

ANALYZED BY LACAN

A Personal Account

Betty Milan

Translations by
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PREFACE

Translated by Chris Vanderwees

Lacan has been with me since 1971, when I met him. He has been with me for more than four decades. How can I explain this constant companionship? Lacan offered me an encounter with myself that never ceased to be renewed—an effect produced by his way of conducting an analysis.

His theory has spread through the publication and translation of the *Seminars*, but his clinical practice is much less well known for reasons that I explain in this book. I wrote *Why Lacan*—the memoir that is the first chapter of this book—to shed light on this. I wanted to show what his scope was and to dispel damaging rumors, such as the one that he shortened the analytic session to earn more money.

A lot of water went under the bridge before I was ready to write my memoir. Between 1973 and 1977, I underwent an analysis with Lacan that, initially, I had not even considered undertaking. I explain in this book how the Doctor genuinely captivated me and how I left Brazil behind to make my home in France. It was not out of courage that I left my native country and lived in another language; it was because I had no other choice. Lacan, who knew a lot about theater, told me at the time that I had left Brazil in order to discover America. In a certain sense, this is what happened, thanks to an analysis where the analysand's journey was a traversal of her "subjective epic."

The reference to theater is as present in Freud's *oeuvre* as in Lacan's approach. For the founder of psychoanalysis, we all share something with tragic heroes, like Oedipus, like Hamlet, because the unconscious acts and speaks in our place, and we live its returns with a guilty conscience. Following Freud, Lacan gave psychoanalytic treatment the magnitude of an epic. He relied on the resources of the theater both in his seminars and in his practice as a clinician.

Since my analysis, several publishers have solicited my memoir. In the 1990s, responding positively to them was beyond my capacity, but I wrote a novel based on my analysis, whose central themes were immigration, xenophobia, and the importance of the mother tongue. It seemed to me that the best way to dig inside myself about what had

happened in the analysis was through the path of literature. Theoretical discourse could have locked me in jargon and prevented me from deepening the subjective questions that were at work in me.

Ten years later, still inspired by my analysis, I wrote a play staged in 2009 at the Théâtre du Rond-Point in Paris. This play is, above all, about the theme of motherhood. Like her ancestors, the heroine of Lebanese origin must produce a male firstborn to accomplish what her family expects of her. Pregnancy therefore becomes the problem of her life: after two miscarriages, her husband leaves her. Is motherhood inaccessible to her? Can she not identify with the other women in her family? Or is there another reason? Thanks to the analysis with the Doctor, the heroine can accept her body, recognize her female sexuality, and become a mother. The play demonstrates that gender troubles can have unconscious reasons.

After its presentation in France, I wanted my play to be translated into English. It was read at the New School in 2018 at the invitation of Paola Mieli. Richard Ledes, who moderated the lecture, told me that he wanted to make a film adaptation of it. I signed the rights over to him in 2020. It would become the first film featuring Lacan.

The gods were with us and the film was made the following year in 2021. I then gathered my courage to write *Why Lacan* as a testament to the relevance of the Doctor's work.

Lacan made extensive use of the so-called short session. In fact, the time of the session was variable. Lacan was not guided by the time of Kronos, the time that passes, but that of Kairos, the moment of opportunity that we seize. What counted for him was the discourse of the analysand, not the clock. As soon as the essential was said, the session was over, and the analyst had fulfilled his role. In his own way, Lacan taught us not to waste time.

Lacan did not interpret the analysand's discourse by attributing a meaning to it. He interrupted the session and allowed the analysand to interpret the reason for the cut. The analysis continued outside the session. This new way of working was due to a clinical discovery: Lacan had realized that the traditional manner of interpreting could provoke resistance. He therefore changed his practice. From his point of view, psychoanalysis needed to be reinvented.

Why Lacan was written to illustrate this reinvention and also to render Lacan's approach intelligible to the uninitiated.



WHY LACAN
(A Memoir)

Translated by Chris Vanderwees

to the memory of Jacques Lacan

PRELIMINARIES

I did my analysis with Lacan in the 1970s. At the time, a French publisher asked me to write on this subject. The *on* bothered me; I did not follow up. The transference was too great; I did not have enough distance to be able to deliver my testimony. This is why I wrote a novel inspired by my analysis instead. Forty years later, I wanted to come back to what had happened at 5, rue de Lille, where, among other things, I had learned to privilege the opportune moment.

If my work with Lacan did not definitively deliver me from anguish, it changed my life. He allowed me to accept my origins, my biological sex, and motherhood, thanks, on the one hand, to his interest, whose intensity I perceived, and, on the other hand, to his way of working, which is controversial even today. It is this precise point that I want to emphasize from my experience with him. But first, I would like to mention a very significant example. Recently, in a circle of intellectuals, someone expressed his indignation about a session experienced by one of his acquaintances who had undergone an analysis with Lacan in the 1960s. On the couch, the person concerned had spontaneously switched from French to Portuguese, without Lacan's intervention. He had let the analysand speak for a good while without understanding what he was saying, then he had stood up and interrupted the session with a "see you next time." Since nothing that was said could be interpreted, we have to conclude that, for Lacan, the signified of the analysand's discourse had counted less than the passage from one language to another.

For those who know the importance of language for Lacan—he often spoke of the "treasure trove of signifiers"—this is not surprising. So, what was the point of the session? Lacan's silence, followed by an abrupt interruption, highlighted the analysand's desire to speak in his mother tongue, thus giving meaning to the idea that "desire is the desire for recognition." By doing so, the Doctor was at the same time underlining the irreplaceable character of the mother tongue.

It was around this question of language that my analysis took place between 1973 and 1977. Intellectual life in Paris was then in full swing, around Michel Foucault, Michel Serres, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida,

and Julia Kristeva, among others. Lacan was holding his seminar in the large amphitheater of the Faculty of Law, on the Place du Panthéon, where the first to arrive warmed up the place for the others. In the front row sat the familiar and closest disciples of the master, who only entered when the theater was full. In the winter, he wore a black mink coat where the light played, as in his white hair, to which he paid particular attention. Lacan's entrance was a veritable apparition: a silence was gradually established. The master was going to speak, every word was going to be drunk, even when his speech was deprived of intelligibility. Indeed, Lacan was little concerned with being immediately intelligible. He emphasized *Nachträglich*, the Freudian concept translated into French as *après-coup*. *Nachträglich* means that certain facts can only be understood after they have occurred—and Lacan's practice was based on this notion, both in his seminar and in his clinic.

The seminar was addressed to psychoanalysts and intellectuals interested in analytic theory—those who could wait for knowledge. This is why the accusations of elitism directed at Lacan during the last few decades have been misguided. How could a master whose practice demanded the greatest patience submit to the imperatives of immediate communication in his teaching? Lacan taught in his own way, differently from that advocated by professors and communicators, whose transmission is necessarily limpid insofar as it aims to express knowledge already constituted. For Lacan, *non-knowledge* was as important as knowledge, and he gave himself up in public to the discovery of his distinctive path. This is what he did in all his seminars from 1953 to 1980, as if to evoke Antonio Machado: “you make your own path as you walk. As you walk, you make your own road,/and when you look back/you see the path/you will never travel again./Traveler, there is no road;/only a ship's wake on the sea.”¹

Nachträglich was also the basis of the Doctor's practice. He would interrupt the session without explanation, trusting the analysand to discover the reason for the interruption on his or her own. He encouraged the other to analyze themselves. “Go and come back and tell me what you have discovered. Go and decipher the enigma of your

1. *Al andar se hace camino / Y al volver la vista atrás / Se ve la senda que nunca / Se ha de volver a pisar / Caminante no hay camino sino estelas en la mar.*

own story.” This explains the substitution of the word *patient* for that of *analysand*. The patient’s position is that of one who waits for the doctor’s wisdom. The analysand’s position is that of the person doing the analysis.

In this context, the treatment depends as much on the analysand as on the analyst and the session does not exist without the street. In my case, the session included traveling from 5, rue de Lille to rue de la Harpe, or to use my slip of the tongue, from the Lacan Quarter to the Latin Quarter. On the way, I would ruminate on what had been said and often make a discovery that confirmed the importance of the work. This eureka increased my self-esteem, and the desire for a new session naturally arose.

Lacan maintained that transference thanks to the cut was an effective means of passing on the power to analyze, i.e., his own power, to his analysand. In other words, he invited the analysand to access knowledge of herself. The cut avoids the resistance to analysis that the interpretation of the analysand’s discourse by the analyst can provoke. This is due to the fact that discourse has several possible meanings and that the analysand may not recognize herself at all in the one attributed to her by the analyst whose intervention may, in this case, generate a power struggle.

As the interruption of the session took place according to the discourse and not the time of the clock, it was not possible to respect the rule of forty-five minutes per session established by the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA). For Lacan, as soon as what was essential had been said, the session was over, the analyst had fulfilled his or her role. This is the main reason why the IPA asked him to resign in 1953. He was banned for “deviant practice.”

In the same year, to justify the interruption of the session, he wrote “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.” One of his analysands was talking non-stop about Dostoyevsky’s art, wasting the session’s time in endless comments. Lacan interrupted his speech and, in the following session, a fantasy of anal pregnancy arose ... a pregnancy that ended in a caesarean section. The interruption had the effect of suspending a fallacious discourse and giving birth to a full speech.

Lacan wanted the analysis to take place without tactics of delay. He condemned wastefulness and that is why he refused to work according to chronological time, thereby allowing the analyst, as well as the analysand, to do what was unexpected. It was not the linear time of

Kronos that guided him, but the time of Kairos, that of the fleeting moment when an opportunity arises that one must know how to seize.

By taking the path of Kairos, Lacan turned psychoanalysis upside down and restored the vitality of its beginnings. What counted was not the analyst's punctuality, but his readiness. In other words, it was not enough to have been trained and to be recognized by one's peers. The analyst had to prove his competence in each session.

The reversal was so significant that the IPA asked Lacan to resign. His teaching was the object of an unusual censorship that made him an outcast. This was a situation that he compared to the "major excommunication" of which Spinoza had been a victim in the seventeenth century.

In 1981, when Lacan died, I chose as an epigraph for his obituary—written for a newspaper in Brazil—a line from Saint-John Perse: "They called me the dark and I lived in brightness." Lacan lit up my path, allowing a descendant of Lebanese immigrants, a victim of the xenophobia of others and of her own, to finally accept herself.

I do not remember everything that happened during the analysis. But what was decisive, I have not forgotten. I have even kept an almost photographic memory of certain facts, such as the image of the Doctor standing at the entrance to the waiting room, in the doorway, to call in the next analysand. His look went from one to the other, hesitated for a moment, and then he pointed to the chosen one with a wave of his hand before turning on his heels and returning to his office.

More than one analysand has spoken about the impact of Lacan's sessions without questioning the reason for it, either because the transference had not yet been worked through or because it was difficult to shift from the position of the analysand—who is content to associate freely and lets the analyst interpret—to the position of the interpreter. This passage also implies the revelation of facts which the analysand does not always have the desire to divulge. Much of what is said in analysis is stated because the analyst agrees not to reveal anything. I still remember the session where, to tear me out of my silence, Lacan assured me: "Nothing you say will leave here."

If the analyst cannot speak of what he has heard from his patient, except at the cost of becoming a traitor, the patient has the freedom to testify. But often those who become analysts shy away from writing a memoir of their experience of being analyzed in order not to strip themselves of the aura of mystery that, in their imagination, they must

preserve in order to exercise their magisterium. However, the fact remains that testimony is important for the transmission of the practice, which is perpetuated in spite of all the detractors of psychoanalysis and the continuous oppositions between analysts.

I worked steadily with Lacan from 1973 to 1977. But it is only now that I wonder how he made an analysis at the limits of the possible into a reality. I say this because at the time I had little fluency in French and deep down I did not really want to engage in an analysis—as is often the case. If I had not had to leave the Brazilian Society of Psychoanalysis (SBP) for irreverence, along with other members deemed undesirable, it is likely that I would never have come to France. My deepest wish was to be recognized as a psychoanalyst abroad so that I could then practice in Brazil. At eighteen, when I entered the Faculty of Medicine at the University of São Paulo, I was already interested in psychoanalysis. As soon as I could, I locked myself in the library to read Freud.

I identified with Lacan because he opposed the IPA. But the fact that the Doctor was French was very important for an unconscious reason, which I will return to in detail, and for the admiration that at the time Brazilian intellectuals had for their counterparts in the country of Descartes.

This aura of France in Brazil had deep roots.² There is Jean de Léry's *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* about his experience with the

2. The relationship between Brazil and France dates back to the sixteenth century. Brazil was the object of the covetousness of Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon (1510–72), who settled in Guanabara Bay and founded the Antarctic France in 1555. This was later wiped off the map by the Portuguese. From then on, the country became a literary and philosophical subject for the French.

Jean de Léry, who visited Antarctic France, published *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* in 1578, a small masterpiece about his experience with the anthropophagous indigenous people. The author accuses the French of being more barbaric than cannibals, evoking the massacre of Protestants in Paris on August 24, 1572, during the Night of St. Bartholomew.

After having met three Tupinamba people in Rouen in 1562, Montaigne wrote *Of Cannibals*, where he asserts that Europeans who torture their prisoners before killing them are crueller than indigenous people. The comparison between the Portuguese and the indigenous led Montaigne to criticize European ethnocentrism and to oppose the idea that indigenous people were barbaric. This is also the reason that he is still a reference for Brazilian intellectuals.

indigenous anthropophagi; the famous chapter of Montaigne's *Essays*, "The Cannibals," resulting from his meeting in Rouen with three Tupinambas; the influence of the Enlightenment on the separatists of the Minas Gerais Conspiracy; the French mission sent by Louis XVIII to Brazil, of which the painter Jean-Baptiste Debret left unforgettable testimonies; the teachings of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Fernand Braudel at the University of São Paulo; Michel Foucault's stays in Rio and São Paulo. The numerous literary and cultural exchanges between Brazil and France contributed to my fascination with France.

I heard about Lacan in São Paulo in 1968, at a meeting of intellectuals. There was a French psychoanalyst there who did not want to deal with the May events and spoke only about Lacan. For him, modernity did not reside in the Parisian demonstrations, but rather at 5, rue de Lille. I left the meeting with the same conviction, determined to explore the relationship between psychoanalysis and linguistics and the nature of the *subject of the signifier*, so important in Lacanian theory.

In the eighteenth century, the ideas of the Enlightenment carried by young people trained in Europe influenced the conspirators of Minas Gerais (*inconfidentes mineiros*) who revolted against Portugal and claimed independence. It was no longer possible to pay the taxes demanded by the Portuguese crown, which threatened to use arms to collect them.

In the nineteenth century, during the reign of Don João VI in Brazil, Louis XVIII sent a French mission to Rio that established a system of higher academic education and played an important role in the cultural formation of the country. In addition to his numerous watercolors depicting daily life, the painter Jean-Baptiste Debret (1768–1848), also wrote *A Picturesque and Historic Voyage to Brazil*, which remains a reference.

In the twentieth century, France's presence continued with a second decisive mission, composed of young professors—including Claude Lévi-Strauss and Fernand Braudel—who founded the University of São Paulo in the 1930s. After the Second World War, an intensive program of exchanges between the two countries began. In the 1960s, sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso—who would become president of the Republic from 1995 to 2002—was invited to teach at the Sorbonne. The University of São Paulo received philosophers, historians, and anthropologists who became famous. Among them was Michel Foucault, who was officially invited to Brazil five times between 1965 and 1976.

With a few others, we formed a group to decipher the *Écrits*, an objective we only achieved with great difficulty, believing that the difficulty arose from the French language, when in reality it arose from the specificity of Lacan's language. In this respect, we can compare him to James Joyce who, unable to write in Gaelic—a language spoken by a minority—invented his own language in English. This language can be heard every year on Bloomsday, the day of June 16, when the people of Dublin celebrate *Ulysses*, evoking in the streets, theaters, and bars episodes from the life of Leopold Bloom, its main protagonist.

Like Joyce, Lacan invented his language and introduced a new concept, *lalangue*, which concerns the idiosyncratic language of each person. Often only writers are aware of this peculiar form of language. In his own way, the master was a poet, and the link he saw between psychoanalysis and poetry became evident when, during one of his seminars in 1977, he declared that he was not enough of a poet to be a great analyst.³

I was already a psychiatrist, but I wanted to get a doctorate in psychiatry, writing a thesis on eclampsia. I was also undergoing analytic training. My deepest wish was to be recognized as a psychoanalyst abroad, so that I could then practice in Brazil. After a psychiatric internship in Brazil, I obtained, through a colleague, Lacan's address in Paris. Despite the military dictatorship in Brazil, the arrests, and the torture, I did not consider doing an analysis abroad. Like many other Brazilians, I was very attached to my country. I wanted to talk to Lacan with the sole purpose of asking him to indicate an analyst who could work with our group in São Paulo to organize a seminar there and to teach his theory. This seemed like a typical request from a person coming from a city where nothing has ever seemed impossible, including bringing the sea from the coast to São Paulo, as the Paulists (the inhabitants of São Paulo) had imagined at the height of their splendor ...

At the time, the great novelty in my field of work was the transformation of the psychiatric asylum into a therapeutic community, and I had met its designer, Maxwell Jones, in São Paulo. We corresponded briefly, and in 1971 I arranged to visit the community he had started in Melrose, Scotland. I had the intention of going to France afterward and perhaps meeting Lacan. I say *perhaps* because no

3. I heard Lacan mention this in one of his seminars in 1977.

meeting having been fixed, I could not presume that a person of such notoriety would agree to receive me without an introduction from someone he knew.

From Melrose, I went to Paris where I settled in a hotel on rue des Écoles. I called several times the number that a psychiatrist in São Paulo had given me, but always got the same answer: *there are no Doctors here*. My companion at the time, also a psychiatrist, suggested that we go directly to 5, rue de Lille.

On the door of the building, no sign. We had to wait until someone came out and could inform us. It was a woman, completely absorbed in her thoughts. Perhaps she had just finished a session.

“Could you please tell me Lacan’s floor?”

“What? I didn’t understand ...”

“Lacan ... the Doctor’s office?”

“It’s on the first.”

And without a word, she turned her head and continued down the street. We went upstairs and, with my heart pounding, I dared to ring the bell.

The Doctor’s secretary, the eternal Gloria, opened the door and said hello to us with her slight foreign accent.

“We couldn’t make an appointment before coming ...”

“What do you mean?”

“The phone number they gave me in Brazil must be wrong.”

“In Brazil?”

Gloria widened her eyes, smiled, and, without asking anything else, led us to the waiting room. Lacan appeared at the door and, welcoming us with a gesture, beckoned us in.

Before making my request for an analyst in São Paulo who could teach a seminar on Lacan’s theory, I explained that we had not made an appointment because we had the wrong phone number.

“If the phone did not work, why didn’t you come here right away?”

I was puzzled by the question. How could I push open his door without prior authorization? From the outset, the Doctor suggested that I could—and why not?—act on my impulse. He valued the desire,

and not the imaginary, of the young stranger, who counted for so little in her own eyes. With a sentence, with a smile, I was won over.

He then wanted to know where we were from.

“From São Paulo.”

“From Brazil!” exclaimed Lacan emphatically.

This emphasis on our origin revealed the Doctor’s interest. He made use of a theatrical resource as he would on other occasions. Since it was I who had answered— my companion remained silent—it was to me that he addressed himself.

“Your ancestors are also Brazilian?”

“My grandparents are Lebanese ... on the side of my mother and my father ... immigrants.”

“Interesting ... When did they arrive in Brazil?”

“At the end of the nineteenth century, to escape the war ... and then at the beginning of the twentieth century.”

“And you, my dear, what are you doing?”

“I am a psychiatrist. I did an analysis and now I study ... Lacan.”

“Really?”

“We have a group in São Paulo that has undertaken to read your *Écrits*. Despite the difficulty, because of the language, we got through the first text, ‘The Purloined Letter.’ We now want to invite a French analyst recommended by you ... I have a letter from my colleagues here.”

I gave him the letter, which he put on his desk after looking at it.

“Very well. Come back tomorrow and you will tell me about the conditions of this invitation.”

Then he got up and walked us to the door.

When I left his office, I was no longer the same. By bringing me to talk about my origins, Lacan had sent me back to the history hidden by my ancestors. For them, the integration of the descendants depended on forgetting the past. The Doctor’s interest led me to speak about what I had been trying to hide since adolescence: the truth about my origins. He allowed me to be the granddaughter of immigrants. In other words, I left Lacan’s office without the shame regarding who I was that I had carried for a long time. All I wanted to do was to return to 5, rue de Lille. This had not escaped the Doctor, whose desire to analyze never wavered.

It is not by chance that he insisted so much on the importance of the *desire of the analyst* in the effectiveness of the cure. He also drew attention to the opposite idea of the *resistance of the analyst*, when at the time we were only talking about the *resistance of the patient*—to whom all and any difficulty in the process was attributed.

I came back the next day with my companion, who was really my shield. As no one is accompanied to see their analyst, his presence attested that my visit was only due to the initiative of my colleagues in São Paulo. But this time, when he appeared at the door, it was me that Lacan looked at and said:

“*Come on in*, my dear.”

Come on in, and I entered, determined to talk about the conditions of the invitation.

“The analyst appointed by you would teach your theory in a seminar we are organizing.”

“Hmm ...”

“There will be no cost to him since the participants will pay for it.”

“Good, put it all in writing and return tomorrow.”

With the *return tomorrow*, he inserted me into the rhythm of analytic work, whose path I secretly wished to follow. He relied on the imperative—*return*—and the regularity of the meetings to open the way to the analysis. Lacan always privileged two resources: the word and time. Hence the importance of the texts “Function and Field of Speech” and “Logical Time” in the *Écrits*.

So I went a third and last time to 5, rue de Lille. But this time it was to tell the Doctor that I wanted to do an analysis with him. Retrospectively, I recognize that what happened there, in 1971, corresponds to the first stage of my analysis, the so-called *preliminary stage*.

Alleging the need to finish a doctoral thesis in Brazil, I pledged to return to Paris within two years and to stay there for four months. The two-year period may have seemed long, but what mattered was the promised word. Lacan said goodbye to me and added, “Above all, don’t forget to write to me.”

Not only did he express the desire not to lose sight of me, but he also gave me the freedom to return whenever I wished. In other words,

your time will be mine, which reminds me of the troubadour who called his lady his *suzerain* and himself her *servant*. Could I, who came from such a deeply machismo country, commit myself fully to this new perspective?

It was only much later that I understood Lacan's way of proceeding in the first stage of the analysis. The Doctor took into account the explicit request (*demande*)—to recommend to me an analyst who could go to Brazil—so that my unconscious desire could emerge. He treated my request as the manifest content of a dream, the signified of which must be discovered through the associations of the dreamer.

Of course, he did this because he wanted me to become his analysand. A desire he expressed by *why didn't you come here right away?*, by *return tomorrow*, and *above all, by do not forget to write to me*. He made it clear that my engagement in analysis with him was something important. This is how my idea of crossing the ocean again to work with Lacan came to fruition.

The analysis began with three short sessions: twenty minutes for the first and less than ten for the following ones. This was a very short duration for what represented a major turning point, because it was not chronological time that counted, but a *modus operandi* based on deep empathy and the quality of listening. The clock counted as little as the length of a poem in poetry. It took no more than a line for Camões to define the nature of the feeling of love, which is “a discontented contentment” (*contentamento descontente*), or “a pain that hurts, but is not felt” (*dor que dói e não sente*). With a single verse, “we are dust, but loving dust” (*somos pó, mas pó amoroso*), Quevedo showed how life is inseparable from death.

Like the poets, Lacan drew on the treasure trove of language to do much with little. One example is the neologism he coined to evoke the transformation of love into hate (*amour en haine*): *hainamoration*. A single word—which could serve as a subtitle for Shakespeare's *Othello*—to designate the ordinary substitution of hate for love, as if love and hate were two sides of the same coin.

My companion and I returned to Brazil, where I wrote my doctoral thesis in psychiatry on eclampsia, a rare pathology in developed countries, but then very widespread in Brazil, due to the lack of resources in the prenatal field. Perhaps because it was not possible to remedy this situation and avoid this pathology, doctors wrote theses on the prevention of death in cases of eclampsia. I was angry because

women were not being monitored during pregnancy, that is to say, the medical establishment was not doing what was necessary to avoid hypertension and the risk of death.

I did not want to pursue a career as a doctor, but as a psychoanalyst. To tell the truth, I had only studied medicine to fulfill the wishes of my father, himself a doctor, who saw no other way for his daughter. Like many men of his generation, he wanted me to exercise a respectable profession—such as a doctor, engineer, or lawyer—which was the only conceivable option at the time for a Brazilian woman “from a good family.” So, I went that route.

When I was a child and teenager, my father taught me to cultivate my body and compete in sports while I also devoted myself to studying. He died at the age of forty-eight, while I was in my third year of college, but not without teaching me how to care for a terminally ill man—him. More than once, I gave him the necessary injection. In the end, I was the one who prescribed the morphine. So, I had to bear the death of a young father who left me with the moral responsibility for the family: I was the oldest child and also a medical student.

This precocious maturity gave me some audacity. Among other things, I joined the movement opposed to the military dictatorship in 1969, and then left Brazil four years later to begin my training with Lacan, which meant separating from my partner at the time—who, due to his work obligations, was not able to accompany me—and finding myself alone in a city whose culture I did not know and whose language I did not speak.

The fact is that I gave priority to analytical training. I did not imagine that it was going to cost me my marriage. My boyfriend was not one who could wait or say “your date will be mine”: he chose sex over love. Without any real attachment to me, he was in no position to accept my freedom. He was a chauvinist without knowing it, and I did not know it either.

Love happens between similar people, and machismo can only be contrary to it, since it does not allow for female desire. Caetano Veloso expresses this in a song: “He is the one who wants/He is the man/I am only the woman.” Other lyrics by Chico Buarque clearly state how a woman should behave: “in your presence I keep silent/by day I am a flower/by night I am your horse/his beer is sacred/his will is the most just.”

Machismo culture was rampant in Brazil, a country that never ceased to rank high on the scale of rape and femicide. Women and children are the first victims of this culture, but so are men. They unwittingly obey the evil imperative of revenge and become criminals.

Before my trip, I wrote twice to Lacan to tell him that I wanted to come to France. I fixed the date when I received his telegram.

“Alright, dear Madame, I am making arrangements now to receive you at your convenience.

Yours truly,

Jacques Lacan

P.S. Specify to me as you can the (specific) date of your arrival.”

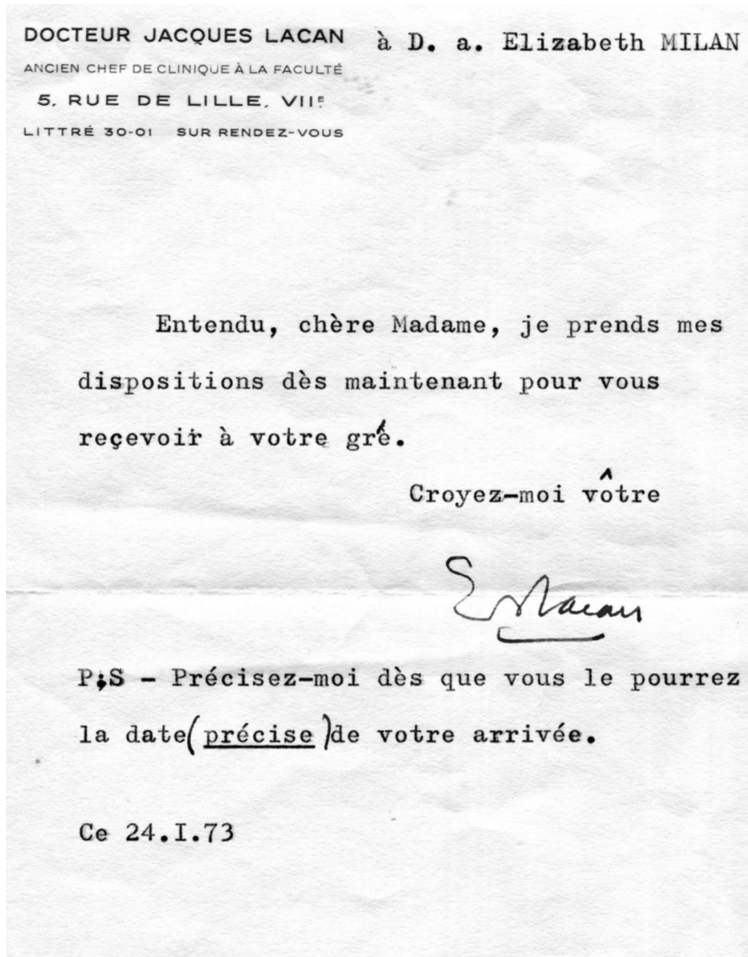


Figure 1 Telegram from Lacan to author (1973).

When I received the telegram, I did not immediately realize the curious repetition in the postscript. Did it not betray the Doctor's anticipation? It only hastened my trip.

I prepared with the help of my mother who, for various reasons, fantasized about Paris. She—like many of her contemporaries—was so fascinated by the City of Light that she saw the constellation of the Eiffel Tower in Brazil's sky and the Notre-Dame in the São Paulo cathedral, which, "in addition to its two Gothic towers, has a rose window." There is no doubt that this fascination had to do with the influence of French fashion, which I was completely indifferent to at the time. In Brazil, those who considered themselves Leftists did not care about how they dressed. Our concerns were of another nature, and it was only in Paris that I discovered fashion.

During my preparations, despite the sunny presence emanating from the Doctor, I was a little cold in my soul. I anticipated nostalgia for the place where I had always lived and where nothing was foreign to me.