from Freud and that the relevance of psychoanalysis is by no means confined to the psychoanalyst's couch.

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