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*Hysterical Science: Analyzing the Methodology of Feminist Psychoanalysis in Reclaiming  
Female Literary Figuration*

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## ABSTRACT

Though the female character has long been a tool of the writer, she has yet to be recovered as a representation of the women of flesh and blood for whom she has stood as allegory, example, and fate. Through alternative lenses, such as psychoanalysis and especially through feminist psychoanalysis, one can find the beginnings of a reclamation. Among the work of thinkers, theorists, psychoanalysts, and writers Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, and Bracha Ettinger lies a pantheon of female literary figures upon which theories such as performativity, *écriture féminine*, and the matrixial space have been applied. By using female figures to explore psychoanalytical intersections, thinkers like Butler, Cixous and Ettinger are reclaiming the history of psychoanalysis as a field built on the exploitation of female psychotherapy patients—the hysterics of science. This thesis intends to analyze how these thinkers go about re-creating psychoanalysis through a feminist lens and create a pantheon of female figures that embodies this work within the field of literature. In doing so, this work will establish, among other notions, how eliminating heteronormativity for Antigone eliminates the living death for the woman, how restoring agency for Medusa restores a creative space for the woman, and how failing to capture Eurydice ensures a freedom for the woman.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

### Methodology

This project began as an argument for using psychoanalysis in a literary setting as a way to combine my thoughts and interests stemming from the double major I completed during my time at Penn State. Character study and, by extension, analysis of whole works through a psychoanalytic lens would be an interesting way to synthesize these two modes of thought and research what exists of this coordinated field already. However, one cannot begin a journey into psychoanalysis without first studying the work of Freud, his predecessors, his critics, and his research subjects— these strands individually create the knots that produce character, genre, theory, and so much more. This is a course of study that brought me in contact with early psychoanalytic concepts that interestingly tied with stories and literary lore that I had long been a fan of as well as having studied them previously— Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* begins to explain the concepts behind psychological horror and was one work that demonstrated to me how clearly the topics of characterization and psychology had already been at play for a significant amount of time. At the same time this study pointed me to the early witch trials and *Malleus Maleficarum*, as well as bringing to the forefront, like oil rising in water, what many critics and theorists call, “Freud’s women”, the cast of patients that served as the basis for Freud’s case studies on hysteria, that became the fulcrum for this work. Though Freud intended to showcase his famed psychoanalytical concepts on the subject of a male, a majority of his cases dealing with this subject matter were made up of women, therefore, a great deal of his findings were the direct result of this group of female subjects. However, most of these voices became lost in the shuffle,

hidden behind the notorious name of “Freud” and began to serve a lifetime sentence as the background characters in a tapestry that weaves together so many concepts, stories, prominent thinkers and influential individuals— many of which would not have risen to such notoriety without standing upon the legacy of these women. Feminist studies and, in particular for this thesis, feminist psychoanalysis serves to return these voices to the story and to build upon the work that Freud’s women started while crediting them for their accomplishments.

Once I began reading about these women I began to see their stories everywhere, including in the stories I read which gave life and logic to some of the oldest female figures in the classical pantheon such as Antigone, Medusa, and Eurydice— the primary characters referenced in this work. From this idea of finding the hysterical women within the pages of the classical literature on my shelf there came a layering of work done by a variety of thinkers that began to fill in the gaps of this idea I had with Freud’s psychoanalysis of the hysterics at the base, a variety of female theorists and writers and their ideas on Freud as a secondary layer, and finally, the aspect which this thesis focuses upon, my examination of how these thinkers look at psychoanalysis through female figuration and their additions to feminist psychoanalysis.

### **The Reclamation Project**

I am interested in the ways in which contemporary feminist thinkers have focused on female figures to explore these psychoanalytical intersections. In particular, I am drawn to thinkers like Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, and Bracha Ettinger, who have sought to reclaim the history of psychoanalysis as a field built on the exploitation of female psychotherapy patients— the hysterics of science. The thinkers chosen reflect, in many ways, the subjects of their focus, their mythological ancestors and counterparts. These figures— Antigone, Medusa, and Eurydice

— as I refer to them in this work, are stand-ins for many things but primarily I see them as archetypes of women who have been lost to their stories and have started to lose their own biographical history. They are heroines, villains, damsels— all labels that pin their purposes to a single motive, a single personality, usually in the supporting role to the male cast of characters or lost to the mode of patriarchal writing in which they were brought forth on the page. Antigone’s efforts are done on behalf of her brother or her father and they are ended by her uncle; Medusa is the key to Perseus’ rise to heroic fame and a tool for the men around her; Eurydice is killed running from a violent man and serves almost solely after that as a motivation for Orpheus. On the quest to reclaim their agency, to advocate for their stories— which are also our stories as women in a heteronormative, patriarchal society— Butler, Cixous, and Ettinger apply their theories on gender, writing, and psychology. This thesis argues that figures such as Antigone, Medusa, and Eurydice are representative not just of women that exist in spaces of direct silencing, such as “Freud’s women”, but of all women and that by applying feminism through tools like psychoanalysis we can restore the voices and lives of these women, both fictionally and in reality, by giving them back their agency and telling their stories in new, translational ways.

Throughout these chapters I will look at a variety of techniques and theories that will aim to free these characters from their historical fates and show new lenses through which we can view their decisions, actions, and states of being. The concepts applied exist as the intellectual fruits of academic and lived labor, making it extremely important that we understand the situations in which these feminist thinkers came to generate their ideas; just as this work explores the stories of mythical characters as contributes to their eventual outcomes. Judith Butler, an

American academic and theorist, generated the theories of the performative nature of gender and sex and became a pioneer and a dominant influence on queer theory and philosophical feminism. After receiving her degrees from Yale, Butler went on to teach at universities such as Wesleyan, George Washington, Johns Hopkins, UC Berkeley, and the Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, during which time she published several influential works including *Subjects of Desire* and *Gender Trouble* which explore the Hegelian concepts behind desire and the social construct of gender as it relates to the “traditional domination of women by men”, respectively. This thesis aims to explore primarily Butler’s theory of performativity particularly through the lens of the Greek figure of Antigone as Butler herself expanded upon in her book *Antigone’s Claim* published in 2000. Antigone was chosen both by Butler and by myself for the purpose of exploring the topic of psychoanalysis in classical female figuration because, as will be explained in the first chapter, she rejects the performativity imposed on her as a woman, as a daughter, as a future wife and mother because the perversity of her background made her anything but a woman in the most patriarchal sense of the word. Butler’s work reclaims her and give her agency by reframing her story and giving her a place among the hysterics as a traditional example of the theory that Butler herself created to diversify and further delve into the field of feminist psychoanalysis.

Hélène Cixous is most often defined as a Jewish-Algerian-French writer, a phenomenon, and an innovator. A woman who has published approximately 87 books ranging from poetic fiction to feminist theory who forged the spaces she required to be able to create rather than wander in search of them. It is this very act of crafting innovative spaces that allowed her to found the practice of *écriture féminine*— most easily described as a feminine writing based in



Cixous' championing of the female body— one of the primary focuses in this thesis. Cixous employed the character of Medusa in her 1976 essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* which first introduced the concept for her new mode of writing. Among other female literary figures that Cixous uses throughout her impressive body of work, Medusa is perceived and put onto the page by men and only men using their method of writing— a method which can never accurately define what the true feminine actually is. Cixous argues, and practices in her work, that women such as Medusa can only ever be accurately portrayed through methods like *écriture féminine* that seek to break molds and allow women to reclaim themselves through their bodies and through their writing.

The third thinker on whose work I focus in this project is Bracha Ettinger, an acclaimed artist, writer, and psychoanalyst who uses her work to explore aesthetics as well as states of being: motherhood, unconsciousness, disappearance, and more. She is credited with forming the Matrixial Theory which aims at rethinking masculine-feminine opposition through anti-Oedipal perspectives and based in a realm that explores the unconscious. She brings her work on the unconscious and experience into all of her mediums, including painting, the form which allowed her to create the Eurydice series which is the work on which I focus in this thesis. Through this series we are shown a glimpse of what we are told is Eurydice, but we are never really sure nor are we ever able to fully capture her in our sight or our minds; she exists at the unconscious level only and through her experience she is lost to us forever. Applying the matrixial theory to Eurydice and Ettinger's own artistic work on the character serves to show her as she is, not as the prize or bargaining chip we now remember her for— the work is to reclaim her.

Psychoanalysis severs hysteria from knowledge and feminist psychoanalysis— these thinkers, and these figures, repair the tear. Hysteria comes from the Greek root for “uterus” and has been used as a medical diagnosis since Ancient Egypt, during which time it was believed that the uterus was a freely floating organ that would move from its normal position. The cure for hysteria was marriage and pregnancy, which was thought to content the organ whose main purpose was, of course, child-bearing. The medieval approach to hysteria continued for decades and, as a female-only disease, received barely a second glance until 1880 when, the French psychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot began to view hysteria as a disease of the nervous system, becoming the first to apply modern medical advances to the ailment. Freud spent a significant amount of time with Charcot during the mid 1880’s and he borrowed many of Charcot’s theories on subconscious thought and the effect of trauma and sexuality on the development of the personality.

While there is no direct definition of the theory of hysteria, hysteria is a root of psychoanalysis and therefore many of the primary factors that make up psychoanalysis also contribute to hysteria. Central to the theory of psychoanalysis, and central to the ground work of this thesis, is repression and how repression constitutes many psychological events and theories. Freud claims hysteria is a physical manifestation of repressed trauma resurfacing as a result of a triggering event in real-life that causes a patient to experience symptoms related to the traumatic event of their childhood. Repression is the entrance to the condition of hysteria and is the reason that only certain individuals experience it and not every person who may have had a traumatic event in early life; a sexual event or new trauma is the key to unlocking repression and causing the distorted expression of this pain in the form of hysterical symptoms. Within the scope of this

project, repression and trauma not only cause the label of hysteria to be placed on the women in question, but it also serves to question how we view these women in light of how we view hysteria. The cases in which Freud dissects his theories and applies them to living individuals, such as *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* which uses the investigation into his patient Dora, explain that male pathology of this sort manifests as an obsessional disorder and female pathology will manifest as hysteria because “women are the passive partners in sexual acts” (Gray) ; he begins to reject legitimate psychological claims of repression, trauma, and pathology in women as “crazy” and simply the result of an inability to embrace sex and sexuality rather than a complex layering of psychological and societal issues as we see today in developing feminist psychoanalysis. In applying gendered thinking to a theory that Freud himself defines as a social disease he contradicts himself and allows societal norms to dictate scientific pathology. Psychoanalysis first developed as a new field in which it was believed Freud could explain the many theoretical changes he made to his theory of hysteria— many of which were influenced by societal thinking, gendered normativity, and the deletion of female psychological claims. Allowing such influences to be made diminishes the impact of hysterical research on the field of psychoanalysis as it developed independently of Freud, and continues the tear of hysteria away from the knowledge evolving in the sphere of psychoanalysis.

Butler, Cixous, and Ettinger belong to the movement that aims to reclaim Dora, reclaim her hysteria as one of the building blocks of knowledge within psychoanalysis, and reclaim women as the foundation of the field, the figures of feminist developments, and the thinkers themselves that make this possible. This project now aims to explore the layering of this subject, to untie some of the knots, and to bring together the hysterics— fictional, real and historical. The first

chapter of this thesis will explore how Hélène Cixous' new form of writing advocates for female figures to be written freely and embraced fully, through the body of femininity. It will then move to Bracha Ettinger's matrixial space to explore the perception and liminal space of womanhood. Finally, it will move to Judith Butler's analysis of Antigone and question if Antigone is a figure of hysteria or a figure for this project of reclamation.

## CHAPTER 2

### Hélène Cixous' Medusa

To organize sociality, to write literature, to debate philosophy, to examine kinship is to make oppositions, to create couples out of ideas, to revert to a binary system, to allow death to permeate and be “always at work” (Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* 64). Cixous picks up this work and in doing so advocates for turning the unwritten into the written in ways that promote femininity and for utilizing the result of Butler’s work in *Gender Trouble*, performativity, and twisting it as a practice for agency—creating a differential form of the woman’s body. In many ways this notion is the key to unlocking all of Cixous’ writing: women have been driven away from writing just as they have been driven away from their own bodies and that by embracing the act of writing, women can create differential forms of their bodies, explore the histories of their people, create a world that does not bend to economics or politics. Writing is a way of coming to know the New Woman, the one who will create the true definition of femininity. In doing this work Cixous created *The Laugh of the Medusa*, *Eve Escapes*, and *The Newly Born Woman*—works that delve into the unwritten laws surrounding women, debate the practices in which these bodies, codes, and laws can be reclaimed and, as a result, create figurations through which these thoughts can be explored.

### White Ink

Hélène Cixous writes for the body: the damaged body, the violently taken body, the aging body, the newly born body. She writes to reclaim her own body, her mother’s body, her

grandmother's body, the bodies of those women in history she chased through her childhood begging to find reason for her anger, a reason for why she felt masculine but was denied access to that well, why she felt feminine but was admonished for it. The historical condition of women's existence is a set of laws— found in political spaces, unspoken expectations of adherence, within our own unconscious— and so the question becomes how does one use writing to take up agency and separate the circumstances of women from the place they have become embedded in laws, codes, and bodies themselves. The practices engaged in this effort to define these laws creates figuration and Medusa can be viewed as one such figure ideal to represent Cixous' theory of White Ink: a type of writing that references the “mother” within all women and seeks to directly contrast with traditional writing methods, it seeks to use the body as a tool for language.

According to an article written by Madeleine Glennon for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Department of Greek and Roman Art titled “Medusa in Ancient Greek Art”, the Medusa character has been written and rewritten numerous times from Homer to Ovid, gaining her more noticeable motif of snake hair as well as the lore around her Gorgon background over time. Some tales, such as that written by Ovid, explain that Medusa was a mortal with great beauty who was “seduced by Poseidon in a Temple of Athena. Such sacrilege attracted the goddess' wrath, and she punished Medusa by turning her hair to snakes” (Glennon), with some other versions translating her seduction as a rape. Other works such as those written by eighth-century poet and fifth-century lyric poet, Hesiod and Pindar respectively, recount Medusa's life after she had attained her snake hair and had gained a reputation for turning men to stone with just her petrifying gaze. In this hero story, the writers followed Perseus as he was commanded by a king

to return with the severed head of the Gorgon Medusa which he accomplished by using the polished shield of Athena, through which he could see the reflection of Medusa which would not have the power of her full gaze should he look directly at her. It is worth noting that these poets specify that Medusa's severed head retains its powers of petrification even after her death. Medusa is chosen by Cixous to be a representation of her proposed new writing style because Medusa's story embodies the principles that Cixous has set forward: that women are connected deeply to their bodies and that their true essence and psyche are unknowable by looking directly for it, by looking directly at her. In this set of actions, written into Medusa's story, her life is marked by a series of violent takings— her body through seduction or rape, her head through murder, her power through the beheading— making her body something that is not her own but an object available for others to use of their own will. One cannot simply look at Medusa directly and find her, she can only be looked upon through her reflection; a device which aids Cixous' arguments about the inability to witness and define femininity directly.

Not referring to her story directly in *The Laugh of the Medusa* demonstrates the taking back of agency that Cixous advocates for. Instead, she creates a description of a woman that embodies *écriture féminine*: a new form of writing that aims to break traditional methods and pushes for free forms that allow women to write for their bodies. Medusa is taken from her own body in many ways and writing her character with this depiction retakes her image and gives her body back to her. In fact, *The Laugh of the Medusa* is the birthplace of the *écriture féminine* movement characterized by free form techniques such as Virginia Woolf's stream of consciousness or the cyclical writing James Joyce uses in *Ulysses* to describe the cycle that marks a woman's passage on this earth. Cixous broached the topic of a feminine based writing

form that reaches a hand into both the cultural treatment of the female body and the psychoanalytical viewpoint of the female body to venture a way to mold these two sides into a singular form that allows the user to write in a way that they discover themselves, their identity, and their inner psyche. The idea was to create a space in which the New Woman could come to define herself in an imaginative land that could be free from the confines of a generations old social structures that binds women into an economic, political role that strips them of their own bodies and rips them away from their understanding of the self—the true feminine.

“Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obligated to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds.” (Cixous, *Newly Born Woman* 72)

This feminine mode of writing, where the *it* is women actually writing their own consciousness, is defined by two particular notions which find their way into most of Cixous’ written work— white ink and the Logic of Antilove. The concept of “white ink” is a reference directly to feminine writing that embodies the “in-between” of women, the existence of their truths, and therefore the content of their writing, as the antithesis of the “black ink” writing that is the masculine mode. Cixous powerfully compels her readers to reject the conventional rules that create the Logic of Antilove by adopting this method of writing as a tool for reclaiming the narrative of their femininity. Antilove, Cixous explains, is a form of narcissism and the great crime men have committed against their opposites— “insidiously, and violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against



themselves... they have made for women an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got!" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 878). Cixous' work praises women, their illusive definition, and their unique ability to be powerful even when caged by their opposing force and in her view the only way to define femininity is to allow women to do what they do best— break loose from form both literally and figuratively, in the work of creating a new form of writing and in allowing themselves to write their lived experience. She feigns no naiveté in believing that our social reality can be changed as completely and radically as her ideas may suggest, but in giving feminism the idea of *écriture féminine* and the knowledge of white ink and Antilove she instead suggests that we create new worlds first with our pens in which we reclaim our bodies, create a lasting and true definition of femininity, and deign to exist within the lines as opposed to in-between them.

### **The Other Body**

It is hard to define what the in-between is— after all it is unwritten, it exists in the negative space, our eyes are not drawn to it. So, if we cannot see it, then how can we define it? Cixous comes at this question directly by insisting that we have never had, nor may we easily gain, an exact portrait of what "feminine" is because we have only seen what has been directed by men and the direct result of Antilove. She shows us that women exist in a place that is Other, their bodies are the Other Body, their words coming from another's mouth, their actions warped or directed by an external author. Therefore, according to Cixous' and Catherine Clément's work in *The Newly Born Woman*, "liberation of sexuality would be a transformation of one's relationship with their body and to the 'other body'— not what today labels as masculinity or

femininity” (83); in other words these women argue for an examination of bisexuality in terms of psychoanalytic theory as well as within the investigative sphere of feminism.

Turning to the work of queer theorist Esther Rapoport in the *Journal of Bisexuality*, we are directed to thoughts of bisexuality as a psychological mode of thought as opposed to a sexual identity and the implications of that line of thought. In her paper, “Bisexuality in Psychoanalytic Theory: Interpreting the Resistance”, Rapoport explains that bisexuality was a term first used to describe the “hypothetical capacity of an organism to develop either into a male or female of its species” (281) until eventually research made clear that a human fetus does not have discernible sex characteristics until about the 12th week of gestation during which time the term bisexuality was then applied to human beings for the first time. During the early 1900s, Freud began drafting his theory of object choice which encompassed the previously discussed Oedipus complex as well as the idea that a child identified with one parent which then supplied the template for how that child would develop psychologically— their identity, their temperament, their sexual orientation all hinged on the attachment to one parent and the attraction to the other. Freud’s beliefs in relation to bisexuality include the thought that because humans retain sex characteristics that are similar to that of the opposite biological sex they must also retain some of the psychological characteristics of the opposite sex and therefore, as children that have not experienced sexual identification yet, the time before puberty is a time when children are polymorphously perverse. The theory of object choice revolves around identification and due to the sexually open nature of children they can therefore choose which parent to identify with and which parent they feel attracted to— as a result bisexuality “implied both bigenderism and dual attraction” (Rapoport, “Bisexuality in Psychoanalytic Theory” 282). Freud’s viewpoint fails

to take into account that psychological sexual identities are influenced heavily by tropes created by society and that the traditionally masculine and feminine personality types are created by a system of patriarchal laws that are significantly lacking in true feminine inputs. However, as Rapoport points out in her paper, this is a predominantly undeveloped part of psychoanalysis and an area that has failed to evolve even as the fields of feminism, queer theory, and gender studies have begun to see significant growth.

Returning now to Cixous in the *Newly Born Woman*, we are presented with abounding examples of what she calls pairs of opposition that are coupled for the sake of aiding in philosophical thought. These are meant to be thought as coupled yet completely different, located within a binary system, man/woman. To allow both to exist logically is to induce the work of death:

“Theory of culture, theory of society, symbolic systems in general— art, religion, family, language— it is all developed while bringing the same schemes to light. And the movement whereby each opposition is set up to make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time, a war is let loose. Death is always at work.” (Cixous, *Newly Born Woman* 64).

So, to keep death from its shores, there came a system in which those afraid of this death, who favored the binding of couples destined to be separately independent, and they created the system of the “other”. Who is “they” that creates this other? Cixous directs us to the history books upon which every page is the story of the Other; “there has to be some ‘other’— no master without a slave” (*Newly Born Woman* 71). Throughout the centuries and woven within the legends Cixous leads us through, what literary critic Sandra M. Gilbert calls, a tarantella dance

that examines the violent taking of masculine power and the rage fueled struggle of the feminist. All of this wandering, the life-long project of searching for Reason away from the “real, colonial space” and instead into that realm of books and writing lead Cixous to bisexuality.

To pose Reason, as Cixous uses it, as different from reason La Marr Jurelle Bruce, author of *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind*, explains that Reason, the proper noun, is used to “uphold objective ‘truth’ while mapping and mastering the world” (4). To have achieved modern personhood, to be considered a member of society and embraced by its culture, one must have achieved Reason: “However, Reason has been entangled, from those very Enlightenment roots, with misogynist, colonialist, ableist, antiblack, and other pernicious ideologies. The fact is that female people, indigenous people, colonized people, neurodivergent people, and black people have been violently excluded from the edifice of Enlightenment Reason— with Reasonable doctrines justifying those exclusions.” (Bruce, *How to Go Mad* 4).

This is in line with Esther Rapoport’s work on bisexuality where she claims that “anything that did not match the male European ideas of mastery, autonomy, and rationality was associated with the primitive past, the childhood of the individual and the species” (“Bisexuality in Psychoanalytic Theory” 283). It is through deviance and perversity of the masculine ideal that women and the feminine identity is created; when the mother is viewed as the first love for both little boys and little girls, it is the girls that are considered to go against the natural course of love. Therefore, it is women who are associated with bisexuality in the psychological sense of the word; they are the perverse, just as I will discuss in a later chapter when Antigone made normative kinship and heteronormativity perverse, they are the hysterical, just Clément’s hysteric “unties familiar bonds, [and] introduces disorder into the well-regulated unfolding of every day

life” (*Newly Born Woman* 5), and so it is women that are the foundation of psychoanalysis as they are the deviation of the European, masculine, societal normativity.

Cixous claims that bisexuality is the existence of both sexes within a singular psyche, not halves of each sex, but a whole identification of the masculine and the feminine available to the self to express as that self wishes and with the permission that the self gives to express according to their individuality. She also lays claim to the idea that “at the present time it is woman who benefits from and opens up within this bisexuality... which does not annihilate differences but cheers them on, pursues them, adds more”(Cixous, *Newly Born Woman* 85). In a similar way that bisexuality is the advantage and the right of woman, so is writing, specifically *écriture féminine*, in that “writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other” (Cixous, *Newly Born Woman* 85, 86). The negative space that belongs to the in-between, that belongs to woman, to the independent, sensical coupling of feminism and bisexuality, that is home to the unwritten laws that govern the feminine psyche, that rob women of their bodies and the freedom of their sexuality, is the same space that Cixous fills with white ink, that breaks the form of traditional prose, that she reserves for the New Woman to fill with tales of her Other Body.

## CHAPTER 3

### Judith Butler's *Antigone*

As a character that formed in the plot of a Sophoclean tragedy, Antigone's backstory and the circumstances surrounding her development are just as important to her function as an allegory or even an archetype of "hysteria" in women. Antigone was the child of Oedipus and his own mother Jocasta—making her, and her three siblings, the children of an incestuous marriage. Following his discovery that he had not only fulfilled the prophecy and murdered his own father, but that he had also married and fathered children with his own mother, Oedipus blinded himself and set off into exile, leaving Thebes behind for his sons to battle over. Antigone and her sister Ismene followed their father to his exile just outside of Athens and after caring for Oedipus until his death they eventually returned to Thebes and found their brothers on the brink of war. Eventually both Eteocles and Polyneices were killed and their uncle Creon was crowned as king as a result of the brothers' deaths. Due to the nature of his death, Creon forbade anyone from honoring Polyneices with a burial and he was to rot where he lied. The primary conflict of Antigone's story comes from her defying this edict and burying her brother, only to be sentenced to death for her treachery by way of live burial in a cave near her brother's burial site. The end of her story finds her dead in the cave after having hanged herself with her betrothed, Creon's own son, dead beside her—her fate of tragedy fulfilled. Antigone experiences great amounts of trauma and in her actions, which go against the expected performance of her gender, she takes up the mantle of the hysterical woman embracing death rather than running towards life.

### The Unwritten Laws of Performativity

In early 2000, Judith Butler published a book titled *Antigone's Claim* in which she delves into the symbolic, figurative, and allegorical position of the play's titular character—Antigone. In applying some of her previous concepts published nearly a decade before in critical works, Butler poses that Antigone is the product of kinship dynamics and that it is the *unwritten* laws of kinship and the *unwritten* laws of gender or sex that determine who she becomes as a character. For example, Butler champions the idea that gender is performative rather than symbolic or biologic in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, and when discussing Antigone she applies this concept by claiming that as a female character the compelling issues center to this story come from her rejecting this performative pattern and this is the act that dooms her. It is not the act of rebelling against the written law Creon has issued, but her act of rebelling against the unwritten laws that outline the performative nature of her sex that forecasts her death. Salih directs us to an example of performativity in her critique of Butler: Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* in which the unnamed narrator arrives at a party dressed exactly as her husband's deceased wife. Salih likens performativity to this social situation in which the narrator becomes the titular Rebecca through the meddling of another character, Mrs. Danvers, who chooses the outfit for her and therefore creates the woman she will become in this scene by pre-dictating her appearance as the deceased wife Rebecca; in this sense "Rebecca literally precedes the narrator" (Salih, "On Judith Butler and Performativity" 57).

Butler, in choosing Antigone, separates her from her symbolic figure, the figure of a disobedient, doomed woman which precedes her as a character, and re-establishes Antigone as the figure of a woman rejecting the performativity of her sex. It is the unwritten law, just as it is

the unconscious mind, which shows us the true nature of an individual or of the situation the individual is placed in and reacting to— repression is the erasure of emotions that remain below the surface, according to Freud, just as unwritten laws pertaining to sociality remain below the surface of social life. We so misunderstand the social aspect of beings that when we apply scientific concepts to them we are confused as to how or why they respond as they do.

Psychoanalysis takes its findings from social scenarios, but it does so by taking into account the undercurrent of the psyche as well as the hidden, unwritten, prescribed set of laws that dictates kinship relations between Antigone and her circle in this story, that dictates the performativity of her sex and what causes so much shock and anger in the wake of her defiance. Perhaps this is why Butler views Antigone as a figure that best represents psychoanalysis— she represents the complexities of psychoanalysis as a science yet demonstrates how these principles unfold through the lens of social scenarios.

The American Psychological Association currently defines psychoanalysis as: “an approach to the mind, personality, psychological disorders, and psychological treatment originally developed by Sigmund Freud... the hallmark of psychoanalysis is the assumption that much mental activity is unconscious and that understanding people requires interpreting the unconscious meaning underlying their overt, or manifest, behavior”. Psychoanalysis represents a field of study on the individual self which is contrasted with the field of law, represented by the study of that which creates the guidelines for the collective members of a society. University of Connecticut professor Anne C. Dailey writes for the Yale University Press that by combining these fields directly we “unveil[s] the damaging consequences of the law’s rationalist assumptions about who we are as human beings” (1), in other words, applying principles of



scientific study to the observations of social beings reveals how base of an understanding we have of the individual when it comes to the social. Therefore, how can we fully understand the individual if the fruit of psychoanalysis manifests in social situations that are dictated by written law?

A theory, introduced in a 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and elaborated upon in the 1930 book *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that became one of Freud's main approaches on viewing individuality within the context of the social spells out, what *Antigone's Claim* references as social and psychic drives, the Life Drive represented by Eros and the Death Drive represented by Thanatos— gods of passion or love and death, respectively. Butler uses this concept through Lacan's viewpoint, who defended the theory along with Melanie Klein in post-Freudian thought. Thanatos, or the death drive, is described as the tendency to move towards death and destruction using self-destructive or aggressive behaviors, which is complemented by Eros, or the life drive, which is described as the tendency to move towards survival and life-producing actions like sex, creativity, or passion. In relation to his theory of the symbolic, which I will discuss later in this chapter, Lacan posits the life and death drives of *Antigone* as the conflicting component of the plot. Antigone is conflicted in her desire to move towards the life drive, which is to join civilization and embrace the passion of her life through marriage, motherhood, and the prescribed performativity of womanhood, however, she feels passionately about her brother, and in an act of self-destructiveness which moves her towards the death drive, she buries him to move her love out of the symbolic and fully into the concreteness of actions, she becomes a doer of actions and moves herself out of the unwritten into the written and seals her fate of death. She follows the claim Nietzsche makes— “there is no ‘being’ behind doing,

acting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction imposed on the doing— the doing itself is everything” (*Genealogy of Power* 29). The act she commits is not a symbolic rupture of morals dictating livable society, but a literal act that rejects the prescribed performativity, the unwritten laws, Antigone is expected to adhere to.

### **The Laws of the Oedipus Complex**

If performativity is the mode for expressing gender and the unwritten rules or laws create the handbook for how this role is to be performed we must look to see where our rules are derived from. In *Antigone’s Claim*, Butler begins to discuss the contrast to unwritten laws and writes that the “set of rules that govern accession of speech and speakability within culture, is motivated by the father’s words” (58). That is, the words that create societal normativity are the words that a man speaks and it is he who creates the patterns, routines, and expectations that define normativity. Oedipus, as Antigone’s father, is the “father” that creates the spoken, unwritten laws that Antigone grapples with, both through his lived fate as brother-father to his own children and through the verbal curse he dictates within Sophocles’ trilogy. His position as both father and brother to his children places Oedipus and Polyneices on the same pedestal in Antigone’s eyes— they are interchangeable just as other familial roles here are interchangeable due to the incestuous background that this family hails from. Due to this flexibility in roles Antigone transfers her curse to only love a dead man, a curse her father proclaimed would keep her bound to him, instead to her brother, Polyneices, and when he dies she is compelled to bury him to complete the order of her father. Where does the authority of the father’s words come from though and how does it operate within the social system Antigone is gendered in?

We can connect Butler's line of thought here with the background of the Oedipus Complex. Freud's period of study concerned with the origins of human society caused him to speculate upon and publish a theory concerning what he called the "murder of the primitive father". This theory was launched from Robertson Smith's work on monotheism which explored what he called "totemic society": a collection of rules and customs that band together what he called a tribe. In a totemic society members were expected to "identify with a sacred totem animal who is venerated as their common ancestor and protector" (McNulty, "Psychoanalysis and Law" 163) and whose killing is expressly forbidden or taboo. Freud saw this totem animal as a substitute for the father, specifically the primitive father that once strictly ruled over the group and whose sons so despised him that they gathered back together to kill their father and end the patriarchal order. It is then that they identified a totem animal as their sacred ancestor and protector through which the clan could attach its group identity which would be passed down through the maternal line. McNulty tells us that it is from this combination of events that we see the generation of our first laws which act as substitutes and barriers against the force of a dictatorship or the influence of the primitive father over the clan. However, Freud believed that these laws are a mere reflection of the remorse the brothers felt over murdering the supreme authority figure and therefore the rules made fall into three categories: as an aspiration to be the father figure, a yearning for the return of the father figure, and the creation of taboos and prohibitions that express the very rules the father held his sons to. It is these two repressed desires—killing the totem and having sexual relations with a woman outside of the clan—that create the Freudian Oedipus complex. As a king, Oedipus' words become law to his people as well as to his children, but as a man who murdered his father and unknowingly entered into an

incestuous marriage with his mother, Oedipus' words become aberrant and doom his family to a fate outside the realm of normativity. The position that Butler takes in her work here places Antigone as both opposite to the laws and traditions upheld by this system of the Oedipus Complex and also as a product of the politics this system enacts.

Returning to Butler, we can find in her previous work, especially within the scope of *The Psychic Life of Power*, her rejection of the traditional model of power and psychological intersection. This model proclaims that a subject can be removed from the political domain and that her motives can be understood as completely separate from the politics she lives within. However, as Cimitile explains, “if we understand subject formation in terms of a regulatory dynamic of power between self and world, we find that out of this formation the ‘domain of livable society’ is circumscribed; that is, proper or normal relations stem from this formation dynamic” (“Between Life and Death” 222). The Oedipal complex demonstrates the belief that “presocial, ‘natural’ relations determine proper social relations” (Cimitile, “Between Life and Death 222) and therefore Antigone, as a character whose very origins are in direct opposition to this claim, would be doomed to a life of indecent social relations. Butler points us to the weakness of this theory by claiming that “although psychoanalysis has often insisted that normalization is invariably disrupted and foiled by what cannot be ordered by regulatory norms, it has rarely addressed the question of how new forms of kinship can and do arise on the basis of the incest taboo” (*Antigone's Claim* 66). Sociality, as a set of relationships and performative systems, exists firmly within the realm of the public— a realm to which “slaves, women, and children, all those who were not property-holding males were not permitted” (Butler, *Antigone's Claim* 82). How can we examine Antigone as a subject separate from the political world she

belongs to and still understand her in her entirety when the makeup of her character is directly influenced by such political circumstances as the laws put into order that, as a subject who exists on the outside of the public realm, she has no power over other than her decision to reject the expectation of her adherence. She, and her actions, are a product of the political and social environment she was raised in, and holding her to expectations that would require disregarding this upbringing ignores the tragic element of this plot—the expected performativity and her social situation push her towards the death drive all while chiding her for moving against the life drive. Butler’s application of the theory of performativity on her story credits the choices of her death drive back to her all while taking into account the circumstances of her background, which gives her more agency and power from those very decisions.

### **Antigonean Revision of the Written and Unwritten**

Butler gives us what she calls the “Antigonean revision of psychoanalytic theory” (66) towards the end of *Antigone’s Claim* which emphasizes the role of Antigone as ensuring that what is considered normalized kinship is not defined by biological reproduction or the heterosexualization of the family but rather as a move toward dissecting postoedipal dilemmas. If Antigone need be defined by a single topic, Butler argues that the definition be “perversion”; perversion of the normalized kinship dynamics, perversion of feminine performativity, perversion of the primitive father that emphasizes the importance of the maternal line over the dominance of the patriarchal rules that doom any that are considered Other.

In *Antigone’s Claim*, Butler discusses the social and psychic drives, or life and death drives, of Antigone and other Sophoclean characters in order to explore how these drives are provoked by and enfolded in heteronormativity and the politics of kinship. In her work Butler

poses that Antigone represents an opposition to heteronormativity and explores what the state deems as “perversity” of the familial requirement, that is the expectance of women to reproduce and raise male youth for the purpose of populating the state for war, politics, and the duties of the polis as a whole; an expectation that is both of the unwritten and written laws pondered over within the text. Antigone allows us to wonder over what makes a law a “true law”: is it the proclamation of the state, the adherence to its protocols by the populace at large, the conscience that demands us to clean the slate as Antigone herself claims commands her when she goes to her brother and piles a layer of dust over his body and in doing so fulfilling the unwritten duty of divine law that would require her to bury her brother and allow him to move on into the afterlife.

Rather than point us in the direction of symbolism or to pose Antigone as a stand-in for all of womankind, Butler shows us an Antigone that ruptures normative representation and questions the “domain of livable society” as a political hegemony that separates some as Others (Cimitile, “Between Life and Death 222-225) based on the laws, both written and unwritten, of the society she occupies a place within. As Butler’s chosen figure, Antigone fulfills and represents the rupture of normativity by acting against the performativity prescribed to her— she rebels against the laws that Creon, a man and her superior according to hierarchy, have laid forth, she has relationships with her male family members that bring the incest taboo into question, and she is proclaimed to be more like a son to Oedipus than a daughter as she was the one who left her home to care for him. Feminist psychoanalysis, such as what Butler discusses in the final part of *Antigone’s Claim*, focuses on the unwritten laws that govern the performativity that is expected of a woman such as Antigone— there is no written law anywhere that explains that Antigone should not follow her father into exile and thereby shift the favor from her brothers

onto her, but there are unwritten laws in which it is expected that Antigone defer to her brothers once her father has died and that familial favor along with him.

Feminist psychoanalysis, or Antigonean psychoanalysis, as is termed by Butler, explores the question of “what would happen if psychoanalysis were to have taken Antigone rather than Oedipus as its point of departure” (*Antigone's Claim* 57). It requires us to think of Antigone as a product of the actions that define kinship, a principle center to her story, not the being of kinship. This series of repeatable actions which are copied and repeated by children predict that Antigone’s practice of these policies will be, again, perverted as a result of a very explicit defiance of the incest taboo committed, albeit unknowingly, by her parents. She ruptures normative representation in that she turns away from life in order to honor the unwritten divine laws of burial, she ruptures the familial requirement of written law by verbally protesting her male relatives’ participation in the politics of her civilization— war, death for honor— and she ruptures the performativity of unwritten social adherence of her sex through all of these actions. Both the written and unwritten laws of the state, the family, and the psyche, are torn through her hysteria and this tear allows for new growth. It allows for an answer to the question of Antigone versus Oedipus within the field of psychoanalysis, which is of course the new feminist psychoanalysis— and Butler, through her own analysis of Antigonean psychoanalysis becomes a building block of this new sector within the field.

## CHAPTER 4

### Bracha Ettinger's Eurydice

Shortly after the publication of *Antigone's Claim*, Judith Butler published "Bracha's Eurydice" which elaborates upon the idea of the in-between, of the unwritten woman disappearing back into death in similar yet differing ways than Cixous did with Medusa and as Butler herself did with Antigone. The painting, upon which Butler bases her analysis in this work, is one of a series by Israeli artist, writer, and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger in which she depicts the Greek figure of Eurydice. Ettinger utilizes a series of abstract purple, pink, and black brush strokes, simultaneously creating form and a lack of form in the negative space; a veil in which Eurydice can be seen yet she is not quite there in that tangible, defined way in which one might seek the form of a woman in a painting with an intended character in mind. This seems to be indicative of the woman Eurydice herself: married to Orpheus, a legendary lyre musician and prophet, Eurydice was pursued, in the Virgil canon, by a son of Apollo named Aristaeus and in her attempts to flee him she stepped on a viper and was immediately killed by its poison. As the legend goes, Orpheus descended into the realm of the Underworld to rescue his love and manages to persuade Hades and Persephone to release Eurydice back to the land of the living with the singular condition that Orpheus not turn around to ensure that she is following until they have stepped firmly back into their realm. However, just as they are about to breach the gates between worlds and they can see the sun ahead, Orpheus is unable to control himself and he looks back to confirm that Eurydice has been following him and that he was not deceived by Hades. As he turns to lay eyes upon the woman he loves and came to rescue she is condemned



back to the Underworld, falling to the breach in oath that Orpheus has committed. Little is known about Eurydice before she died, and the legend surrounding her exists only by virtue of her violent and untimely demise just as a litany of characters that seek their home in this pantheon experienced; Eurydice's existence is intertwined with death in a way that always seemed inevitable in a much more intimate way than normal mortal death— these women were never meant to live beyond the shadow of their ends.

### **Reclaiming the Hysteric**

Bracha Ettinger, who creates the work that Butler critiques in this piece, is both a professor of art and of psychoanalysis at The European Graduate School in the Division of Philosophy, Art & Critical Thought. Her work centers around the interaction between trauma and motherhood, women experiencing war, and the feminine figure centered in mythology. In a way, her work resonates strongly with the work of both Cixous and Butler while clearly building upon many of the theories Freud began with decades ago— by examining women in the context of war and the subsequent trauma and lingering expectations of these women to perform for their men and the common good of their nation and defining female figures that represent this viewpoint. In Butler's version of this work, Antigone is seen in the wake of a war that has not only placed her kingdom in conflict but her family in conflict as well with the outcome being the loss of her brothers and the eventual loss of her own life; Ettinger's version examines Eurydice as a woman with trauma whose very story is that of her death and her place in the space between. Both of these women exist within the sphere of the unconscious, within yet without, and their interpreters, here in the form of Butler and Ettinger, utilize different mediums with which to convey the abstractness of their feminine existence.

In a work that combines her own interests in the figuration of women, particularly in the Greek literary tradition, Butler lends her written voice to the artistic work of Ettinger and in doing so she creates an overlapping discourse on performativity, unwritten law, and the practices of agency—all while contributing to the hermeneutics around female figuration. In the article Butler explains to us that, by virtue of knowing that Eurydice is already dead and will never live again, to seek her in Ettinger's painting is to know that you will lose her again; to find her face within the brush strokes is to be as Orpheus turning around and damning her to hell. In another way, Butler's analysis of Ettinger's work gives us a new and fresh look at the concept of *écriture féminine* and the various practices of post-structuralism that reclaim agency for the female body and feminine psyche. She describes Ettinger's work:

“When we turned, looking for Eurydice, we thought perhaps we could know she was there by seeing, and so we thought that looking would be a way of knowing and capturing. But it turned out that she was uncapturable in this way, and that, in general she is uncapturable, that capture will not be the way in which we might recognize her...prior to identity, prior to any question of construction, a psychic landscape that gives itself as partial object...are, on the one hand, the results, the scattered effects of an unknowable history of trauma, the trauma that others who precede us have lived through and, on the other hand, the very sites in which a new possibility for visual experience emerges. (Butler, “Bracha's Eurydice” 97)

Butler gives us a new lens through which we can view Cixous' descriptions of the work she asks of the New Woman as well as the notions of performativity and the resulting trauma Butler herself established with Antigone—to create a new form that aims not to capture, but to view the lived experiences of generations of women. Butler argues in this piece that the feminine

psyche is unknowable and that by forcing a definition of identity onto women and onto what is feminine accomplishes little except for creating new expectations of performativity. In truth, as both Ettinger and Butler argue with this work, the scope and depth of feminine trauma, identity, and psychic landscape is, by virtue of its suppression, undefinable and therefore a space is needed in which women can find femininity for themselves.

In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous aimed to create a space like Butler and Ettinger, free from cultural oppression, from the unwritten laws that bind women in reality and to empower with the thought that “I-woman am going to blow up the Law” (Cixous, 887). In *Eve Escapes*, Cixous shows the same principles that run fluid throughout the body of her work and alternately explores how aging and ultimately death reflect a freedom for women that writing also supplies. Butler’s argument about the scattered effects of trauma leads us to think about Cixous’ *écriture féminine*, defined and explored in all her works, and what that theory asks of us which is “to bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies” (Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” 875). As discussed in earlier pages, *écriture féminine* seeks to carve out an intellectual, therapeutic, and almost spiritual place for women to explore what it means to be a woman and to experience the trauma that comes from performing a prescribed role in society, from adhering to the laws of a heteronormative style of gender roles. There is a through line in all of these pieces and an intermediary space that these figures fill—Antigone, Medusa, Eurydice— all exist in the overlap between spheres, between law, practice, and sociality. Within the existence of the law that prescribes a particular psyche and outlines the appropriate desires and actions for women, psychoanalysis shows us how these laws are not simply the truth, not a way to simply define the feminine. Psychoanalysis is a science that gains

its theories and sees physical outcomes through these types of social scenarios that we see Butler, Cixous, and Ettinger commenting on through their work. By using female figures to explore these psychoanalytical intersections, thinkers like Butler, Cixous, and Ettinger are reclaiming the history of psychoanalysis as a field built on the exploitation of female psychotherapy patients—the hysterics of science.

### **The Matrixial Space**

We see within the last three decades or so that a renaissance of psychoanalysis begins to take place and heralding with it the resurgence of the Dora case along with new psychoanalytic theories that reign in conjunction with new feminist ideals. Cixous arrives just before this new wave with her 1975 essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* in which she rejects the concept of penis envy as well as the castration complex; Judith Butler publishes *Gender Trouble* in 1990 and sparks the beginnings of a new field specializing in queer theory right at the start of a revolution in psychoanalysis and gender politics. Bracha Ettinger conjointly became a member of this new movement in which psychoanalytic theories developed feminist points, or new theories altogether, and literature, film, painting, theory, and critique converged to create a new amalgamation which fostered *écriture féminine*, the performativity theory, and a host of practices that aimed at new forms of liberation.

Ettinger herself spent decades crafting what she termed the matrixial theory: the replacement of the penis with the uterus aiming to shift the gaze from a symbol of masculine power to one of feminine power and with it to “conceive of an alternative to the phallus in terms of structure, mechanism, functions, [and] logic” (Ettinger, “Reply to Commentary” 424). As a

disease of the uterus, hysteria and the subjugation of hysterical women, has historically been the heart of a power dynamic that places women as proverbial lower class, they go mad unless given the task of raising children; this task is required in order to populate the state and supply it with fodder for war and politics; the politics of the state labels women as hysterical if they reject this prescribed sequence. It is a cycle of masculine power with little to no reference to the feminine viewpoint; something that Cixous continuously points us to as she questions if a true definition to “feminine” even exists beneath the masculine structures women have lived beneath and been expected to perform for. In creating the matrixial gaze Ettinger finds a space where the female gaze, maternal ideas, metamorphosis, and other feminine experiences can be validated and confirmed as a consistent narrative for women and coincides with Cixous’ New Woman in that it supplies the space for these notions to become recognized.

Beyond doing the work of theorizing the new feminine psychoanalysis, Ettinger also picks up the work of others and carries it into new mediums such as painting. The Eurydice painting that Butler chooses to critique is one of many that finds figures like Eurydice, such as Ophelia and the characterized version of Ettinger’s Matrix itself, the centerpieces of a more abstract *écriture féminine*. Butler points us in her critique to the shapeless, mute form of Eurydice in Ettinger’s piece and questions if this is meant to be what feminine is— a questioning of the Ego, if a feminine conscious is “at once traumatic, scattered, partial, multiple, non-unified and non-unifiable, the scene which is closed over again and again by our talk of identity and our presumption that what we most need is recognition for what we distinctly are” (“Bracha’s Eurydice” 97). If the feminine definition is whatever we choose to identify with does that make it a true definition or just an adoption of other experiences, of other traumas that we then make

ours and further alienate ourselves from the true feminine form and from our own bodies?

Ettinger purposely follows the principles of *écriture féminine* by making her painting an abstract series of lines, not a true likeness of what she may picture Eurydice to look like in her mind in order to lead us to such thoughts. If we search for Eurydice's face within the streaks and colors we are ignoring the plea to view her as a multiple, not a singular object, a singular body. To recognize Eurydice truly is to acknowledge the emergence of her totality through the matrixial space that Ettinger gives her by filling the entirety of the canvas, no blank space, and respecting the notion that we cannot capture her, not in the way she is meant to be viewed in all her trauma, madness, hysteria, the child, the woman and instead we see her with the freedom of her body, the body that does not belong to us.

### **Implications of the Scientific**

The concept of the body is a constant in both feminist theory and psychoanalytic theory, with thinkers in these fields questioning the politics of the body, how we can find agency for our bodies, and how some bodies are subjugated by others. The political and social spheres that Butler discusses in *Antigone's Claim*, the nomadic wandering in search for a safe creative space in Cixous' *Laugh of the Medusa*, and Ettinger's own artistic process in her painting, overlap to create scenarios that feed psychoanalytic thought, but also create suppression and rage. Simone de Beauvoir, in her collection *The Woman Destroyed* confronts this knowledge directly by reclaiming the hysteric in her own way. In each of the three novellas that contribute to this work de Beauvoir writes women who have brushed with the stereotypes of hysteria and experience a multitude of losses and misuse at the hands of their children and husbands. There is the loss of a child in more ways than one, the loss of a faithful husband, the loss of self-sufficiency, the loss of

feeling needed by the family that these women have spent their lives enmeshed within and, as a result of this much loss, the collection questions what it is that makes life meaningful for women and what is it that women are told makes their lives meaningful. They have birthed their children, nursed them, given their work in service to them, they have slept with their husbands and given them children; these women have given their bodies to their families and now that those bodies have been tossed aside, is there meaning for these women outside of the service their bodies give?

De Beauvoir's two groundbreaking volumes that create *The Second Sex* discuss theories about the Other in relation to woman— theories that are picked up and teased further in the work of Butler, Cixous, Clément, Ettinger and many more. Her work on this piece is credited with starting the second wave of feminism and argued that women are fundamentally different from men psychologically, physiologically, and socially rather than writing that women are a mirror reflection of men, that femininity is simply the converse of masculinity. Rather, the feminists of this period and many feminists much later on agreed that woman and the concept of the feminine is a separate entity, meant to be sought out and crafted just as masculinity was crafted by men over the years. To imply that women are the reverse of men is to imply that the definition of woman is to serve as contrast to men, not as their own group, their own unique, lived consciousness. As a reigning influence on the field of feminism and gender studies she penned the idea that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”(De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 3); a concept that supports Butler's ideas on sex and gender being separate and distinct terms, that contributes to Cixous' desire for the development of the New Woman and a definition of the true

feminine separate from the feminine that has been “gifted” to women by the men that originally wrote it.

Silvia Federici as well adds to the narrative of women’s work and how giving women the work of the family, work of the house, work of the body is a new form of subjugation. She argues for payment of the unseen work that falls to women and weaves through the intricacies of the marriage bed, the implication of a space in which sex and work are intertwined. In her abounding essays and her prime work *Caliban and the Witch* she describes capitalism with women as the keystone, their work and their bodies as central to a thriving system, yet it is a system that does not aim to support them or to free them from, as de Beauvoir would call it, reproductive slavery. Federici, as many feminist thinkers before and after her have done, uses the hysteric, the witch, the outcast as figurations of the work that is done against women, to describe the rape and prostitution of women’s bodies that binds them to their attackers in societal rope.

Federici’s witch experiences the hunt because she held power over the reproduction essential to capitalism. De Beauvoir’s women lost their purpose when their bodies were no longer required and came face to face with hysteria. Cixous’ Medusa laughed in the face of her torment and because of this was called mad. Butler’s Antigone rejected the performance she was expected to give and was condemned to both a living death and an eternal one. Finally, Ettinger’s Eurydice was shielded because she was given the matrixial space to create her true feminine, to hold tight to her own body and trust that it would not be handed over so easily.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In the winter of 2016 Princeton professor and prolific writer Jhumpa Lahiri began preparing for a seminar class dedicated to the process of translation in preparation for her own endeavor in the topic. Years later she would publish a biography that would explain, what some would call, her rather erratic career and the choices that carried her from a writer of English stories to a writer of Italian stories to a translator of them both. Within this biography Lahiri includes an essay titled “In Praise of Echo” to explain her thoughts as she underwent her first translation project and picks the story of the nymph Echo and her trials to relate to translation in a way that brings its ethics and overall permeating impact on literature to the forefront. At the risk of introducing another figure to this already dense cast of characters, I have chosen to include Lahiri and her explanation of the Echo myth here to connect the topic of translation to the topic of figuration in that both are partially defined by a number of choices made by the creator. In translation, the work of the translator is to bring the work to new audiences and have the story connect with them all while allowing for the “echo” of the original message to shine through in the translated text. Figuration is similar in that it stands to represent something else while at the same time being an entirely separate entity itself.

The myth of Echo and Narcissus is shortly summarized here as in Lahiri’s biography:

“A doomed love story, it is one of a series of tales in Ovid in which both the lover and the beloved are transformed. Echo, a mountain nymph known for her sonorous voice, is enlisted by the philandering Zeus to distract Juno by chatting with her. When Juno learns that she has been deceived by Echo’s talkative nature, she condemns her to say only a portion of

what other people have already said. Her capacity to speak is altered, reduced to a partial repetition of words previously generated by others... At first glance, it seems that Echo, who starts out as a talented storyteller, is converted, thanks to Juno's curse, into a translator" (63-64).

Echo's story makes her, in some ways, into a translator of others and is therefore canonized as the myth of the translators by Lahiri. Echo herself relates to the stories referenced previously in this thesis not only because of her connection to mythological and classical literature but because of her connection to women as well. She, as we have seen similarly in Antigone, Medusa, and Eurydice's stories, been used as a pawn by the men in her circle and her character becomes a symbol for something else entirely serving as a foil to that of Narcissus. We lose the graceful arc of Echo as the storyteller, of Echo as a woman in love, when we try to look at her as a tool rather than a character in her own right.

Passion is the word that Jhumpa Lahiri uses over and over again in her biography to explain the choices she made as a writer and a translator. Passion led her to learn an entirely new language at the age of 45, passion led her to start writing exclusively in a language that was not her native tongue, passion led her to translate both of her languages and mold them to fit her in a new, unique way. I argue that passion is what led each of our characters to their own storylines: Antigone felt passionately about her familial duty; Medusa felt passionately about her identity; Eurydice felt passionately about her love. Hysteria, in a way, embodies this sort of passion as both a barely controllable emotion that compels us in some way and as a suffering that drives us towards our unconscious desires, itself the driving force in psychoanalysis. In numerous ways these passions were turned into devices, means to an end for the storyteller, for

the history maker, that allowed these women to fade into the background and absorb their singularities until they become only a fixture in the story necessary for the overall plot to occur.

Butler, Cixous, and Ettinger, respectively, take these stories and peel back the layers, untie the knots, and repair the tears in the tapestries long-since weaved. While performing the work of the translator these women find the echo of flesh and blood women within the abstractions of these mythical women we find on the page. They recovered these women, gave them back their voices, their agency, and allowed for them to be perceived truly and not as the men of their stories or the masculine form of writing would define them. Just as Lahiri tells us that Echo's "converts this 'punishment' into a stimulating challenge, and often a joy" (64), these women have taken characters and constructed a movement around them, endowed them with the power to represent the masses of women, and allowed for a gathering in which we can view these female figures together working towards the same reclamation— hysterical, but hysterical with passion.

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