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# MY BESTIARY

*Débora Rabinovich*

**T**he organism is a real that is singular and which, because of the impact of the signifier, becomes a knot uniting the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. Of course, I don't know what happened during the first encounter, the first time the signifier hit the organism to make a body of it.

When I was in analysis, and in my work as an AS (Analyst of the School), I was able to pinpoint some discursive events that touched my body and left traces. My organism is obviously a feminine real. But how should I live through this body? In the masculine? In the feminine? This was a very early concern of mine, one that has almost always been there in my mind.

Is this body "correct"? Does it have the shape of a woman's body? It does not look like the body of a real woman. Isn't it too hairy? Too bony? And what about that nose! It's not nice, it looks like my father's... so it's masculine! And what about my belly button? No, this belly-button is not normal: it is neither a man's nor a woman's. It's shapeless!

All of this found its place in the analysis the moment my analyst stopped a session before it had even started right after this slip of the tongue: "Je suis très content", using the masculine form, which is entirely lost in English – "I am very happy." Such was the question that was behind this detective's questioning: Who am I? A man or a woman?

## I Don't Know...

As the story goes in my family, my father, whom I have never seen cry, is said to have cried on the day I was born. There are two different versions to explain these tears. The maternal version: I was his second daughter and he had dreamt of having a son. The paternal version: his mother – who for him was in the place of *The* woman – was never going to be able to meet me because a few months before she had died after being bitten by a rabid dog.

Both versions have left their mark on me. The little girl I then was did not know how to inhabit this body, this disappointing body, this body that could never measure up to that of this real woman that my beautiful, feminine grandmother had been. Since she was dead, I had failed to inherit her

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femininity. This fantasy was going to be confirmed quite a few years later when my analyst interpreted this as the inaugural trauma.

One day – I must have been five or so – I answered the phone. On the other end was a woman who said she was my father’s friend. A few seconds later, when my mother asked who had called I immediately said: “I don’t know... Nobody!” It hadn’t seemed fundamental, but I had never forgotten this phone call.

It was the trauma-analyst that situated it for me. If I use the phrase “trauma-analyst”, it is because his intervention was totally unexpected. As I was relating the story of this unpleasant moment that I had lived through, thinking as I did so, that I was the victim of the scene (even though I had created it myself), the analyst stopped me. He asked me the age of my children at that time, as well as the age I was when I received the phone call. His questions were immediately disconcerting.

It was not that his intervention was the cause of another trauma, but as he pointed to the traumatic nature of that phone call, the process towards the end of my analysis started. This phone call had fixed me to the phrase “*I don’t know*”, as well as to all the places and characters in the scene: my father’s friend the enigmatic woman (therefore an enemy), my mother the deceived wife, and my father the unfaithful husband. Each of them represented a step towards the end of my analysis.

In my fiction, an excess of knowledge about what could not be known, and an absence of knowledge blended into each other. I went through this jouissance time and time again, each time knowing what I should not know. And this always came with inconsolable tears, tachycardia, and even a loss of appetite... the “*I don’t know*” that had been my answer to my mother repeated the versions surrounding my birth.

As I was approaching the end of my analysis, a dream punctuated this confusion between man and woman in a different way: *I am putting on my contact lenses. There is something in my eye. I take off the lens and I find a transparent sticker with a thinly-written letter M on it. I try to unstick it, thinking that with the sticker off, I will be able to see clearly. And yet, just after I do, I realise the situation is worse: an opacity starts to form. I decide that I will see better through the sticker than I do without it.* That sticker with the letter M could just as well have been a W, depending on how you put the lens on. M or W, Man or Woman.

## Sticking Together

It was a style I had: to remain stuck to the other, or to have the other stick to me. The analyst touched upon it in different ways. *Deborá*, my name, easily equivocates with *devora* [devour]. This other name *devora*



Reduction: Analysts of the School

manifested sometimes in the form of *devouring* food and the Other. It caused much torment!

For a long time, I thus named my adherence to the other by saying: *I am a thistle* [*abrojo*]. I thought it was a nice nickname. But I was only accentuating this jouissance, which only calmed down once I read *abro-ojo* [*I open-eye*] in the word *abrojo*. Meaning plus satisfaction: Lacan condenses them both into the signifier *jouissance*, or into the formula “from father to worse” [*du père au pire*], the passage from the meaning involved in the Name of the Father, to the worse implicated by jouissance.

With an adhesive analysand, the analyst must be like Teflon. Today, I realise that this was his way of touching upon the non-interpretable jouissance. It was not about a specific act or a one-off intervention, but rather the direction that the analyst gave to the cure. Today, I would thus say that I had a Teflon analyst.

“The politics of Teflon”: this was an expression that I had heard him say a few years before he became my analyst. It was about not adhering. No surface of contact. His style was always welcoming, but he never shook my hand.

## Extraction of the Slug of Libido

A dream indicated the end of my analysis by producing the extraction of the devouring in me: *I am with people. I see a spot on my leg. I discreetly pierce it. Seeing that some beastie is coming out of my body, I become frightened and ashamed. Without knowing what it is, I try to hide it between my hands. My son notices that there is something going on and he insists that I show him what's in my hands: it's a slug!*

My mother liked to kill the slugs in her garden. I followed her in this. After it had rained, we would go out together to cover them in salt. I would watch their bodies transform into foam. There is something of the rabid, devouring dog in the slug. If my mother was so insistent on killing them, it was undoubtedly because slugs devoured everything!

It is not only the beastie itself that is repulsive; its signifier, *slug* [*babosa*], is also evocative of disgust<sup>1</sup> and points to meanings that are both sexual and troubling. A slug is sticky and libidinal. I situate something of the libido in this beastly gastropod. As a mythical organ, the libido is a concentration of all of the drives. It is an organ with a mortifying connotation. We thus used to kill slugs that produced foam as they died. Such was the treatment we inflicted on those that ate everything.

1. [TN: In Spanish, the word *babosa* [*slug*] literally means *sliming*, that which dribbles, and it is also a slang word used to describe someone who is excited when they look at a woman.]



## Frozen Hands

There remains one body event that is very surprising and that started in the waiting room on the first day of my analysis: some of my fingers became so cold they turned to a white-greenish colour. This strange, unpleasant, painful and unsightly event continued for almost two years starting from that first day, this happened to me from time to time and was always unexpected. Although it often occurred when it was cold, this phenomenon was not linked to the ambient temperature. My numerous efforts to find gloves that would be ever warmer were always in vain.

Jacques-Alain Miller asserts that for such a thing as this to be considered a body event, one has to assume it means something on some level. Otherwise, there is nothing to read into it. This was the case for more than twenty years: nothing to read. Even though I did mention it in analysis, I never really pondered this phenomenon. I went to the doctor's once or twice but was never given a specific diagnosis for it. That's just the way it was. It was not even something that was left over. The analysis ended, it persisted.

If I say that this phenomenon was not a remainder, it is precisely because it was not something that remained to be analysed. It was going to be a mystery forever. There was nothing adhering to its interpretation, and I did not think that it was possible to read it.

A few months after the conclusion of my interviews with my passers, I received an email. A woman told me that she was to meet up with the other members of the cartel the next day and she wanted me to answer some questions before she did. One of these was: "Do you know the circumstances surrounding your conception and birth?" Yes, I did. I had returned to them over and over again in analysis. But I called my father anyway to ask him to tell me again how my grandmother had died.

Here is what he said: "The rabid dog bit your grandmother as well as two other people. But the bites were not lethal for these two because it was their legs that had been bitten. Your grandmother, on the other hand, was wounded on her hands and her death was practically immediate." As I listened, and almost before he articulated it, I looked at my hands.

I used to describe this phenomenon by saying: "My fingers are dying." And yet, it was not about death, but about a death that refused death. It was very painful. In this way, I bore a trace of the premature death of my grandmother, a trace of the bite that left me frozen.

My analysis was long, very long, and as I have said before, this didn't bother me. It was more like a life style. The time to conclude dragged on. Two dreams pushed me to its end: the one of the extraction of the slug, and another that contained a new signifier, rhinoceros [*rinocerante*].



I had these two dreams shortly after a cycling accident in which I thought I would die. At that instant, I clearly understood that that was the last thing I wanted. As the analyst told me, the slug did not come out because of the rain, but because it faced the anxiety of death. I would rather say, faced with the imminence of death.

Translated by Nicolas Boileau

## THE RISK OF AN INVENTION

*Luiz Fernando Carrijo Da Cunha*

A contingency on my psychoanalytic path brought me to the choice of my fourth and last analyst. Years earlier, he had been the protagonist of a “no”. This “no” had followed another, which had taken place just before this choice. The first “no” was in relation to my entry to the School, and the second concerned the response of the cartel of the Pass. At the time my third analysis was concluded, the cartel had responded with a “non-nomination”, founded upon the idea that “something of the drive remained anaesthetised...” It is not difficult to recognise in this sentence one of the nodal points of a jouissance programme that was yet to be untangled, driven by the signifier “anaesthesia”.

I had chosen anaesthesiology, a specialty to which I was devoted in my first years of medical practice. Very soon, I found boredom and sadness in it, which led me to my first analysis.

The series of “no” responses triggered anxiety. The deafening voice of the maternal Other, partnered with the mortifying silence of the father, had given the tone to the preceding analyses. This time, the “gaze” took centre stage, starting from the first interviews. A dream marked the inclusion of the analyst into a logic that unfolded in the following way: *I arrive at my session and the waiting room is full. I have to wait for a long time, but strangely I am called in by the analyst right away. The door to the office stays open so that all the other patients can witness the unfolding of the session. It begins by the request to lie down on the couch. With an almost aggressive gesture the*

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