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## **Eat Your Words: The Incorporation of Language and Body**

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***Eat Your Words: The Incorporation of Language and Body***

(Spine Title: Eat Your Words: The Incorporation of Language and Body)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

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## Abstract

This project explores the relationship between bodies and language through Hélène Cixous' notion of writing the body. Metaphor becomes a site where bodies and language speak to each other. Therefore, the metaphors of Cixous' own theoretical writing become sites of inquiry. Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine* coalesces around the metaphor of white ink and textual maternity. This theory also emphasises the importance of history and desire in empowering feminine subjects. Legitimatization of such subjects takes place through writing originating with embodied experience, a morphology rather than an economy. However, such experiences are also in turn written onto the body by social and cultural discourses. These discourses, which become evident in the metaphors and myths that dramatise these dominant ideologies, seek to determine, and thus delimit, the body. Such determination heightens the urgency with which bodies must write themselves out of and against harmful exclusions and into viable and vibrant subjectivities.

## Keywords

*Ana Historic*, Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, *écriture féminine*, feminine subjectivity, feminist theory, gendering, lesbian desire, metaphor, *The Passion of New Eve*, queer theory, white ink, White Mythology, writing the body

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## **Abbreviations**

AH Ana Historic

BTM Bodies That Matter

CD Castration or Decapitation?

GT Gender Trouble

TJ The Trojan Horse

TLB The Lesbian Body

WM White Mythology

## **Introduction**

### **A Thesis in Three R's: Resurrect, Resuscitate, Recite**

"I was raised on the milk of words. Language nourished me. I hated to eat what was on a plate. Dirty carrots, nasty soups, the aggression of forks and spoons," writes Hélène Cixous in her 1977 essay "Coming to Writing" (20). Cixous describes the relationship between bodies and language as one of nourishment in which language fuels the body, especially the vivacious feminine body. Importantly, Cixous uses metaphor to communicate this sentiment, and specifically a metaphor that apprehends embodied experience. Thus, metaphor becomes a site of writing the body, the site where subjects consume language and are consumed by it. While subjects savour the syllables and syntax that play sweetly across the palate, there is also an element of force-feeding. After all, bodies are marked and marketed in very specific ways; they are sexed and oriented, desiring and inspiring within a world of languages always already set out, laid out like a meal with place cards and table settings.

The feast of language, prepared and served as metaphor, allows us to incorporate, to make part of our bodies, the sustenance that we need. However, all too often this vital incorporation between body and metaphor becomes something more similar to Metaphor Inc., an economic system in which language is only seen for its use value. Rather than attending to the utensils that feed us the essential food of words, all that is apparent is the utility of language: metaphors for the purpose of profit and exchange rather than something cultivated, ever-growing and life-sustaining. Thus, the richness of metaphoric language is appreciated by only a few gourmands for its delectable flavours while it is otherwise commoditised and tossed about without delicacy or appreciation. Such an economy puts metaphor into circulation away from the body, especially certain culturally marked bodies. After all, language, always telling and listening, does not happen without hands and mouths, writers and speakers. When language becomes second nature, it becomes second hand, caught in catch-phrases and clichés and dead metaphors like over-cooked dead meat, all gristle from having been worn down to the bone. Then, we risk forgetting the first hand experience of material realities, of hands pressing pens to paper,

the movement of tongues and breath in morphology. Instead, our stories are written in short hand and told in a voice not our own.

And sometimes some stories are not told at all. Cixous' quote touches upon the violence inherent in language, or, more accurately, in the tools we use to manipulate it. The sentence in a system that takes language as currency, as an abstraction of value rather than something valued in itself, threatens to become a death sentence. As the vivaciousness of language dies, so too does those who live in, through and with it, their bodies becoming less vital, their experiences less vibrant. Stale old language, the kind saturated with preservatives, sugars and fat, rots teeth, dulls the palate and wreaks slow havoc on organs. A death sentence indeed, and one Cixous wants to escape. Cixous' jailbreak takes place as an explosion of such sentences as well as the conventions that structure them. An explosion sparked by breath like dynamite, this denotation results in the proliferation of subjectivities so that white ink becomes the diverse spectrum of colouring markers, vibrantly coloured and deliciously scented.

Chapter one explores the economy of language, starting with questions about what is embedded in language, what is buried in so-called dead metaphors. After all, they keep coming back to haunt us, especially as they manifest in the shadowy, cobwebbed corners of ideology and mythology. My exploration takes places through four main texts: Paul Ricoeur's 1977 book *The Rule of Metaphor*, Jacques Derrida's 1974 essay "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," and his 1978 essay "The *Retrait* of Metaphor," as well as H el ene Cixous' 1975 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." Ricoeur and Derrida set up the debate over dead or worn-out metaphors, for Ricoeur criticises "White Mythology" in his eighth study and Derrida then responds in "The *Retrait*." Then, Cixous, herself not without a textual and historical connection to this debate, poses a potential resolution to the project Derrida begins.

Ricoeur's book of eight studies, a cornerstone text, argues that dead metaphors are no longer metaphors. This argument stems from Ricoeur's view that these metaphors lack the essential ability to re-describe reality. Although Ricoeur is useful for establishing the legitimacy of metaphor as meaning-making rather than a linguistic ornament, he can account for neither the alluring quality of metaphor nor the process by which they de cease. Derrida's "White Mythology," however, suggests that what Derrida



terms worn-out metaphors are so worn precisely because they make sense. Making sense relates to how metaphors lure us by capturing an element of embodied experience that makes them easy to understand or, more accurately, easy to grasp; they are tantalizing precisely because they exist at the fingertips, on the tips of tongues, at the edges of experience in the between space between bodies and language. Metaphors have a currency, a type of presence in our always already mediated existence, because we grasp them so readily.

However, the currency of metaphor means that making sense falls into the pit of making cents. We grasp such metaphors so easily and they have high exchange rates that prompt their wear and tear. Just as coins and bills circulate and lose their face or become tattered around the edges; in circulating, metaphors become faceless and dull, losing their anthropomorphic quality. As such, language becomes economical, operating as a system governed by a figurehead, like the head on a coin, and by capital, like the capitalized patronym. The result is that some subjects, as language-users, have more wealth and value than others.

Derrida resurrects the metaphors buried within the western philosophical tradition, a project that evidences the importance of language as that which structures perspectives and reality. Through Derrida, I argue for the resurrection of metaphor and it is Cixous who provides the next translation of making sense/cents. With Cixous, making cents becomes making change, that is bringing change to the dominant system that disenfranchises certain subjects, that privileges some at the expense of others. First of all, there is Cixous' textual and historic connection to this debate. In "White Mythology," Derrida explains: "what is white mythology? It is metaphysics which has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being, and which yet remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink" (11). One year after Derrida writes this, Cixous says, "She writes in white ink" (2045).

This last sentence is often quoted by critics of Cixous. However, despite the well-known and well-documented relationship between Cixous and Derrida (who reflected on each other's work and did interviews together), the inspiration for Cixous' infamous statement seems lost in the commentary. Bringing Cixous to the table with Ricoeur and Derrida is thus legitimated by the intertextual and actual relationship between these

thinkers. More importantly, however, Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine* compliments the argument to the utmost.

*Écriture féminine* takes as its goal revolutionizing the dominant system through both bodies and language, through language that speaks the body and a body that speaks out of, with and against language. For Cixous, "this is an 'economy' that can no longer be put in economic terms" (2056). Instead, this articulation takes the form of a morphology. Morphology reunites bodies and language, resuscitating metaphor in the process.

Chapter two begins from the question of how *écriture féminine* works. How does putting the body into the text work? How does it not work? What work does this writing do? Thus, the main focus of this chapter is this morphology of *écriture féminine*. Cixous explains that

woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history. (Laugh 2039)

I ground my analysis of Cixous' theory in Daphne Marlatt's 1988 novel, *Ana Historic*. Marlatt's text and Cixous' theory speak to each other especially well because the novel accentuates the often-overlooked importance of writing women into history. The dialogue between Cixous and Marlatt also enunciates the effects of this writing as they relate to more commonly examined features of *écriture féminine*, namely embodied experience, desire and feminine subjectivity. Moreover, desire in *Ana Historic* manifests specifically as lesbian desire, a feature that aches for comparison with Monique Wittig, her theory of lesbian writing and her own works of fiction. Although critics commonly consider *Ana Historic* a lesbian coming out story, I suggest instead that Marlatt's text emphasizes the unique status of lesbian subjectivity rather than outing its protagonist as a lesbian.

Cixous is clear that white ink is mother's milk, but she is also explicit about the fact that she intends for the mother to be a metaphor; she writes in "The Laugh of the Medusa" that "the mother, too, is a metaphor" (2045). Therefore, the question becomes:

what does Cixous want us to take from this metaphor? After all, as Ricoeur outlines, metaphors provide new knowledge, a new perspective, and thus a new structure for reality, and metaphors do this by taking the salient features from one thing and forcing them onto something else. I conclude that Cixous' mothering metaphor relates to qualities of nurture and generosity: the endless, selfless but self-affirming gift of life from one living, breathing, speaking, writing embodied subject to another. Overall, Cixous' theory, despite its grey moments, resuscitates language, the body and feminine subjects from the flat black horizons of death.

Chapter three then moves from resuscitation to an investigation of recitation and questions about the nature of this body that speaks and writes. The primary texts for this chapter are Judith Butler's two foundational books, 1990's *Gender Trouble* and 1993's *Bodies that Matter* as well as Angela Carter's 1977 novel, *The Passion of New Eve*. Butler explores the ways in which the body is written upon, the prescripts of gender, sex and sexuality that are prerequisites for culturally intelligible subjects. The speaking body must be gendered in very specific ways in order for it to be heard. Butler's project attends to the force and violence embedded in gendering, and this violence becomes apparent in Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*. Despite having been written years before Butler's work, *The Passion of New Eve* provides an uncannily accurate dramatization of Butler's theory. Butler explains how gendering takes place through interpellation, punishment and ritual, all elements that Carter illustrates in her novel. Moreover, the moment when the novel's protagonist, Eve, becomes a woman remains ambiguous. This ambiguity reinforces Butler's proposition that gender is an ultimately unfulfillable assignment.

*The Passion of New Eve* emphasizes the roles played by mythologies as ideology. Carter tackles head-on the myths that construct our reality, the constructions that narrate dominant discourses. She writes that "a critique of these symbols is a critique of our lives" and such a critique is certainly the impetus behind *The Passion of New Eve* ("Notes from the Front Line" 6). Carter's text is vastly intertextual, critiquing biblical and Greek myths as well as their more contemporary reiterations in psychoanalysis, hero quest narratives, the Frankenstein tale, philosophy and feminism. Overall, Carter claims that "myth is more instructive than history" ("New Eve" 68), and indeed, by literalising how

the corpus of western mythology plays out, she demonstrates how myth and ideology impact lived experience.

Finally, critics cast Tristessa as a transvestite and Eve as a transsexual, but the details of the novel rejects this casting. Repositioning these characters as respectively transsexual and posttranssexual, provides a more enlightening reading for the text as well as elaborating on Butler's demand not just for subversion but also for empowerment. This elaboration (re)locates power in the body as the site of performativity and the narrator of identity because "our external symbols must express the life within us" (Carter 6). This life within us is the intuitive and bodily sense of identity, which, whether constructed or not, is the sense that must be empowered and the place from where writing bodies into embodied subjectivities originates. The range of human experience requires a rainbow of inks and a spectrum of viable and vibrant subjectivities. Ultimately, the life within us becomes the heart of the matter, and it is precisely why what we say and how we say it matters.

## Chapter One

### Giving Metaphors CPR:

#### Resuscitating the Body in Dead Metaphor with Drs. Ricoeur and Derrida

“We can never simply ‘get beyond’ or ‘get over’ metaphor, even though we must constantly rethink and criticize our metaphors and their sources, especially the light beneath which they grow, through which they are nourished, and toward which they turn,” writes Michael Naas in his chapter “Stumping the Sun: The Odyssey of Metaphor in ‘White Mythology’” (41). The fact that we cannot escape metaphor, that we are embedded within it, and that we live in and through it, means that the metaphors we use have direct effects upon our experience of the world and ourselves. Moreover, metaphors do not exist in isolation; they have context within language and also in relation to other metaphors. Thus, my method of investigation often extends individual metaphors in order to discover the implications of metaphor at large. This method is possible only when the semantics of metaphor are taken to heart.

In this chapter, I explore the theories of metaphor outlined by Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida in order to tease from their stringently knotted texts the thread of how metaphor works in ways that make it an important element in human existence. Like a Theseus treading the paths of these labyrinthine texts, I pick up the trail-end of this tread with the debate surrounding worn-out or dead metaphors. This debate begins with Derrida’s essay “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” which Ricoeur criticizes in his book *The Rule of Metaphor*. Derrida then responds to Ricoeur in “The *Retrait* of Metaphor.” Ricoeur provides an astute and thorough theory in which metaphor is not a simple, pretty ornament, a poetic device or purple prose, but rather the way in which language is used creatively to make meaning. Although Ricoeur affirms metaphor’s legitimacy, he discredits some metaphors, alleging that so-called dead metaphors are no longer metaphors and thus rejecting Derrida’s claims in “White Mythology.” However, despite his rigorous study of metaphor, Ricoeur cannot account for why dead metaphors debase. I argue that dead metaphors do not cease to matter, but that they are instead the very heart of the matter. As suggested by Derrida, so-called dead metaphors reveal the structure of an underlying ideology, a dominant system. Through

Derrida, I posit that metaphors decrease through a process of making sense and that this making sense relates to the comprehending gasp of both the mind and the body. As metaphor loses this anthropomorphic quality, making sense becomes making cents, an economy based on utility and capital. Derrida recognises the need for a new articulation that would account for gaps in this system and perhaps rectify some of its violent exclusions. I posit that Hélène Cixous provides such an articulation, translating making cents into making change with her theory of *écriture féminine* and its writing the body.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Theseus finds at the centre of the labyrinth not a bull-headed monster and a duel to the death, but the living, laughing, heart-poundingly stunning Medusa who is scribbling away with her pens and paper.

The polemic between Derrida and Ricoeur mainly takes place across three texts: Derrida's "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" from 1974, Paul Ricoeur's eighth study "Metaphor and Philosophical Discourse" in 1977's *The Rule of Metaphor*, and Derrida's "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" from 1978. Much of the debate between these two philosophers rotates around Heidegger's comment that "the metaphoric exists only within the boundaries of metaphysics" (qtd. in WM), which Derrida cites in a footnote of "White Mythology." Although Heidegger employs various poetic examples, his few outright statements on metaphor dismiss it. Heidegger's seeming hypocrisy with his use metaphor while at the same time disparaging it presents a challenge to scholars, a challenge of such notoriety that Derrida cannot but include this famed quote. The noteworthiness of the Heidegger quote is precisely Derrida's point in *Retrait*, his rebuttal to Ricoeur. Ricoeur frowns upon both Heidegger's "restrained criticism" and Derrida's "unbounded 'deconstruction'" (284), which he believes leads to "a paradox of the auto-implication of metaphor" (286). This paradox is that "there is no non-metaphorical standpoint from which to perceive the order and the demarcation of the metaphorical field. Metaphor is metaphorically stated...the theory of metaphor returns in a circular manner to the metaphor of theory" (Ricoeur 287). The circularity-inducing

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<sup>1</sup> Aliette Armel comments while interviewing Derrida and Cixous: "This dialogue between the two of you has lasted for forty years" (Thompson 168). Cixous then comments: "I have never stopped reading him [Derrida] meticulously" (Thompson 168). Thus, the connection between Derrida and Cixous is well-documented. Moreover, Cixous' meticulous reading of Derrida may have noted "White Mythology's" white ink, a metaphor which she may have then translated into her own theory in "The Laugh of the Medusa." These two essays were also published one year apart.

paradox conflicts with Ricoeur's claims that metaphor results from the interaction between the two distinct realms of speculative discourse and of metaphoric discourse. Ricoeur affiliates Derrida and Heidegger, and Derrida overtly rejects this filial relationship. Derrida remarks that "Ricoeur seems to [him] to have neglected the place and scope of this Note in discussion" (*Retrait* 107).

This polemic is well-documented by critics such as Clive Cazeaux, Leonard Lawlor and Guiseppe Stellardi. Lawlor and Stellardi see a difference in approach and perspective between Derrida and Ricoeur, both sympathizing with Derrida. For Lawlor, this difference manifests as the divide between Ricoeur's distanciation and Derrida's law of supplementarity. Distanciation is a type of mediation that takes place between an articulation and the real origin or end. Lawlor explains that "this means on the one hand for Ricoeur that the immediate, the present, identity, and continuity are prior to mediation, absence, difference and discontinuity (3). In other words, for Ricoeur, discourse always comes out of and back to the world. In regard to supplementarity, however, Derrida explains how "there would always be at least one metaphor which would be excluded and remain outside the system: that one, at least, which was needed to construct the concept of metaphor, or...the metaphor of metaphor" (WM 18). Furthermore, Derrida redefines metaphor as catachresis, which disavows the possibility of any Ricoeurean return to origin. Thus, for Derrida, a discourse cannot contain all that lies within it; there is always more because there is always less, because there is always a difference between words and thought and between words and things. Meanwhile, for Stellardi, the distinction is that Ricoeur's philosophy is 'in quest' to articulate a theory while Derrida's deconstruction instead puts to question. Cazeaux then critiques both Lawlor and Stellardi, accusing them of misrepresenting Ricoeur as either too totalizing or too binary, respectively (186). All three critics agree that Ricoeur misses the deconstructive impetus of Derrida's earlier essay, although Cazeaux, perhaps reductively, attributes this to a difference in Ricoeur's conventional academic style versus Derrida's 'embodied' or 'performative' use of language (177). In the end, Cazeaux weaves together Heidegger, Derrida and Ricoeur, claiming that all three thinkers recognize, however implicitly, a distinction between mere metaphor and ontological metaphor (191-2).

Cazeaux explains that Heidegger's outright rejections of metaphor relate to mere metaphor, that is to say, metaphor as a decorative accessory and thus not particularly meaningful, rather than to metaphor itself. On the other hand, Heidegger's view of language, particularly poetry, enables a new and larger vision of things, which Ricoeur posits is precisely what living metaphor does (284). Thus, Ricoeur finds Heidegger's work conforms with his own project. Cazeaux then inserts into the project of "White Mythology" the necessity of metaphor's death or its "becoming mere" in order to for metaphor to be examined (192). This brief section in Cazeaux, which is based on equally brief sections from the thinkers he is attempting to bring together, does not fully explain how mereness connects to Derrida. On the other hand, I would argue that Derrida would reject any such attribution of mereness to metaphor, especially in light of "White Mythology." This essay rests on the postulation that metaphor is never "mere metaphor" and that these so-called mere metaphors actually contain the most significance. This significance becomes apparent through an exploration of what I believe to be a primary difference between Ricoeur and Derrida. This difference is the focus on either living or on dead/worn-out metaphors.

The immediacy of Ricoeur's focus on living metaphor is lost in translation from his book's original French title, *La Métaphor Vive*, "metaphor lives" or "living metaphor." Ricoeur explains that his analysis "leans towards the position that dead metaphors are no longer metaphors, but instead are associated with literal meaning" (290). For Ricoeur, dead metaphors cease to quality because they have lost their deviation, entombed in the concrete lexicon. In other words, Ricoeur conception casts metaphor as the sphinx.<sup>2</sup> Once man solves the enigma or the riddle, the sphinx dies; she becomes a monument of stone. Eventually, Ricoeur dismissively concludes that "a reflection on the wearing away of metaphor is more seductive than earth-shaking" (291). Needless to say, Derrida responds to such dismissals by taking out his Ouija board, and it

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<sup>2</sup> Cixous addresses the myth of the sphinx in her essay "Castration or Decapitation." Cixous remarks on how the sphinx is outside of the city of man and that she "doesn't recognise herself, she it is who poses questions, just as it's man who holds the answer...his answer is completely worthy of him: "Man," simple answer...but is says everything" (49). Here, Cixous refers to the riddle the sphinx poses to Oedipus: which creature in the morning goes on four legs, at mid-day on two, and in the evening upon three, and the more legs it has, the weaker it be? Fittingly, the sphinxes of ancient Egypt were associated with solar deities.



is precisely the seductive siren song of metaphor for which Ricoeur's theory cannot account.

Lawlor claims that "the live/dead distinction, according to Derrida, implies that metaphoricity resides in the consciousness of it" (26). Such consciousness would return to the initial clash or collision between the literal and the figural sense in which the literal has not been erased. Lawlor suggests that Derrida rejects such a 'continuist interpretation' in which meaning can be traced back to an origin (26). For Derrida, the linguistic element and the sensible thing are rife with discontinuity, and thus Lawlor concludes that the live/dead distinction is irrelevant (27). Lawlor's conclusion, though accurate, rests on a ground of shaky premises, especially the premise that implies a rejection of etymologism. First, positing his own theory of metaphor is not Derrida's aim in "White Mythology." Second, Derrida's texts showcase an abundance of word play that intensifies the fact that language always says more than what it says. Also, this play often draws from the more obscure, etymological meanings embedded in words. Derrida draws on the connections within and across language that are forged by auditory or graphical resonances and by meaning buried, like treasure, within idioms and metaphors. Cixous remarks on Derrida's "hypersensibility to what French words conceal" and Derrida himself describes his own use of language as making "of it something that was not programmed but already rendered possible by the lexical and syntactic treasure trove" (Thompson 171). Lawlor posits that Derrida defines metaphor by division (27); however, such division implies something to be divided, an implication which grates against the Derridian more and less of language. All language carries all its meanings always because meaning is always shifting, sliding on the sly, because words are never enough. Metaphors are part of this play of language that keeps meaning circulating, thwarting the formation of any solid, permanent concept, a truly dead metaphor. The impermanence of concepts only means that metaphors do not need to stay dead, and Derrida's own focus on and terminology for *worn-out* metaphors, at least in the case of "White Mythology," maintains such metaphors as significant and unique. If anything, Derrida's essay achieves bringing the metaphors of metaphysics to consciousness, a fact that supports their non-dead state.

According to Derrida, the dominant metaphor of Western metaphysics is that of the heliotrope.<sup>3</sup> The term heliotrope applies both to flowers that follow the path of the sun and to a type of quartz with red spots of jasper that is also called "bloodstone." While the latter meaning of the heliotrope may find more ground in Derrida's response to Ricoeur in "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" and its discussion of Heidegger, withdrawal and neighbourliness, in "White Mythology," Derrida attends primarily to the circular movement implied by the former meaning. Derrida does not provide much explicit elaboration on how the heliotrope functions, leaving it ambivalent. However, it is evident that the heliotrope grows out of a field populated by references to the same, singularity, presence and light. Under the dominance of the sun, knowledge is metaphorized as light and illumination, the seeing of Truth hidden in darkness but ready to be discovered by the mind's insightful eye. However, this eye is that of the Cyclops, monstrous and monstrously singular. The unitary vision of metaphysics then posits a stability of meaning, of its supposed enlightened view that, for Derrida, the very nature of language and our being within language render illusory and impossible.

Ricoeur criticises Derrida's heliotrope, calling it a "fantastic extrapolation" (289). Ricoeur claims that the "metaphors of sun and the home reign only to the extent that they are selected by philosophical discourse" (295), but he does not take up the question of who has the power to make such selections or why these particular metaphors are selected. Ricoeur claims that this selection apparently does not take place because of any "specific fecundity" such metaphor possess (290), although Derrida has likely highlighted the heliotrope on account of its dual destiny as fecund seed-carrier and as plucked, dried and thus preserved, herbarium.

Moreover, Ricoeur himself must give account for the legacies of the heliotrope, such as Aristotle's notion of setting before the eyes. For Aristotle, metaphor "sets the scene before our eyes" (qtd. in Ricoeur 34), which is characteristic of all metaphor. Specifically, this characteristic gives metaphor the ability to point out or show, "to make

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<sup>3</sup> Lawlor questions, "what does Derrida mean by metaphysics...? Derrida not only connects Aristotle's definition of metaphor to his metaphysics, but also, by means of the solar examples, connects Aristotle's metaphysics to that of Plato. Then, in "White Mythology's" final section, the sun metaphor is connected to Descartes, Hegel, and Husserl. Because of these solar connections, the entire history of metaphysics, according to Derrida, forms a system" (24-5).

visible" (Ricoeur 34). What is made visible are relationships of resemblance, for Aristotle proposes that metaphor is just a shorter albeit more elegant form of a simile. Ricoeur repudiates this proposition. More importantly, Aristotle's enduring legacy is that of visibility, of a tradition oriented around presence and essence. An emphasis on the visual also comes through in Ricoeur's own theory. Ricoeur also employs heliotropic language, even within his very dismissal of this fantastic extrapolation. He judges that it is "singularly more interesting....where philosophical discourse deliberately has recourse to living metaphor in order to draw out new meanings from semantic impertinence and to *bring to light* new aspects of reality" (291, my emphasis). Ricoeur then continues to posit "seeing as," a notion explored further below, as one of the primary functions of metaphoric language. At least Ricoeur thusly proves the Derridian hypothesis of the proliferation and persistent infiltration of metaphor into (his own) philosophical discourse and theory of metaphor, if not proving the prevalence of these specific metaphors.

Ricoeur could counter by saying that what I have been calling metaphors are no longer metaphors, but concepts. The process of conceptualization removes essential characteristics of Ricoeurian metaphor, especially the semantic impertinence that requires the transition from the literal meaning to the figural and the ability to re-describe. However, Ricoeur, after making the argument against dead metaphors, concludes that "reanimation of a dead metaphor...is a positive operation" and that "analysis of dead metaphor is thus seen to refer back to an initial foundation which is living metaphor" (291, 292). These conclusions do not render the live/dead distinction irrelevant, as Lawlor claims; instead, they highlight the different functions of metaphor between Ricoeur and Derrida.

Derrida explains that the dominant metaphor of a group has the capacity to gather things together, to organise a system (WM 68). This is precisely what the heliotrope does. Naas comments that Derrida ties to "draw attention to a 'metaphoricity' that would precede any particular metaphor, the condition of possibility, so to speak, of all metaphor" (41). Naas' argument implies that he does interpret the sun as the metaphor for metaphoricity, and this argument possibly obscures the detail that the heliotrope is not the sun itself, but that which, rooted and held fast, held down, follows the sun's movement as best it can but never fully follow the sun past the horizon. The nature of the

sun as that which is above and beyond us radiating from the outside seems to suggest just the interpretation avoided by Naas. Looking directly at the sun causes blindness, and we cannot control the sun although its light establishes our world as visual and present. Moreover, the immediate contradiction of presumed singularity manifested by the polysemy of the heliotrope reveals the impossibility of the sun as centre and of the system itself as stable and univocal. Even the sun contains its own death. The heliotrope follows and needs the light of the sun to live, but this is not all it needs, and this flower is not all the heliotrope is. Thus, Derrida says in regard to metaphors, “the word can only be in the plural” (WM 70)

Derrida continues, explaining that “it is because the metaphorical comes into play in the plural that it does not escape syntax” (WM 71). Syntax is the order that gives words meaning, an underlying logic that controls the unruly polysemic word. Syntax happens at the level of the sentence, which is why Ricoeur rejects theories of substitution that position metaphor at the level of the noun. Instead, he promotes an interactive theory in which metaphor is produced at the level of the sentence or of discourse. Ricoeur elaborates that “a purely rhetorical treatment of metaphor is the result of the excessive and damaging emphasis put initially on the word...a properly semantic treatment of metaphor progresses from the recognition of the sentence as the primary unit of meaning” (44). Ricoeur staunchly opposes metaphor as a frivolous ornament, as rhetorical costume jewellery without any precious stones or real metal.

Without the context of the sentence, the deviation, an improper use, from conventional, lexical meaning essential to metaphor would not be recognisable let alone interpretable. The deviation presents the receiver of a metaphor with an incoherency that can only be solved by leaving the first order to literal reference and entering the second order of figural reference. Thus, the sentence acts as a sort of trampoline, which the metaphor bounces away from, creating a new and different view of the world, and inevitably falls back to because the metaphor can never fully catapult or escape out of literality.

The trampoline analogy connects to the play of language, its freedom. Karl Simms summarizes that what is “important about figurative language is that it is ‘free,’ in that any idea can be freely presented under the image of another. Any piece of language

can be metaphorical of anything – that is the freedom that figurative language opens up” (67). This endless freedom does not account for how some metaphors work better than others, that not all coinage works. Perhaps likening a metaphor to a grasshopper jumping through a field of reference but always returning to the ground better captures the vitality of metaphorical language. Also, language games are not always innocent, a fact which raises the question of whether the sentence that is the Ricoerean playground of metaphor becomes the sentence inscribed onto the body by a machine similar to that in Kafka’s “The Penal Colony.” After all, Stellardi remarks on the difficult task of deconstruction in which the “deconstructor discovers in the text of philosophy, of literature, of art. . . powerful (albeit often unperceived) machinery of dominant conceptual structures” (72).

Ricoeur describes what metaphors do; they re-describe the world and create new knowledge. However, he does not explain what our metaphors mean, specifically why metaphors have this ability to be so meaningful that they can change our perceptions. This perceptual change happens in terms of “seeing as.” Ricoeur claims that metaphorical seeing is a “seeing as” and that this seeing is different from seeing or simply making visible (231, 61). Regular seeing is only an experience while “‘seeing as’ is an experience and an act at one and the same time” (Ricoeur 213). “Seeing as” as experience means that it happens intuitively, that is it cannot be taught, and it is an act because it requires understanding and “to understand is to do something” (Ricoeur 213). Understanding highlights the cognitive function of metaphor as an act of interpretation; the enigma of metaphor asks to be solved. Karl Simms provides a useful analogy of how Ricoeur’s metaphor functions like a linguistic magic eye picture. These pictures “ostensibly consist merely of bands of coloured dots, but when seen in a certain way, reveal a picture. You cannot be taught to see a magic eye picture - you either see it or you don’t - some people never do (74). Thus, metaphors reveal a picture of reality, for, as Mark Muldoon notes, ‘seeing as’ leads to ‘being as’ (61), drawing upon the interplay of similarity and difference inherent in the copula of ‘to be,’ the ‘is and is not’ of metaphor. This ‘is and is not’ is the most important part of metaphor’s tensional truth (Simms 75). The metaphorical ‘is’ is the ‘is’ of equivalence and not of determination (Ricoeur 248). Therefore, Ricoeur notes that metaphor “preserves the ‘is not’ within the ‘is’” (249). Metaphor says that ‘x is y,’ meaning that ‘x is-like-but-is-not-actually y.’

Tensional truth stretches thinking, is a “thinking more” (Ricoeur 303), which gives metaphoric language ability to re-describe the world. Therefore, Muldoon summarizes that “metaphorical truth is not something projected by us as much as it opens up a wider dimension of reality” (62).

To explore this notion of how metaphor works for Ricoeur, I take as an example in E.E. Cummings poem “13:”

r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r

who

a)s w(e loo)k  
upnowgath

PPEGORHRASS

eringint( o-

aThe):l  
eA  
!p:

S a

(r

rIvInG .gRrEaPsPhOs)

to

rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly  
,grasshopper;

(286)

This poem re-creates the experience of the poet and represents the movement of grasshoppers. The poet’s surprise at the sudden leaping insects is evident in the exclamation point in the midst of the word “leap.” This word which itself follows the arc of the action as the word falls down the page and captures the quick moment of leaping itself and the poet’s surprise with the capitalization of the A.

Only through motion does the jumble of *rpophessagr* become an intelligible thing. Motion has an etymological relationship to metaphor and its ancient Greek roots in “carrying” and “meta,” a prefix with connotations of sharing, togetherness, between, in common and change. This motion or movement contrasts the seeming standstill of Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor, in which metaphor presents an enigma, a semantic collision, and tensions that promote a pause. Ricoeur’s metaphor causes us to stop in

surprise at the literal contradiction before moving along with the necessary jump into the figural realm. Conversely, Cumming's poem enacts the poet's surprise in the movement of letters across the page and presents a confusing experience that is similarly solved by movement. The poem requires that the reader jump from letter to letter in order to decipher the word and this jumping of the reader's eyes mimics the jumping of the insect. Also, only at the end, after moving through a poem that leaps around the page to the effect of enacting this insect's key quality, can the reader arrive at the linear decoded presence of the subject: grasshopper. Through hopping the grasshopper becomes what it is. Thus, the rearrangement of Cumming's poem re-establishes what we already know about grasshoppers; they hop through grass. The fact that the poem does not create a new way of seeing grasshoppers or contribute to our knowledge about them questions whether this poem would function metaphorically for Ricoeur.

Ricoeur concludes that "in the metaphorical discourse of poetry, referential power is linked to the eclipse of ordinary reference...reality brought to language unites manifestation and creation" (239). While Cummings both manifests grasshoppers and creates a poem, poem 13 does not seem to enact an eclipse of the ordinary, the concept of grasshopper as grass-hopper; rather, he illuminates the initial literal meaning underlying the grasshopper itself. In a key statement, Ricoeur states that the enigma of metaphorical discourse is that it "'invents' in both senses of the word: what it creates, it discovers; and what it finds, it invents" (239). In relation to Cumming's "13," the poet does enact a process of simultaneous invention and discovery; however, this process does so in regard to language and not in regard to the figure of the grasshopper. The world of the poem, although figural, does not deviate from the world of reference. Thus, Cummings does seem more on the side of reanimation of metaphor but even more so on that of revealing that which already lies within language than with creating anew. Cummings' poetry not only suggests that Ricoeur perhaps indulges a totalizing view of poetical discourse but also approximates a more Derridian project of delving into language to find out what is inside.

The dominant conceptual structure that the deconstructor discovers is the structure that orbits around the heliotrope. Subsequently, the metaphor of the coin (of metaphor) describes how these metaphors function. The coin metaphor helps elucidate how

metaphors become concepts. The process of conceptualization takes place when metaphors make sense. This making sense becomes a making cents, a commodification of human experience with larger rates of exchange in text rather than in coin, in paper rather than metal. The economical system of language has many disadvantages, which may be overcome with a translation of text to Cixousian sexts in which the work becomes a corpus and the economy, a morphology.

Derrida remarks that "it is remarkable how insistently the metaphorical process is designated by the paradigm of coinage" (WM 14). This paradigm guides investigation into the power embedded into worn-out metaphors. Following the implications of the coin metaphor reveals two main features of worn-out metaphors: they have value because of their currency and their exchange. Derrida snatches the lucky penny of the coin metaphor from Nietzsche. "In Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," Nietzsche claims that "truths are illusions...metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins" (878). For Nietzsche, worn-out metaphors lose value through use because he values ultimately human creativity and originality. In Nietzsche's anti-realist view, we translate original sensations metaphorically first into words and then into concepts or universals. Through this double translation, humans create their worlds; Nietzsche's view is empowering for the individual subject and provides a refreshing emphasis on human embodiment and creativity, despite the looming threat of an acute albeit artistic solipsism. However, the problem is that we forget this creative process and the power we have over it. Thus, we believe that stable, singular, enduring Truth exists, instead of recognising that truth is actually "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms" that we have the power to create and re-create (878).

Interestingly, Nietzsche uses the term "army" to describe our so-called truths. The militant aggression that characterizes the drive for truth causes us to lose sight of our sensuous original experience, which in turn allows for the creation of a system of laws and order invented to serve this drive. Of course, this system ends up drawing dividing lines to maintain the side, the inside of truth, drawing and quartering that which and those who fall outside. The dire results and the urgency especially evident in Nietzsche help highlight the importance of Derrida's insights.



In contradistinction to Nietzsche, who views the wearing away of the anthropomorphic figure on the coin of metaphor as a negative process, Derrida notes that it is the defacement of the obverse figure that increases the exchangeability of metaphors. In other words, Nietzschean metaphors have value because they bear the stamp, the figure of their anthropomorphic origin. For Derrida, metaphors have value precisely because they are worn, or more precisely they are worn because there is something about them that lures the rough grit of our fingers.

There is something about highly circulated metaphors that makes sense. Ricoeur certainly does not explain why some metaphors pass on into concepts and lexicalization. Although he does emphasize the surprising, enigmatic quality of metaphor, Ricoeur does not account for the seductive quality of it. Ricoeur's "seeing as" perhaps deafens us to what John R. Searle mentions (but does not explain) as the ability to "call to mind" (99). This notion of calling touches upon how metaphor calls to us, beckons us not just to hear but to listen. Specifically, this listening attends to the imperative of metaphor, a call or command that is both necessary and unavoidable, a siren's song that lures us with seductive power. Those metaphors that start off especially alluring and poignant tend toward conceptualization, and this is perhaps because and why they make sense. Derrida remarks that it is "necessary to investigate the double twist which opened up metaphor and dialectic by allowing the term *sense* to be applied to that which should be foreign to the senses" (WM 28) – should be, but perhaps is not.

Derrida posits that the problem of metaphor is that "the theory of metaphor remains a theory of sense" (WM 32). In this case, sense has two meanings. First, that this theory remains strongly tied to the senses, or, at least in the case of dominant systems, one particular sense, that of sight and the light of presence that is its medium. Second, that metaphor must be rational and thus maintain some connection to standard epistemology, that the proper implicitly underlies metaphor's initial impropriety. As Lawlor explains, the proper provides an immediate vision of thing's essence (19). While metaphor manifests essential properties by means of resemblance because, for Aristotle whom Derrida is examining at this point, metaphor is an elliptical analogy and the terms the analogy can be restored so that "metaphor says essence twice" (Lawlor 19). The proper is thus the proper name, the signature that guarantees identity and resonates with

properly, property, propriety, appropriate and appropriation. The proper name, the signature on cheques, is signalled by capital letters and is also that which earns the most capital.

Therefore, Derrida also postulates that the "question of metaphor belongs here to a theory of *value*" (WM 16); metaphors, in making sense, make cents. The small change of meaning jingles as coins in pockets. These coined metaphors are ready to be used and are easily exchanged. The usage of these metaphors is their *usure*. Derrida explains the notion of *usure* in his response to Ricoeur's critique (or, as Derrida might prefer, Ricoeur's misreading) of "White Mythology," "The *Retrait* of Metaphor." In "The *Retrait*," Derrida elaborates on the wear and tear aspect of *usure* as the "use, this value of the value of use, utility, of use or utility as being *useful* or as being *usual*" (*Retrait* 105). Thus, the usual suspects, the usual subjects provide the mark of currency. In the flow of use, the head figure on the obverse, the figure head of authority is defaced to the point of effacement. So, we lose the sensuousness of the face, our own and that other to whom we speak; we lose the anthropomorphic trace. Then, we lose the recognisable features, the marks of humanness and humaneness as the profile is filed away. It is as if, having followed the thread to the centre of the labyrinth, a singular path of meaning built of stone, and discovering only a mirror in which reflects the Minotaur. And then Cixous asks "you are men. But are you sure you're human?" (Coming to Writing 35).

Another reason why metaphors make sense is that they relate to lived, embodied experience. As much as ideology excises the body in favour of heads on coins, the body always lies in language. This is evident in various example of worn-out metaphors, such as the skin and flesh of fruit, the legs and arms of tables and chairs, the spines of books, grips on reality, eyes of potatoes, grasping a concept, inspiration/expiration, and even showerheads. Even if these examples display not an anthropomorphic projection of ourselves onto the world, they do exemplify a connection, perhaps a dialectic, between our bodies, objects and language. Hence, metaphors makes sense because we live them, live in them, and accordingly many of these example relate to the familiar objects of the home. We are at home in metaphor but can also trapped or imprisoned within it. Therefore, when Cixous exhorts us to writes the body into the text, her exhortations do not seem so outrageous because bodies are, in some sense, already there, in the ways

metaphors connect to embodiment. Also, as a result of speaking the body, the body can speak out of and against the metaphors that structure subjects in heavily constrictive ways.

Returning to Derrida, this wearing, the *usure* is also usury. Derrida questions whether metaphor can function as usury, as “the production of surplus-value according to laws other than those of a continuous and linearly accumulative capitalization” (*Retrait* 109). Usury points out the interest involved in metaphor as always invested in an ideology. Umberto Eco comments that “the text exhibits its ideology as if by watermark” (156), and this idea of the watermark as well as the move to textuality are useful. The watermark helps increase the stakes, transitioning from the spare change of metaphor to the big bucks of a text on paper. The watermark of ideological value that a text carries becomes the palimpsest of white mythology. This coded underwriting is only visible in a certain light, and, in the case of metaphysics, this light is the light of the same, the one sun followed day in and day out by the heliotrope.

Derrida, when questioning the nature of white mythology, claims that “it is metaphysics which has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being, and which yet remains, active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible drawing covered over in the palimpsest” (WM 11). Resonating with Nietzschean influence, Derrida’s view of white mythology continues the emphasis on text and its written authority. We read the black and white typeface, forgetting what lies beneath and behind all but the obvious characters. Our apparent creative control and freedom within language is ultimately governed by the logos, a system of singularity and singular truth. Paying attention to the worn-out metaphors reveals the underlying traces that make these metaphors poignant enough to become not second hand but second nature.

Thus, the figurehead of authority gracing the obverse of the coin is the white man who governs a system, is that of the one, the identity of the same, of hierarchal binaries ordered according to a patrilinear Western philosophical tradition and the logic of the logos/phallus. Derrida, still exploring the concept of white mythology, states that it “assembles and reflects Western culture: the white man takes his own mythology...his logos – that is, the *mythos* of his idiom” (WM 11). The quote attends to how mythology is a system that develops around the textual centre as based on common usage.

Mythology narrativizes ideology, giving it characters and a plot. In white mythology, the white man becomes the Cyclops, a giant figure of androcentrism with a one-eyed vision. This vision, as we will see, may perhaps be dethroned by the astonishing seeing of the Medusa, who Cixous recasts as a laughing beauty who has escaped the double-bind of ideological standards that require women to be either innocent maidens with flowers in their hair or evil temptresses with wreathing tresses.

In the first section of "White Mythology," Derrida states that "the task is...to dismantle the metaphysical and rhetorical structures that are at work...to reconstitute them in another way" (WM 13). Then, in the last section, this task returns when Derrida calls for a new or an other articulation. He explains that

we should no doubt have to substitute for the classical opposition between metaphor and concept some other articulation...to give account of the specific gaps which cannot be ignored in epistemology...[this articulation] would give rise to a displacement and a rewriting of the meaning of science, of knowledge, of truth, which is to say, some other terms also. (WM 65)

The new articulation shores up the importance of language in epistemology and its gaps. Derrida, however, does not give an account for these said gaps. Certainly this is not a contentious claim, especially given that Derrida, the father of deconstruction, is still grappling with the legacies of his forefathers and his affiliation with Heidegger. Furthermore, Derrida finishes "White Mythology" with a book and specifically a book that is set in stone. Ending the essay with dried flowers in a powerless anthology, Derrida remarks: "unless an anthology were also a lithography. Indeed, the heliotrope is a stone too" (74). Incidentally, this is a stone both imbued with blood and with the power of invisibility, for Derrida does begin the settling of accounts even if he does not accomplish the full transaction of work to corpus, of text to sexts.

"We're going to show them our sexts!"<sup>4</sup> triumphantly proclaims Hélène Cixous in her manifesto for *écriture féminine*, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (2048). These sexts are the articulation of sex and text written of and from a body that is endlessly plural, eruptively desiring; "bodies of paper and blood; their letters of flesh and tears" (Coming

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<sup>4</sup> Sexts is a translation of the French *sextes*, a combination of *sexes* or sexual organs and *textes* or texts.

13). For Cixous, the body is text, written upon and primed to write itself, and, as a site of plurality of organs, flows and erogenous zones, it gives rise to a language that similarly flows according to its own endless (il)logic. This flows is not the Nietzschean flow of metaphor that is a hot, liquid stream that always threatens to harden into rigid shapes (880). Instead, Cixous has volcanoes “but not lava: what wants to flow is breath” (Coming 10). Cixous attends to the body that writes and speaks, a body that, in its articulation, you, the feminine writer, “want to affect, you want to wake the dead” (Coming 57). Waking the dead takes place as a restoration of body. The figureheads and typefaces regain the full extension of articulate parts in order to articulate.

Ultimately, these sexts disrupt phallogentrism, Cixous’ targeted dominant discourse in “Laugh.” These disruptions take place through the body as it is thrown forward into language, desire and history, thus presencing itself and bringing women back to their senses and their sense of self as fully empowered subjects from the abyss of the dark continent of absence and lack. Cixous comments on how woman is “ever caught in her chain of metaphors, metaphors that organize culture” (CD 44). Thus, metaphoric language, as the manifestation of ideology, has the power to bind subjects into certain forms with often violent force. For Cixous, this is the “‘capital’ force that is effectively decapitation. Women have no choice other than to be decapitated...if they don't actually lose their heads by the sword, *they only keep them on the condition that they lose them...turned into automatons*” (CD 43). The Medusa was subjected to such a decapitation, the loss of body along with her head.

Cixous reanimates the Medusa, translating emphasis from the monstrous Medusa’s violent death at the hands of a victorious hero into a desire for life that focuses on the creativity and nourishment of milk, blood and books. After all, the blood of the Medusa created in its flowing two offspring: the winged horse Pegasus and the giant Chrysaor. Rather than beheading the Medusa and engraving her severed, sideways profile on a coin, Cixous explores the richness of metaphoric language in order to approach the Medusa on her own revived terms. Cixous writes that “you have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly” (Laugh 2048). Cixous questions “who’s changing [her] into a monster” anyway (10)? Not to mention, looking at a Gorgon requires a different kind of sight to begin with.

Cixous states that this feminine subject “writes in white ink” (2045), and this white ink, although not without tensions that will be addressed in the next chapter, is useful as a way to feel out a new articulation. This articulation allows the allure of metaphor to achieve the full potential of its seduction, for Cixous draws upon the notion that the feminine writer mothers the text. This mothering contrasts with the patrilinear system of the proper name and its investment in capitalization, or, what she calls in “Coming to Writing,” “the Society of Cacapitalist [sic] Siphoning” (49). Such Societies build institutions of stone, such as Cixous’ cathedral from which she was thrown out because she was Jewish and a woman. She mourns that “their stone is sad and male” (12). Also, writing in white ink is a self-reflexive and self-fulfilling process that creates a this new type of text as sext. Following through the metaphor of white ink, this revolutionary writing disappears in the current dominant system, that of the white page and black text. Therefore, white ink plays upon the notion of the gaps within and suggests that the reading in addition to the writing of *écriture féminine* requires a different system, perhaps a system of a differently coloured page that may not even be a page at all.

The shift in emphasis promoted by Cixous helps guide epistemology away from violence. Instead of taking or seizing, the writer of *écriture féminine* gives. Cixous explains:

She doesn’t ‘know’ what she is giving, she doesn’t measure it; she gives, though, neither a counterfeit impression nor something she hasn’t got. She gives more, with no assurance that she’ll get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out. She gives that there may be life, thought, transformation. This is an ‘economy’ that can no longer be put in economic terms. (2056)

Comprehension becomes not a choke-hold, death-grip of a grasp but rather a touching upon. Expression becomes expiration, breathing out and out without end. Thus, Cixous achieves what Derrida and Ricoeur do or cannot do; she recognises the violence and exclusion enacted in language particularly through metaphors that structure subjectivity, and she articulates a type of writing, one that shifts around, in and through systemacity itself.

Cixous continues the direction that begins with Derrida when he explains that “as soon as we admit that in an analogical relation all of terms are already individually set in a metaphorical relation, the whole begins to function, no longer as a sun, but as a star, the pinpoint source of truth, of what is proper, remaining invisible, or swathed in night” (45). Derrida takes us from sun to star and into the flipside of night with the shelving of the heliotrope. Cixous then takes us from single star to plural stars, from the external cosmos to that within. She explains:

If she is whole, it’s a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitless changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organized around any one sun that’s any more a star than the others. (2052)

The “she” in this passage is the feminine writer and the Medusa, and specifically the laughing Medusa. Cixous explains that “one can emerge from death...only with an irrepressible burst of laughter” (Coming 41). The Cixousian Medusa thus becomes a joyful and empowered artist figure, a sculptor of the very stone she creates. The constellation called The Sculptor unites this stellar plurality and the Medusean sculptor. The Sculptor sits low on the horizon and, although it contains various galaxies, it contains no bright stars; no one shining point stands out from the others. Moreover, the sculptor has no mythology.

As F.T.C. Moore, the translator of “White Mythology,” reminds us, “the question of metaphor...is at the heart of those very general questions concerning the relations of language, thought and reality” (5). Having left Ricoeur lying in the sun (but certainly not put out to pasture), Derrida and Cixous venture into some of the blind-spots Ricoeur’s theory leaves unexplored, specifically the ideological underpinnings that worn-out or supposedly dead metaphors reveal. Riving these metaphors then can help change the ideological system, and thus, change realities through language. Overall, in a sense, Derrida gives metaphor a precordial thump to get its heart going again, while Cixous provides the re-animating breath.

## Chapter Two

### Authentic Respiration:

#### The Mouth to Mouth of Hélène Cixous' *Écriture Féminine*

In her elusive and allusive manifesto of *écriture féminine*, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous envisions and enacts a style of writing that simultaneously creates and expresses an unique feminine subjectivity. This chapter will explore Cixous' *écriture féminine* along with Daphne Marlatt's novel *Ana Historic*. I argue that *Ana Historic* speaks and speaks to *écriture féminine* so well that an exploration of Marlatt illuminates the ways in which Cixous' theory accomplishes its task of empowering feminine subjects while also unearthing some of the pitfalls and dangerous ground in Cixous. My exploration of *Ana Historic* and *écriture féminine* draws to the fore the central role of marginalized bodies in writing, the importance of history and the significance embedded in naming. As such, I read *Ana Historic* as a narrative that (re)writes history as a blend of fact and fiction and posit that through this writing women imagine/realise their own unique desires. Marlatt shows how, through desire, feminine writers can become an active and interactive subjects. Subsequently, many critics position *Ana Historic* as a lesbian coming out novel, and, while lesbian desire remains significant in this context, I explore how this coming out is actually a coming to writing, to self and to other. The lesbian context of the novel compels an examination of the theoretical and fictional works of Monique Wittig. This examination takes Wittig's lesbian writing on the one hand and Cixous and Marlatt's *écriture féminine* on the other. Wittig's writing leads my analysis to the aforementioned dangerous grounds by presenting many challenges to Cixous and to her central metaphors of "white ink" and textual maternity. However, these challenges do not defeat Cixous; instead, they legitimize Cixous' own challenges to phallogentrism and draw out the ways in which her metaphor and overall theory of *écriture féminine* empower embodied feminine subjects.

Cixous asserts that phallogentrism has violently driven women away from both writing and their bodies and that through writing women will return to their own unique embodied experience and thus subjectivity (2039). Cixous claims that, "by writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from



her... censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (2043). This writing takes advantage of the ways in which women have been identified with the body as the lesser or negative term in the system of hierarchal binaries. As such, the empowerment starts from where women already are; in a system that relegates women to body, this body is precisely where Cixous starts. For this reason, although Cixous clearly states that men can write in this feminine style, she bestows women a privileged place as writers of *écriture féminine*.<sup>5</sup>

Cixous takes advantage of the gaps and discrepancies in the system that can never completely capture lived reality in its still-frames, that can never reduce living, breathing, active women to drone-like objects of pure body. However, Cixous does not want women to become masculine, aiming toward qualities of rationality and logic, in part because women have been repeatedly and stridently excluded from such qualities on account of their bodily-ness. After all, bodily existence is undeniable. Women (and men) live through and with their bodies, but what and how bodies matter can change. Cixous advocates bringing women (back) to their intimate embodied experience and its expression as a method of explosive revolution. Speaking from the body thus becomes a speaking out, specifically speaking out against binding stereotypes and speaking as a way to get out, to escape these binds by playing 'out of bounds.' As such, women become their own muses and are not craning their necks to achieve the unattainable, high standards of goddesses carved in stone. In other words, if dominant discourses are going to say that women are unstable, bodily creatures, Cixous is going to say, laughing, "exactly! And watch what we can do."

Bringing bodies back to writing overthrows the myth that writing appears without having been written by a writer situated in time and space, that it appears magically, like script engraved in tablets from a God's eye view and an invisible hand. Such objective writing is taken to express an indelible, stable Truth in singular black on white, but, overall, black and white does not account for the spectrum of human existence. For Sara

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<sup>5</sup> Cixous consistently claims that men can write *écriture féminine* and that bringing the feminine into legitimacy will also affect both (a more authentic) masculine and men's subjectivity. She comments on the presence of femininity in men, "femininity which is always massively repressed. What it means to be a man, 'being-a-man,' consists first of all in eradicating femininity. But in writing...there are men who transmit femininity...Genet's works for instance, but there are others" (Sellers 60).

Ahmed, this myth becomes the “fantasy of a paperless philosophy” (34), and this fantasy then becomes a writerless philosophy. The fantasy of paperlessness gestures toward the forgetting of the material realities of writing, and writerlessness gestures toward how the masculine ideal becomes not even masculine but the universal standard, neutered and neutral.

Cixous’ so-called “return” to the body is one of the main features taken up by critics of her writing and is also a feature that garners accusatory cries of essentialism. For example, Cecile Lindsay cautions that Cixous’

writings seem overwhelmingly to define female subjectivity through what are presented as universal, biological givens...which begins to sound uncomfortably like the old rhetoric of feminization used to assign women to their roles in society and keep them there. (52-53)

Conclusively denying or affirming these accusations is not easily done; Cixous is never a writer who provides an easy or easily accessible straight answer. However, Cixous is clear that her aim is to empower women and the feminine and that part of her project does require embracing, celebrating and (re)creating bodies as both signifiers and concrete entities. Cixous does not want to reduce women to an essential biological function in part because concerns have shifted away from instant terror upon the first mirage-like glimmer of such reduction and toward recognition of the gamut of women’s experiences, including ones that could be called biological and also others that intersect across race, geography and class. “My eyes, my tongue, my ears, my nose, my skin, my mouth, my-body-for-the-other-“ (2053), writes Cixous in a list that does not definitely end and does not just highlight the parts of her body typically considered dangerous and/or defining, such as wombs, vaginas or breasts. Instead, she evokes sites of sense, organs that make sense, that interact with a world that calls and speaks to us in certain ways in order to create lived experiences that take place between and in the in-between between bodies and worlds.

Although Cixous starts from the body to which women are relegated, she shifts the nature of the female body from one that is absented, passive, an empty vessel, to a vital entity that is present, active and always already becoming, a lived and living reality. Rather than a body devalued and fragmented due to a supposed instability and lack, the

Cixousian body is not a hole but “a whole composed of parts that are wholes” (2052). This body is one of literal blood and literary transformation. Cixous writes that “our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching end” (2042). A body that is always in process, unfinished but not incomplete, a body without end certain does not cohere with Ann Rosalind Jones’ suggestion that the French feminists, including Cixous, “make of the female body too...totalized an entity” (368). The totalization of the female body is precisely why it must speak, and this speaking manifests as a physical act that works from within to dislocate phallic language, “to explode it...containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of” (Laugh 2050).

Lindsay argues that feminism postulates projected futures, seeking utopian visions that change inherited pasts and, specifically for Cixous, change the past of historically silenced women. However correct Lindsay’s observation of feminism’s future tense may be, she overlooks the function of *écriture féminine* to (re)create a past. This recreation of a past is a necessary aspect of creating viable futures. Such oversight obscures the very non-literarity and plurality that Cixous advocates. In the very first paragraph of “Laugh,” Cixous says that “woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement” (2039). *Écriture féminine* has a keen sense of history as that which perpetuates proscribed norms of binding, silent femininity and that which requires (re)writing in order to form empowered, unique femininities (and masculinities) that fly into the future.

Daphne Marlatt performs such a writing of history in her novel *Ana Historic*.<sup>6</sup> This novel shows how *écriture féminine* plays out. The novel functions as such an excellent presentation of Cixous’ theory that it also helps to outline potential moments of trouble. *Ana Historic* can be read as *écriture féminine* on account of how Marlatt’s language and overall linguistic prowess echoes that of Cixous’ in “Laugh.” Marlatt also writes very much of and from the body, writing women into history and desiring. Marlatt writes in a way that fractures and eventually ruptures from within the system at play by

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<sup>6</sup> The connection between Cixous and Marlatt is not just fortuitous coincidence. Marlatt mentions that, before when she would have written *Ana Historic*, she “began to get very interested in the possibility of writing carrying the feminine, so that led [her] to French feminist theory, and [she] started reading Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva” (Williamson 183).

enacting a non-linear multiplicity that blurs boundaries between disparate binaric categories, especially that of fact versus fiction. Furthermore, *Ana Historic* projects into the future and results in creating a new feminine subject.

Marlatt remarks on the creative power of language, saying that “when we change language, we change the building blocks by which we construct our reality or even our past reality” (Williamson 188). Given the impact of language on bodies, it is especially important not only to attend to what is said about them but also how this saying happens. Precisely because language carries so much meaning it can determine the meaningfulness of a body or its parts, its matter and mattering. Cixous certainly seizes upon the relationship between the female body and language, reversing the external pressures of dominant discourses in order to restructure bodies and the feminine subjects that live through them.

Bodily experience, although always mediated, happens with a sort of intimacy, a presence/present tense that makes physical experience a privileged site from which expression can begin; subjects may not know the tenets of Aristotle’s metaphysics but they cannot help but know hunger, cold, pain and desire. Desire, for Cixous and Marlatt, becomes an embodied sense that connects closely with expression on account for its wanting. Desire reaches out, seeking to touch and be touched by other people and objects. Annie, Marlatt’s main protagonist, finds herself wanting in a discourse that relegates her to lack and leaves (women-shaped) gaps in history, in her story. Through writing from this place of want she finds her own active, vital wanting. Kathleen M. Scheel agrees that, in Marlatt, “the feminine act is redefined as that of writing oneself as a subject, of languaging oneself into desire” (105).

*Ana Historic* tells the story of Annie Richards, a disenchanted faculty wife. While doing research in the archives for her husband, Annie discovers two brief mentions of a “Lady teacher” named Mrs. Richards who lived in a logging community in Victorian British Columbia. Annie begins to write the journal of this teacher, whom she names Ana, and in her writing she imagines Ana’s life, which has been erased by official history. Through her writing, Annie begins to imagine her own desires, which have been erased by the constrictions and contradictions of the traditional feminine roles of daughter, wife and mother. The narrative includes dialogues between Annie and Ina,

Annie's dead mother, as well as memories of Annie's childhood, through which the reader sees how Ina imposed oppressive feminine standards on her daughter. Marlatt writes in the voices of the three women, Annie, Ana and Ina, exploring their experiences through personal reflections, memories and conversations. Marlatt also includes interspersed "facts" from historical, medical, religious and cultural sources. Finally, the text also incorporates reflections on the writing process, poems, and an abundance of word and syntactic play. Marlatt describes her reasoning for *Ana Historic's* boundary-blurring intertextuality in a 2002 interview:

And then there's memory, which is famously unreliable because it tends to carry a fictional component. I like rubbing the edges of document and memory/fiction against one another. I like the friction that is produced between the stark reporting of document, the pseudo-factual language of journalism, and the more emotional, even poetic, language of memory. That's why I used such a hodgepodge of sources in *Ana Historic*: a little 19th-century and very local journalism that sounds like a gossip column, a 1906 school textbook, various historical accounts, some contemporary feminist theory, and a school teacher's diary from 1873 that was completely fictitious. (Kossew)

The effect of such a hodgepodge is that the various stories build associatively. The multiple voices, real, imagined and remembered, create not a cacophony but a polyphony that emphasizes instances of harmony and dissonance. The dissonance between the embodied experience of the feminine characters and authoritative voices from history, psychiatry and religion creates a juxtaposition that reveals the underlying ideologies embedded within these dominant discourses. Thus, through this juxtaposition, Marlatt provides a critique of the value system that excludes and subordinates women's experiences and voices. For example, Marlatt intersperses the sections that describe a boat race within the birthing scene (121-127). The contrast between these two types of vessels (for indeed the ships with female names and the labouring female body both appear as vessels in this section) marks the differences and similarities between the competition of the publicly documented race and the community created in the birthing room that goes unrecognised in the annals of history.

*Ana Historic*, as both ahistoric and a historic, attends to the importance that *écriture féminine* places on history, an importance that is sometimes overlooked by critics like Lindsay who focus on the forward movements of *écriture féminine*. Cixous writes that

we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another. As subject for history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places...In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history. (2046)

Facts are to Official History as wood pulp is to paper, and these facts are supposed to be stable and true, especially when grand machinery mashes them into a straight-lined, wrinkle-free flat form. However, Marlatt disrupts the stability of fact and history, showing how facts are changeable even dynamic. Marlatt writes: “‘history says of her...’ but when you’re so framed, caught in the act, the (f) stop of act, fact- what recourse step inside the picture and open it up” (56). The ellipsis in this quote calls attention to the omission of women in history, marking in punctuation the gap/s of feminine experience. The ellipsis also operates as fill-in-the-blank for the reader; we all know what history says of women. Marlatt plays on the notion of fact, histories building blocks, in this quote. Earlier, she asks “what is fact? (f) act. The f stop of act, a still photo in the ongoing cinerama” (31). For Marlatt, women have been framed, constrained in the still shots of history, the feminine, the f that is the sign of the female on official documents, has been bracketed off from action and thus from subjectivity. In response, Marlatt through Annie opens up these photographs, crossing mediums and the fact/fiction binary as she writes the life of Ana, filling in the blanks and fleshing out the flat white blank page.

This process of writing Ana’s story through an imagined journal and scenes becomes a *re-membering* of history. This term, re-member draws upon the multiple meanings of member as both a limb of someone’s body and someone who belongs to a group or community. “Re-member” first arises in *Ana Historic* when Annie remembers her mother’s experience, which references psychoanalytic narratives of the diligent housewife and mother turned trapped hysteric:

they erased whole parts of you, shocked them out, overloaded the circuits so you couldn't bear to remember. *re-member*. you went looking for something, someone...and you couldn't put those *fantom* limbs together into a shape by which you recognised yourself. (148-9 my emphasis)

The archaic spelling of "fantom" with a "f" instead of a "ph" hints toward how master narratives such as psychoanalysis are not only out-dated but also inflict harm on body and self. Female bodies especially are subjected to harm, a fact also suggested by the "f," particularly in light of Marlatt's close attention to words like (f)act. "Fantom" also draws on how such narratives mark the feminine with absence so that the female is, and can be further, amputated. The feminine thus becomes an apparition, an illusion/delusion without proper shape or material substance. The connection between absent limbs and Ina's inability to recognise her self highlights the connection between bodily entity and overall identity, the something of the someone.

Re-membering takes place as a fleshing out the bare bones of factual history through writing the stories of women and their bodily experiences. Marlatt criticizes that few mentions and snapshot of women in history "are not facts, but skeletal bones of a suppressed body the story is" (29). The skeletal bones function as both the healthy body's sturdy foundation and also as the sick or dead body's ruins. The experiences that fill in and flesh out the gaps include Annie's memory of pre-pubescent freedom and wholeness, of her body before it was a woman's body clothed in shame, fear and, in Cixous' terms, "stupid sexual modesty" (Laugh 2049). Annie remembers wearing a bra for the first time, and she questions

what did it mean to leave behind that body aroused by the feel of hot wind, ecstatic with the smell of sage, so excited i could barely contain myself as we left pines and high-blue eagle sky...our mouths full of sweet pulp, bare legs sticky with it, hot and itchy against each other, against the pelt of the dog, his rank dogday smell...real summer on our skin- (51)

In this passage, the body of childhood is sensuous, sensing and active and pleasurable. This body tastes and smells and feels and sees, contrasting with the passive female body that is meant to be seen.

However, despite the idyllic nature of Annie's childhood memories, this time is not one of wholly uncomplicated innocence and freedom. Girls who play in the woods are not girls, but doubly masculinised "tomboys" (13). The threat of bears/men looms large in these open spaces and this threat is echoed when Ana projects her fears onto the Siwash men whom she passes on the forest trail (41). Moreover, in school, children learn while they are young the terms that will define them. These terms, such as tramp, slut and bitch (34), create woman as a brand name, as a branded commodity, scarred by possession and marked for trade, trademarked. Only in retrospect does Annie realise the significance of these terms and remembrances. They are, in fact, remembered for their significance, which in turn changes the memories themselves. This recalls Marlatt's own statements about the fictional component of memory, its famous unreliability.

Wittig, too, blurs the boundary of facts and fiction, commenting that "you say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to re-member<sup>7</sup>. Or, failing that, invent" (*Les Guérillères* 89). Invention is precisely the accusation Annie receives from her husband. Richard tells Annie that she is "indulging in outright speculation. this isn't history, it's pure invention" (AH 55). From Richard, the esteemed History professor and author of the "Big Book," invention is not celebrated for its qualities of creativity and pleasure; instead, invention comes "out of a perverse desire to obscure the truth" (AH 55). This last statement leads Annie to question whose truth she is supposedly obscuring. Drawing on the visual connotations of "obscure," his line of questioning leads Annie to thoughts about how women are trained to solicit the gaze of the father/the Father and to how things are seen from certain frames.

The various scenes of childhood highlight another feature of pre-womanhood existence, community. The children always play together, but, as Annie grows into womanhood and learns to stay in the house like a good girl (AH 16), she becomes increasingly isolated. Annie recounts an early experience of menstruation in which she can hear her friends from a distance while she is alone in the bushes: "i streamed too, feeling my dark insides, liquid and now leaving me, trickle into the sand - and I jumped up scared, had i left a stain" (52). At this point, Annie's insides are already marked as

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<sup>7</sup> The hyphen in re-member in Wittig's text may be happenstance due to a line break in the justified text.



dark and unstable, and the possibility of leaving a trace of such presence, of such becoming, is fearful and must be contained.

The containment of all three women, Ana, Ina and Annie, takes place through the restrictions placed on their physical bodies; not only are they limited by clothing and other technologies of feminine appearance but they are also confined to the schoolhouse, the home and the closet. Each of these spaces become defined by their relationship as spaces with certain table, such as the family dinner table or the neat rows of writing tables in a classroom, or a certain lack of table in small and confining spaces like closets.

Sara Ahmed's attention to objects adds to the repeated question "who's there?" from *Ana Historic* the additional question of "what's there?" In her book *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed organises her exploration of the spatiality of orientation around the table. Ahmed attends to how writing not only requires a body that writes but also all of the object of writing, especially tables and paper. Ahmed notes that "in waiting for the writer the table waits for some bodies more than others" (59). Expanding on Virginia Woolf's epochal statement that women writers need a room of their own, Audre Lorde explains that "a room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a type writer and plenty of time" (qtd. in Ahmed 34). The body of the writer takes shape, it extends, through objects that belong to writing, but these objects must be reachable. Often, gendered bodies do not have such objects within reach. For example, women's bodies have often been formed through the domestic space created by the family dinner table and the family tree that manifests in the horizontal and vertical lines of genealogy. On account of compulsory heterosexuality, genealogy becomes a straightening device, such that Ina teaches her daughter the conventions of womanhood follows along the lines of girl to wife to mother. Annie's inheritance is that she inhabits, she both dwells in and exhibits the repeated actions of, straight spaces and orientation. With Ana, Annie gives herself a new mother, one that teaches her how to go off line via queer desire.

For Ahmed, queerness in particular impacts spaces, the bodies within space and the objects within reach. Recalling the etymology of queer, meaning to twist, queer orientations deviate from the straight lines that put them in line and grant ease of movement and easy access to socially regulated objects. Queer bodies twist to face

toward different object of desire. However, this twist is not entirely controllable or voluntary. Ahmed asserts that “orientation is a powerful technology insofar as it constructs desire as a magnetic field” (85), so the result is that “we become lesbians in the proximity of what pulls” (94). Consequently, we tend toward certain objects and others, and our tending becomes tendency or habit. Through habits, we inhabit the spaces where we feel at home and so the more objects we have within reach, the more we can extend our bodies. Accordingly, for Annie (and Ana), her writing coincides with a broader range for her body, exemplifying Cixous' statement that “woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement” (2039), and it is this movement that brings the women into spaces where they can encounter other women as self-named subjects.

Cixous claims that “writing and traversing names are the same necessary gesture” (Coming 49). Accordingly, in *Ana Historic*, Marlatt writes names and then works to cross the boundaries between them. Ana's name first appears in a font meant to look like handwritten script, and this naming is a necessary gesture given that the archives do not tell her first name. The multiple mimetic names evidence both relationships and subject-formation. The similarity of the names Annie, Ana and Ina highlight their similarities, connecting their experiences and identities. “Ana” and “Ina” resonate with a negative connotation that signals their absence due to their status as women in history/no longer living and as women omitted both in life and death. For example, Annie reflects: “I-na, I-no longer...there is this absence here” (11). Marlatt emphasises this similarity between Ana and Ina:

Ana/Ina

whose story is this?

(the difference of a single letter)

(the sharing of a not) (67)

That single letter tells a large story in that, while Annie's name contains all the letters of both names, she shares the capital, the beginning, with Ana, and it is through Ana that Annie begins to mother herself. The mediation of a male name further connects Annie and Ana. Annie is “Richard's Annie,” and Ana appears in the archives only as Mrs.

Richards; they are both assigned value via attachment to richness, to man with a name meaning powerful, rich ruler. Annie names Mrs. Richards "Ana," tying her life to that she imagines for this Victorian foremother. The connection in naming suggests a connection between the roles of mother and teacher inhabited by Ana and Ina. These two roles are not distinct; they overlap in how Ina, Annie's mother, has a very large role in teaching Annie the conventions of womanhood. This overlap also suggests that the roles of the Victorian lady teacher and of the 1950s housewife are not very different and how both women play similar roles in Annie's life, albeit with different details and effects. This is also clear in how Annie is the diminutive of the other women's names.

Cixous comments on naming in "Coming to Writing:" "This is what my body teaches me: first of all, be wary of names; they are nothing but social tools, rigid concepts, little cages of meaning assigned, as you know, to keep us from getting mixed up with each other...take the time to unname yourself" (49). This unnamng allows an opportunity for re-naming and a momentary namelessness that collapses the space a name creates in order to bring others into intimacy. Annie experiences both allowances. Annie renames herself "Annie Torrent" at the end of the novel, where she is finally able to answer the text's repeated question of "who's there?" Throughout the novel, "torrent" connects with desire and the expression of it (35, 49, 136). These internal torrents flow right out of Cixous. Cixous describes how she overflows, how her body knows unheard-of songs and how she, time and time again, has felt so full of luminous torrents (Laugh 2040). Mediating on "whole wardrobes of names guarding the limitations - we rise above them" (152), Annie is finally able to cast away her married name and thus her role as wife and subordinate, reverting not back to her maiden name, the name of her father and the role of the child, but to a self-chosen name that enables a new identity. Annie's act of naming helps actualize her desire, completing the narrative that goes into the past to imagine possibilities that create a viable present and future for feminine subjects. More specifically, the possibility created by Annie's imagining/writing is that of fulfilled lesbian desire.

Critics such as Heather Zwicker read *Ana Historic* as a lesbian coming out novel (170), and thus a novel that undermines the compulsory heterosexuality so essential to phallogentrism by maintaining a traditional comedic trajectory that climaxes with lesbian

sex. Teasing a 'typical' lesbian coming out narrative from *Ana Historic* is possible. Annie is a tomboy as a child, she gazes longingly at another girl, Donna (82), while an adolescent, she is intrigued by the discovery of two women in a steamy car (106), she calls lying with Richard a defensive lie and describes how life feels trapped in small spaces, her desire boxed off (59), and, finally, she meets a seductive, opinionated 'lady in leather' who seems to exist outside of normal realities of time and space. This lady is Zoe. Annie meets Zoe in the archives. She is an artist who becomes the reader of Annie's "novel" and who suggests the potential relationship between Ana and Birdie Stewart, the first madam in Victorian Gastown.

Again, naming signals the underlying workings of Marlatt's text. Annie's writing of a relationship between Ana and Birdie recalls feminist critiques of hierarchal binaries in which the two terms fall under the form A and not A or A and A-. This binary thinking manifests in dominant categories such as Man or not Man, a distinction recalling the negative valences of Ina and Ana's names. This distinction also completely absents woman and thus determines not her subjection/objectification, as would manifest in the unequal equation of Man and woman, but her omission. Therefore, Annie's writing takes us from A to B, takes us at least to the presence of woman as a different term.

However, this A to B movement that cannot 'go all the way' because history, while full of gaps, is not fully open. These gaps allow the appropriate (re)appropriation in Marlatt's text.<sup>8</sup> Annie takes historical fact and runs away with it, fleeing into a flight of fancy or imagination. Marlatt explains this process: "to fly in the face of common sense, social convention, ethics - the weight of history, to fly" (146). Marlatt's quote, coupled with the significance of Birdie's shifty name (she is sometimes named Bridie in the records and Annie notes this wanton letter), echoes Cixous' own sentiments. Cixous explains that "for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying...It's no accident that voler has a double meaning...It's no accident: women take after birds and robbers" (2050).

A to B is the first step that then enables present day and present tense Annie to move to Z, Zoe, whose name means "life." The leap from A to Z has two readings. First,

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<sup>8</sup> *Ana Historic* also raises post-colonial and ecological issues of rather problematic appropriation, which are beyond the scope of this project.

A to Z branches out across the whole alphabet, the whole spectrum of expression and experience. Second, this leap is rather large and has the potential to leave out all the letters in between. The largeness of the leap is perhaps why the lesbian undertones of *Ana Historic* become significant when looking back from the end of the text, while reading from Z to A.

Marlatt's interspersed hints of lesbian desire could be part of a deliberate strategy. Such a strategy suggests that the existence these lesbian moments is akin to something that might be right in front of you but hard to see, like looking into darkness from spaces of sunlight. More importantly, however, is the fact that Annie does not actually come out; neither does she name herself as a lesbian nor find herself outed someone else's proclamation. Also, one night with a 'sexy lady' does not make one instantly a lesbian. As Ahmed notes, "it takes time and work to inhabit a lesbian body" (102), and coming out is a declaration that requires repetition in every new context. Finally, instantly labelling Annie a lesbian could illegitimate the potential authentic moments of her marriage and repeats the violence of binary structures, including gay *or* straight, that obscure the inbetween.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Annie's "coming out" functions more as a coming to writing and to desire. The fact that Annie enters *into* Zoe's house, a space of women, reinforces this reading (151). At first, Annie says she cannot imagine the place in which Zoe lives (152). Then, the two women "enter a room that is alive with the smell of her" (152). Of course, this entrance takes place only after Annie has (re)named herself and spoken her desire. This desire turns out not to be a monstrous Frankenstein knocking ominously from within the wardrobe, but one that gives life and place.

The organizing image that brings the various feminist and queer narrative threads together is that of the wardrobe. The wardrobe appears on the very first page of the text and is immediately paired with wordrobe (9). The play of wordrobe attends to how the trappings of femininity are also structured by not only the clothing and other accoutrements of a 'lady's' toilette but also by and in language to the extent that such language has real, material effects on psyches and bodies. For example, the etymological history of "vagina" structures this organ as receptive, as the sheath or scabbard for the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* in which Sedgwick posits the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy as the founding opposition of contemporary culture.

phallic sword. The wardrobe/wardrobe is also immediately linked with potential monstrosity, the threat of monsters lurking the closet (9). After all, what could be more monstrous in a phallocratic system than lesbian sexuality? Marlatt takes lesbian sex out of the dismissal of the margins and places it in the centre of the page, figuratively and literally. *Ana Historic* ends with poetic prose passage centered on an unpaginated page. As such this page and its content exist both inside and outside the text; the lesbian tryst begins within the formal structure of the book but continues in a more liminal space that projects beyond the text and fulfills/defers the projection of the previous page through “the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead” (“153”).

The ultimate passage also makes some significant pronouncements. The movement of A to Z enters into the more intimate space of me and you, pronouns unmarked by gender. Monique Wittig provides insight in to the work of names. She writes in *Les Guérillères*: “THAT WHICH IDENTIFIES THEM LIKE THE EYE OF THE CYCLOPS, THEIR SINGLE FORENAME” (13). Thus, just as Annie casts off the surname that marks her role as wife, so also escapes the name that marks her feminine identity so that the last act of the novel is more about being with another body and not necessarily whether or not this other body is that of a woman.

However, this is not to say that Zoe’s femininity is of little importance. That Zoe is a woman is a necessary driving force of the narrative. Ahmed argues that “lesbian contact opens up erotic possibilities for women” (100). She explores the spatial and thus physical components of sexual orientation and agrees with the notion of coming out as coming to, specifically as coming to the certain types of bodies that queer desire puts in reach. This contact “*makes a story* and opens up other ways of facing the world” (Ahmed 105 my emphasis), and accordingly “the contingency of lesbian desire makes things happen” in *Ana Historic* (Ahmed 107). Ahmed postulates that “women desiring women can be one of the most oblique and queer forms of social and sexual contact” (106), and certainly for Wittig, this is the best things about lesbian bodies, who privileges the lesbian body as the site of revolution.

The importance of lesbian desire in *Ana Historic* urges comparison with Monique Wittig and her theory of lesbian writing. Wittig is an material feminist and self-identified radical lesbian and as such an advocator of class consciousness and lesbian separatism.

Wittig tackles many of the same concerns found in Cixous and *Ana Historic* and all three authors focus on writing embodied female experience in order to incite change and to empower the feminine. The lesbian content of *Ana Historic* raises the question as to whether Marlatt's text could also be an example of Wittig's "lesbian writing." Lesbian writing provides a foil for Cixous' *écriture féminine*. Jeffner Allen claims that there is "an insurmountable opposition" between Cixous and Wittig (108). Critics, including Allen, Crowder and Helene Vivienne Wenzel, who explore both of these writers often raise scepticism in regards to Cixous while overtly favouring Wittig's technique and texts. Wittig's lesbian writing orbits around not women but the lesbian as the central figure. For Wittig, women are a class, a political category rather than a natural given, defined by their belongingness to men ("One is Not Born a Woman" 15). Wittig believes that "lesbian is the only concept...beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes woman is a specific social relation to a man...a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual" ("One is Not Born a Woman" 20). Since lesbians exist outside heterosexuality, they are, Wittig claims, not women but subjects with privileged access to spaces outside of sexual difference. Rather than focussing on Wittig's perhaps naive or even insulting proposition that lesbians are not women, the insights to take from Wittig are instead that lesbian eroticism opens unique spaces and thus extends possibilities. De Lauretis reads Wittig as opening up lesbian as a conceptual and experiential space outside of constricting social structures rather than an actual lesbian separatist commune (77). After all, de Lauretis remarks that, if even there was a time when lesbians were not women, she would not say that they are women now because "although a few do think of themselves that way, others say they are butch or femme, many prefer to call themselves queer or transgender; and others identify with female masculinity-there are lots of self-naming options for lesbians today" (72). These options are the point of loosening the tight bounds of the heteronormativity that is such a rigid enforcer of phallogentrism.

The similarity in the themes and narrative trajectories of Marlatt and Wittig's works of fiction help explore the differences arising in the approach each uses. Even Allen admits that an "uncompromising affirmation of female control of the creation of

meaning is fundamental to the writings of both Cixous and Wittig, as is the affirmation of female language, embodiment, and experience as sites where meaning is created" (108). Three of Wittig's novels, *L'Opononax*, *Les Guérillères* and *The Lesbian Body*, function as an (perhaps) unintentional trilogy, narrativizing female empowerment in three stages from girlhood to amazonian revolt to the infinity of lesbian eroticism.

To briefly summarize, in *L'Opononax*, the school-aged protagonists run reckless in pre-adolescent harmony. Their first encounters with language, desire and death, disrupt and challenge their uncomplicated interaction with the world. The pages of uninterrupted text without paragraph indents or spacing reinforces the seamlessness of the children's experiences and marks a distinction between *L'Opononax* and the two later novels. Both *Les Guérillères* and *The Lesbian Body* appear in rectangles of text with large spacing between sections and interruptions from capitalized lists. *Les Guérillères* tackles the symbols and myths that structure women as well as the violence sometimes necessary in overthrowing the dominant discourse. This overthrow includes destroying "the feminaries," texts of gynocentrism that would have filled the gaps found in the school dictionaries by Catherine Legrand in *L'Opononax*. *Les Guérillères* also promotes, if not revels in, violence and aggression that would both be out of place in Cixous and Marlatt. Finally, leaving behind the capitalized names of the women in *Les Guérillères*, *The Lesbian Body* depicts the con/destructiveness of the erotic relationship and the fractured nature of subjectivity.

Despite Allen and many other's views of the opposition between Cixous and Wittig, Wenzel's summary of Wittig's novel *L'Opononax* sounds very much akin to the Cixousian *Ana Historic*. Wenzel summarizes that

In *L'Opononax*, the writer is present in Catherine Legrand who rejects first intuitively and then more consciously the language of the Fathers...

Constantly reminded that the words she uses, the poems she recites, are not her own, she invents an indefinable *opononax* as her private symbology to explain all that the school dictionaries do not about the world she experiences. The *opononax* first defines and then comes to be the love she feels for Valerie Borge... (283)



Much like Annie comes to lesbian desire through Ana, so does Catherine Legrand find her love for another girl through a figure of her own invention. Wittig's descriptions of the children running through forests and gardens echo Annie's childhood remembrances and resonate with the same undertones of suspicion that unsettle the protagonist as she grows and her reckless girl's body is moulded into saintly womanhood.

In *L'Opopanax*, Wittig tackles the problem of learning a language not one's own. Wittig describes how "Catherine Legrand can't write. She presses on the paper with the black pencil. She makes letters that stick out on both sides beyond the two lines you are supposed to write inside of, they stick out above and below, they touch the other lines, they are not straight" (24). Catherine Legrand's crooked and oversized letters do not count. She cannot get it straight, get it right, so she cannot write. Which is certainly not the fault of the black pencil she must use. In other words, Catherine Legrand's letters do not cohere to the standards set by the logic of the straight-lined page.

Wittig returns to this page later in the novel:

Catherine Legrand sees that Valerie Borge is beginning to make reliefs on the page of her missal of all the change she has in her pockets. She begins by putting one coin on the right-hand page of the missal then she folds the left-hand page over it and holds it as tightly as possible over the coin until you can see the pattern, pressing with her thumb and being very careful not to make holes in the paper...The result is that she has the profile on the coin on the page of her missal right in the middle of the canon, just below the red initial...the page of the missal is completely covered with the impressions of coins. (172)

In this passage, the distinction between left and right pages connects the text to the hands that hold it and turn its pages and ultimately grant the text legitimacy. This handedness also highlights the materiality of texts and thus the physicality of the bodies that make sense of them. In fact, Valerie Borge literally makes cents of the page. Moreover, this page that is so receptive to the figure of the coins, to coinage and currency, is from the missal, a religious text that dictates dominant discourses. Finally, Valerie Borge is careful not to make holes in this discourse, illuminating Wittig's view that women contribute to their own oppression by sustaining 'woman is wonderful' myths that

ignorantly celebrate this subordinate class and thus its larger system. Overthrowing this system is the project of *Les Guérillères* in particular and lesbian writing in general.

The scenes of writing in *L'Opononax* contrast with those in *Ana Historic*. Annie calls her writing "scribbling," an activity associated with children that does not produce overtly readable results. Annie comments that

there is still even now the innate pleasure of seeing on a fresh white pad the first marks of red, bright red when the bleeding's at its peak. innate because of a childish astonishment. *i made that!* the mark of myself, my inscription in blood. i am here. scribbling again.

writing the period that arrive at no full stop. not the hand manipulating the pen. not the language of definition...but the words that flow out from within...the words of an interior history doesn't include ...

that erupts like a spring, like a wellspring of being, well-being inside (90)

Here, Marlatt provides the prime example of the body writing. Instead of Catherine Legrand's struggle with her black pencil and the lined page, Annie finds the writing her body does pleasurable. Although Annie undermines the value of her writing by calling it 'scribbling,' she recovers its worth when she traces the etymology of "scribe" back to the root "to cut." Annie translates scribe from the medieval notion of scribes copying religious texts to an action that describes the pain of subjectivity.

Cixous describes this experience in her novel *Angst*. She writes: "Cut. You say I. And I bleed. I am outside. Bleeding...In and out of my body. In pain...The body, here. Separate. Flesh; separation" (7). In this section, Cixous writes in short sentences, mirroring the gasping breath of a body in pain. The process of inscribing the female body into social codes is not painless; the descriptions of femininity women's bodies must live up to involve traumatic rendering of flesh. Annie reflects upon how "that child: one with her body. not yet riven, not split in two - the self and the body that betrays the self...*the* body, not even *your* body. split off" (89). *Écriture féminine* involves a return from

which women have been driven away on three levels: bodies of and in writing, their own bodies and the bodies of other women.

Zwicker suggests that "Marlatt glosses this literal and figurative process of giving birth as a kind of 'uttering/outering' whereby women speak with each other through their bodies" (170). The birthing scene provides a contrast to the scribbling menstrual body and highlights some dangerous moments in Cixous' textual maternity. Ana is having tea with two of the logging wives, Susan and Jeannie, when the latter goes into labour. Susan helps the labouring Jeannie as Ana watches. Marlatt's third person narrative and Ana's first person perspective (as imagined by Annie) both describe the scene:

Ana caught a glimpse of the dark almost purplish flesh...How dark it looked, an angry powerful o...this was a mouth, working its own inarticulate urge, opening deep...she caught a glimpse of what she almost failed to recognise: a massive syllable of slippery flesh slide out of the open mouth...This secret space between our limbs we keep so hidden - is yet so, what? What words are there? If *it* could speak! - as indeed it did: it spoke the babe. mouth speaking flesh. she touches it to make it tell her present in this other language so difficult to translate. the difference. (126)

The vaginal mouth presents an image for the speaking female body, and the positivity of this image is questionable, especially given the genderless pronoun "it." Wittig will comment further on the "angry powerful o" below. The woman's body opens to speak another not herself, and in this case a boy other, providing fulfillment of the narrative of Freudian psychoanalysis. This narrative not only posits women as lack, but also gives them two options when they do not fulfill its projection: hysteria or homosexuality. In *Ana Historic*, Ina fulfills the role of the hysteric while Annie, according to various readings, fulfills that of the homosexual. Moreover, the speaking vagina would need not only lips but also tongue and teeth to speak articulately, recalling the violence inherent in the image of the vagina dentata. While Cixous does advocate a language invented by "taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth" (2050), she does not condone violence toward the other, an other such as the fathering force necessary for pregnancy. This fathering is another puzzling aspect of mothering the text; the woman is not an independently empowered agent at this point.

She instead completes the narrative set out for her by dominant discourses, earning value by being a (re)producer.

Furthermore, Jeannie's husband is excluded from the birthing scene; he leaves the women to 'their work.' While Wittig is quite content to keep men on the periphery, Cixous wants "all of me with all of him...I want all of us" (2054). The insertion of women into history in place of men does not cohere with Cixous' love for the other, male or female, or her claims that men, too, can write *écriture féminine*. Therefore, Jones makes the point that even "if we take *l'écriture féminine* as a utopian ideal, an energizing myth rather than a model for how all women write or should write, theoretical and practical problems arise" (372).

Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine* coalesces in the statement: "She writes in white ink" (2045). Cixous is very specific about the nature of this white ink in the preceding sentence, explaining that, in the case of the feminine writer, "there is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk" (2045). Cixous continues in the same vein as "Laugh" in her 1977 essay "Coming to Writing," elaborating on the writing process in a more personal manner and extending many of the themes from "Laugh." In "Coming to Writing," Cixous explains that "why, how, what [she writes]: milk. Strong nourishment. The gift without return. Writing too, is milk." (49). Cixous describes the writing woman: "she gives birth. With the force of a lioness. Of a plant. Of a cosmogony. Of a woman...A child! Paper! Intoxications! I'm brimming over! My breasts are overflowing! Milk. Ink...The milky taste of ink" (31). She describes the text as "flesh at work in a labour of love" (42), and she continues with her claim that "there is something of the mother in every woman" (50).

Thus, Jones' theoretical and practical problems, the first of which Angela Carter expresses in a sentiment with similar attentions to the realities of writing as the room of one's own quote from Lorde above. Carter observes that "being pregnant most of the time is tiring, enfeebling, and a drain on one's physical and emotional resources...you need to be quite strong and healthy to write big, fat books" ("Notes from the Front Line" 27). Thus, pregnancy and motherhood have not been empowering as lived realities, at least historically. The second problem is that such writing would require a fathering force, an influence from the outside rather than a solely, self-validated overflow. Thirdly,

attending again the page, the ground of writing, white ink would disappear onto the phallogocentric page; it could not make a mark let alone incite revolution.

For Cixous, precisely because pregnancy and maternity have been devalued by the economy of dominant discourse to such an extent as to become taboo, that these unique feminine processes become a site of reclamation and power. Cixous writes in "Laugh" that, "if there's one thing that's been repressed here's just the place to find it: in the taboo of the pregnant woman" (2054). Cixous celebrates the gestation drive, which is albeit not the only drive, but the one that she writes is "just like the desire to write...a desire for the swollen belly, for language" (2054).

Given that pregnancy validates women's existence as (re)producers in a system that objectifies and commodifies their bodies, Cixous' claim that pregnancy is taboo seems incoherent. Instead, the taboo lies in the desire and pleasure of women in their own bodily experiences. Marlatt's two contrasting scenes, menstrual and birthing, exemplify the accuracy of this shift of the taboo. Jeannie's labouring body is not one of desire and pleasure; it is a body of work, assuredly miraculous but also uncomfortable, painful, hardcore work. On the other hand, Annie's menstruating body is one of easy delight and pleasure and well-being.

For Marlatt, birth translates the difference, but perhaps it is menstruation that translates the differences. Allen notes that "feminine writing dissolves the logic of difference organized according to a hierarchy of opposition and, Cixous declares, makes of difference 'a bunch of new differences'" (115). In celebrating plurality, Cixous promotes a continuous, non-linear plot, an aspect that eliminates the either/or (ie: either men or women) of binaric logic in favour of the both/and (both men and women). This non-linearity is certainly very apparent in Marlatt's working out of *écriture féminine*. *Ana Historic* must be read and re-read backwards, forwards and sideways simultaneously in order for the reader to piece the story together. Birth, however, takes place as one event in the linear progression of conception to pregnancy to motherhood.

Conversely, menses happen in a cycle that occurs within the body without an outside catalyst and as both an actualization of the body's creative and its potential for further creation. Cixous often emphasizes the flows of the female body. She writes that "our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end" (Laugh 2042).

Marlatt re-enforces this translation of white ink of the mothered text to the red ink of the desiring, flowing text. Marlatt describes Zoe as “bleeding and soft” (152) and begins the ultimate passage of the novel with a description of how “we give place, giving words, giving birth, to each other - she and me. you. hot skin writing skin.” (“153”). The triplicate repetition of give/ing not only emphasizes a Cixousian notion of gift but also de-emphasizes the birthing aspect, which is grouped together the place and words, and draws. Cixous further illuminates the idea underlying this quote, writing that “everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman” (2045).

Allen warns that Cixous texts “resist the patriarchal disparagement of the pleasures of pregnancy, but at the risk of making motherhood prescriptive for females” (116). Such a prescription exclude women who are not mothers and those who have no desire to be mothers in any way. At the very least, women more women experience or have experience menstruation and what is more, all women (and men) have bodies that require flows of blood to sustain life. Thus, blood-red ink would open *écriture féminine* to wider range of writing subjects, while also translating the site of meaning from vaginal hole or even vaginal whole to the whole reproductive system of ovaries, uterus and vulva, itself the major site of pleasure, or even to the whole human body.

Wittig’s *The Lesbian Body* certainly accomplishes the tasks of encompassing and eroticizing every aspect of the whole body, but first Wittig has something to contribute in regard to Marlatt’s “angry powerful o” of the speaking vagina. She describes in *Les Guérillères* how

The women say, the language you speak poisons your glottis tongue palate lips. They<sup>10</sup> say, the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated ...Whatever they have not laid hands on...your masters have not been able to full with their words of proprietors and possessors, this can be found in the gaps...in the zero, the O, the perfect circle that you invent to imprison them and to overthrow them. (114)

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<sup>10</sup> “They” is “Elles” in Wittig’s original French.

This passage highlights two significant points. First, language, again, has a direct effect on physical health, which Wittig emphasizes with her use of terms specific parts of the mouth and throat necessary for articulately speaking. Thus, while Zwicker claims that birth in Marlatt is women speaking through their bodies, women cannot but speak, and write, through their bodies. This is not only because lived reality is embodied but also because such actions require moments of tongues and lips, hands and fingers. Second, the passage highlights the revolutionary capacity of invention and specifically invention of the O. This O is “the zero or the circle, the vulval ring” (14). Zero and circle, the O carries multiple meanings; it fills the gaps while also leaving them open. The O as the vulval ring is also significant because it translates the site of meaning from the vagina, a singular organ designed to be filled as the defining hole, to the entire vulva, a site of many wholes just like the mouth made up of glottis, tongue, palate and lips and a site more likely to provide pleasure and erotic actualization.

Eroticism is precisely the focus of Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, which fulfills the result of the battles waged by the warriors of *Les Guérillères* when “the women say that they perceive their bodies in their entirety. They say that they do not want to become parts on the grounds that it was formerly a forbidden object. They say they do not want to become prisoners of their own ideology” (57). *The Lesbian Body* ranges across every part of the body, depicting the con/destructiveness of the erotic relationship and the fractured nature of subjectivity. Leaving behind the capitalized names of the women in *Les Guérillères*, the capital in *The Lesbian Body* is the body itself, parts of which appear in bold lists interspersed throughout the text. Wittig vastly expands Cixous' short list (2053), for the body parts listed by Wittig of the body range from blood clots to armpits to calcium. As a result, Crowder claims that Wittig “is conscious of the importance of the female body in the development of feminist awareness...she never uses the body as a metaphor for the act of writing. I know of no author for whom the body is so insistently concrete” (119).

According to Crowder, Wittig aims to strip the female body of the heavy chains of signifiers that manifest through metaphoric language and the myths that perpetuate such language. This perpetuation is precisely the accusation Wittig levels at Cixous. Wittig claims that “committed literature and *écriture féminine* have in common that they are

mythic formations and function like myths...they throw dust in the eyes of people" (TJ 46). However, Wittig can supposedly free the female body because she believes that a body that can be freed exists underneath all of its externally-imposed significations and because words are just raw material to be worked into new form. Wittig assumes that "words lie there to be used as raw material by a writers, just as clay is at the disposal of any sculptor. Words are, each one of them, like the Trojan Horse. They are things, material things, and at the same time they mean something" (TJ 47). Even when extrapolating the virtues of words that can be turned into a raw, neutral material by literature (TJ 47), Wittig cannot deny that words are always things with meaning.

Crowder questions whether this maternity is "derived from the physical potential to give birth as the primary mark of difference, or is it a metaphor?" (136) Crowder argues that Cixous and Wittig differ primarily on their approaches to metaphor. Crowder explains that, "whereas Wittig regards metaphor as potentially obfuscating to women's political reality, Cixous views it as a means to release the feminine from the bonds of phallogocratic language" (142). For Crowder, metaphor "is always in some sense a denial of the word that is replaced by another. But metaphor disguises this absence with the presence of the substituted term" (128). Thus, Crowder maintains a substitution theory of metaphor, a theory which, especially for Paul Ricoeur as shown in chapter one above, cannot capture the richness of how metaphor functions.

Shaktini provides an alternate view of how Wittig's writing operates. She posits that Wittig undertakes a process of "overwriting," which performs a lesbianization of metaphor. "It is the trace of this all too ubiquitous masculine 'presence' that must be erased from lesbian language. Lesbian metaphor must overwrite phallogocentric metaphor," writes Shaktini. Significantly, overwriting implies the existence of the writing underneath, regardless of how well it can be seen. Shaktini then goes on to explore the various mythic figures that populate Wittig's writings, especially *The Lesbian Body*. These figures are traditionally male but are lesbianized by Wittig, through the feminization of their names and pronouns. For example, Osiris becomes the lesbian lover of Isis (TLB 80). Therefore, contradictions and potential hypocrisy arise in regard to Wittig. Allen claims that "the ideology of difference is more successfully brought to an end by Wittig, whose texts make real her maxim, 'Neither gods nor goddesses, neither



master nor mistresses” (116-7). At the same time, in her analysis of *The Lesbian Body*, Shaktini observes that “when the deity is addressed, it is as mother-goddess rather than as father-god” (42), and that “Wittig’s reorganization of metaphor around the lesbian body represents an epistemological shift from what seems until recently the absolute, central metaphor - the phallus” (29). Finally, critics commonly describe *The Lesbian Body* as the lesbian “Song of Songs,” a label that highlights the religious/mythic (re)formation present in Wittig, despite her own claims.

Having dispelled attacks on the efficacy of metaphor by revealing its inevitability if not necessity, the next project is to explore how Cixous is using the mothering metaphor. Unlike Wittig, Cixous is not explicit on her view of metaphor, except to ask “metaphor? Yes. No. If everything is metaphor, then nothing is metaphor” (Coming 50). Crowder comments on how Cixous’ ambivalence about metaphor stems from what she describes as “a hesitation between metaphor and reality” (132). This hesitation is precisely the point of metaphor and it is what forces the working through of Cixous’ own rather fraught metaphors. Thankfully, Cixous does explicitly state at one point in “Laugh” that “the mother, too, is a metaphor” (2045). Certainly, Cixous’ other comments re-enforce this statement and thus undermine any attacks from critics who read the mother too literally. After Cixous explains that “there are thousands of ways of living one’s pregnancy” (Laugh 2054), and that “either you want a kid or you don’t – *that’s your business*” (Laugh 2053).

Therefore, the question becomes what to take from Cixous’ mothering metaphors. Allen suggests that “metaphoric language opens up a life space for Cixous” (112), and the life giving, nurturing nature of *écriture féminine* runs through Cixous’ theory. Cixous herself explains that writing is “a way of leaving no space for death” (Coming 3), and also that “writing, loving: inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love...Love opens the body...Text: not a detour, but the flesh at work in a labour of love” (Coming 42). The business of reproduction is precisely that, a business. Cixous wants to leave behinds such economies, specifically the ones based on old values and on indebtedness and property or the proper. Instead, Cixous advocates for the gift without the demand of a return or exchange. She explains that “she gives with no assurance that she’ll get back even some expected profit from what she puts out. She gives that there may be life, thought,

transformation. This an 'economy' that can no longer be put in economic terms" (Laugh 2056). Cixous' mothers are not exchangeable; instead they are changeable and endless, they are all of us when we write, for "when I write it's everything that we don't know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusions, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, inappeasable search for love. In other another we will never be lacking" (Laugh 2056).

## Chapter Three

### Filling Prescriptions:

#### Recitations of Gender in Judith Butler and Angela Carter

Angela Carter's 1977 magic realist novel, *The Passion of New Eve* is called a "postmodernist nightmare" for its vision of gendered power dynamics and its revision of such dynamics through an investigation of the gendering process (Ivory 75). The nightmarish quality of this novel stems in part from how Carter makes explicit the violence embedded in mythologies and the ideologies they dramatize. The violence of gender categories becomes especially obvious, and Alison Lee agrees that Carter 'tells the whole story' of problematic gender identification by "making the violence of gender inscription on the body quite clear" (238). Inscription onto the body makes writing the body a fraught yet necessary process as this writing seeks to re-inscribe the body and identity, speaking out against and speaking to get out of such violent structures.

Carter's dramatization, which is actually literalization of the myths and metaphors, of gendering garners comparisons with the gender troubler herself, Judith Butler. As Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton explain, "it is almost impossible to read Carter's novels...without noticing how uncannily they anticipate certain strands of current feminist theory, how importantly they seem to invite comparison with such influential work as that of...Butler" (qtd. in Benedikz 147). First, Butler's theory illustrates how gender takes place through interpellation, punishment, ritual and the dominating heterosexual matrix, the ultimate expression of which is the marriage bond, elements that all manifest in *New Eve*. Second, although the apparatuses that structure gender are clear, the moment when Eve becomes a woman remains obscure. Her passion has five stages or sites: Beulah, Zero's ranch, Tristessa's glass house, the desert and the sea-shore and the ambiguity of when and where Eve's undertakes her gender reinforces Butler's theory of gender as an unfulfillable assignment. Third, critics cast Tristessa as a transvestite and Eve as a transsexual, but the details of the novel rejects this casting. Repositioning these characters as respectively transsexual and posttranssexual, provides a more enlightening reading for the text as well as elaborating on Butler's demand not just for subversion but also for empowerment. In conclusion, this elaboration (re)locates

power in the body as the site of performativity and the narrator of identity because “our external symbols must express the life within us” (Carter 6).

Butler’s influential works, primarily *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, elaborate her theory on the primacy of gender in the construction and consolidation of sex in service of the heterosexual matrix. Butler claims that gender constructs both sex and desire, specifically desire as heterosexual. These constructions are accomplished through regulatory practices and performative acts that can never completely fulfill the prescripts of stable gender identity and must therefore be repeated and reiterated. Moreover, the generative process of gendered identity is dual, first producing and then concealing the production so that these norms appear natural or seamless. The seeming naturalness of the oppositional and hierarchal gender binary also produces exclusions against which and through which norms fortify themselves. These exclusions include non-normative sexualities (such as lesbian) and identities (such as transgender). Individuals on the supposed outside of normativity experience violence and violation in their exclusion. Exclusion leads to their dehumanization, abjection and punishment for their inevitable and disorienting disruption of central focal points of discrete gender, sex and desire, which are regulated and compelled by heterosexuality and the originary taboo against homosexuality. For Butler, being subjected to gender norms is requisite for becoming a culturally intelligible subject. Therefore, Butler’s proposed task is to reveal the true nature of gender constructivity, specifically gender as performative, as well as the possibility of agency opened by the gaps within repetition for productive subversions of binary gender. These subversions may then contribute to redefining what counts as human so that lives that fall outside of gender norms and heterosexuality become not just viable but also valuable.

*The Passion of New Eve* exhibits and interrogates the gendering process as it is described by Butler<sup>11</sup>. Butler observes individual beings become human subjects through

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<sup>11</sup> To refresh: *The Passion of New Eve*, is the first-person narration of the transformation of Evelyn, the British professor, into the New Eve. Evelyn immigrates to New York City, finding an urban landscape of decay and the stirrings of revolution. He remains in New York long enough to cultivate a brief friendship with a Czech alchemist, Baroslav, and begin a torrid affair with Leilah, the black dancer of the reeking night. Upon Leilah’s botched abortion, Evelyn flees the city and begins a journey across country and desert. In the desert, Evelyn is abducted by the Mother, a giant black hyperbolic figure of femininity as maternity who reigns over her one-breasted acolytes in the underground city of Beulah. The Mother, aside

interpellation, the simultaneous call to and naming of gender. Butler builds upon Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation by shifting the authority figure who performs the call/recites the name and by adding the key element of gender; whereas Althusser's subjectivizing call comes from a police officer naming the non-gendered "hey you," Butler's medical professional names the gender of the newly born infant.<sup>12</sup> Butler explains that, in medical interpellation, the doctor "shifts an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or a 'he,' and that in that naming, the girl is 'girled,' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender" (BTM 7). This initial interpellation marking the birth of a culturally intelligible subject is then reiterated by other authorities over time. Notably, the reiteration of this gendering pronunciation holds the authority to redefine gender, a fact that highlights the power at work in these pronunciations.<sup>13</sup>

A redefinition of gender also rests in the hands of the surgeons and other medical professionals involved in and executing sex reassignment surgeries. This is surely the case for Evelyn, whose reassignment takes place under the obsidian scalpel of the

from being an incarnation myth, is also a talented surgeon who rapes, castrates and then molds Evelyn into the perfect composition of female anatomy. Now the ideal figure of ripe womanhood, Evelyn becomes Eve, whom the Mother intends to impregnate with Evelyn's ill-gotten sperm in order to fulfill her militant, separatist feminist agenda.

Eve's terror of pregnancy and motherhood spurs her flight from Beulah. However, her return to the desert only serves to bring her into the cold hands of Zero, the misogynist poet and pig-lover. Upon his rape of Eve, Zero pronounces her the eighth of his harem of wives, a position that will eventually bring her to meet Evelyn's boyhood fantasy, the film star of tragic femininity herself, Tristessa. Zero blames Tristessa for his sterility, and so he hunts her in order to gain it back by means of her death.

Discovering Tristessa in her glass tower leads to an unpredictable series of events: the revelation that Tristessa is a man, the marriage of Eve and Tristessa, the deaths of Zero and his wives, and Eve and Tristessa's tryst in a fertile oasis of passion in the midst of the arid desert. However, Eve and Tristessa's love-making is interrupted by a band of revolutionaries, who execute Tristessa.

Eve flees once again and her flight reunites her with Leilah, who is now in her true persona as Lilith, another revolutionary and daughter the Mother. Lilith takes Eve to see the Mother, and, on the way, they encounter a show-tune-singing, vodka-drinking old woman by the shore who bears a suspicious semblance to the Mother. Eve then enters a cleft in a body of rock where she journeys back in time, encountering objects from her past as the cave becomes increasingly uterine. Bidding farewell of Lilith and her former genitals that Lilith offers to return, Eve ends the novel at sea in the old woman's plastic boat, hopeful for her future and the future of her unborn child.

<sup>12</sup> Althusser writes that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" See "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus."

<sup>13</sup> Such as in the case of Foucault's intellectual darling, Herculine Barbin.

Mother. The Mother, as Carter explains, is not only the terrific deity of her own theology but also a former LA plastic surgeon, “a great scientist who makes extraordinary experiments” (49). The Mother’s nest of feminists hums with secrecy and technology, suggesting to Evelyn that he has stumbled into a government establishment (57). This conjecture ties the power that the Mother appears to wield with the authoritative structures of society.

However, the Mother’s agenda is, apparently, counter-hegemonic. The Mother is “the Great Parricide...the Castratrix of the Phallogentric Universe” (Carter 67), and she aims toward a feminist overthrow of the symbolic system that casts women to the pits of the dark continent as the negative correlatives of Man. Carter’s critique of feminism is very much in line with Butler’s criticism of the monolithic woman-subject of identity politics that is based in the humanism of the metaphysics of substance. Subsequently, the Mother states that “to be a *man* is not a given condition but a continuous effort” (63), and that “a change in appearance will restructure the essence” because essence is not actually essential but the result of the system concealing its constructivity through naturalization (68).

At the same time, Carter’s critique of Beulah’s feminism reveals that the Mother ultimately reiterates the norms she purports to subvert. This reiteration, which is especially significant given not only the Mother’s authoritative status but also her hand in sculpting the narrative itself, supports Susan Stryker’s view that sexual reassignment techniques and their “cultural politics are aligned with a deeply conservative attempt to stabilize gendered identity in the service of naturalize heterosexual order” (248). The Mother turns Eve into the *Playboy* centerfold (75), into the very incarnation of (heterosexual) men’s carnal desires. Accordingly, the blueprint for Eve’s new figure is based on studies of media representation of the ideal woman and, once this new figure is complete, Eve’s transformation continues with psycho-programming consisting of images of stereotypical femininity: paintings depicting the Virgin and Child, films starring Tristessa and a video intended to instill maternal instinct (72).

If the Mother’s actions suggest that the new system will be built from the old, Carter is clear that such revisions will fail. Rubinson summarizes that Eve is “the product of a bricolage of myths derived from psychoanalysis, Old and New Testament scripture,

pornography, and Hollywood film" (728). For example, on one hand, the Mother attempts re-enact the myth of Adam and Eve as well as that of the messiah's birth from virgin: this Eden is in the desert, in the violating volcano of the mother-goddess's vagina.

On the other hand, Eve is still created from her male precedent, whose first partner is Leilah/Lilith, and this ideal woman is still the castrated version of man<sup>14</sup>. Rubinson continues, succinctly noting that "Mother takes motifs from these sources and attempts to rewrite them from a feminist perspective to give women the power. But she fails because she is still drawing on and therefore validating androcentric source material" (728). In the end, Beulah collapses; the very name of the place portends the failure of its revolution, for "Beulah" comes from the Hebrew word for "married" and is a term famously taken up by poet William Blake as a "male vision of conciliatory femininity and of sexual union of man and woman" (Schmidt 62). Thus, fulfilling the portent, the Mother at the end of the novel is demoted to a liquor-soaked and dying hag, her vision dissolving and evaporating. The Mother becomes Carter's parody of 1970's feminist essentialism and separatism and the Mother's final breakdown ratifies Carter's view that "mythic versions of women...are consolatory nonsenses...Mother goddesses are just as silly notions as father gods" (qtd. in Blodgett 50).

Carter continues, explaining in an interview:

I am interested in myths...just because they *are* extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree...I wrote one anti-mythic novel in 1977, *The Passion of New Eve* - I conceived it as a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity, amongst other things.

("Notes from the Front Line" 25)

Carter's anti-myth strategy in *The Passion of New Eve* is a literalization of metaphor and myth. Carter does not need to create new metaphors to create a "postmodernist nightmare." Wyatt proposes that Carter "rewrites social myths in way that bring out their hidden damages" (75). This rewriting is not a repetition that empties these myths of their meaning but rather one that reveals the meanings and implications within them.

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<sup>14</sup> Schmidt notes that "the fact that, as a man, Evelyn could perceive Lilith only as Leilah exemplifies how men's view of women is formed by the available symbols. The woman is seen through the distorting grid of male symbolization which degrades and traps her" (64).

Mythology narrates the metaphors that structure femininity, characterizing, giving face to ideology. This literalization shows how, if the ideas embedded in language and the ideology that motivates language played out, the result would be nightmarish; Carter brings the myths that ground dominant views of the world out from the background and explores what happens not only when they meet face to face in the foreground but also what happens when they hit the ground running. For example, Carter presents an Eve born of an Adam, but, for this to happen, the Mother must use advanced surgical techniques on the unwilling Evelyn. Schoene-Harwood reads the novel as “rigorous exploration of the wasteland between the iron-curtained enclaves of traditional masculinity and femininity, the binarist carve-up of the body of human potential into male and female” (118), and Evelyn’s body, which Evelyn himself notes as ironic for his castration is executed with the phallic symbol of the Mother’s obsidian scalpel, is literally carved into femininity.

Wyatt, drawing upon the detail that both Eve and Tristessa have been men at one point, posits that “Eve and Tristessa thus *literalize* the notion of femininity as a male construct” (65 my emphasis). In this case, a more accurate formulation would be femininity as found in this text as a specifically phallogocentric construct and as a concept generally, but, more importantly, Wyatt agrees that Carter employs a method of literalization. Although Benedikz claims that “by *repeating* the myth with difference or variation she rewrites it against itself” (148 my emphasis), Carter does not change the myths she evokes; they are not reinterpretations. Drawing upon classical myths from biblical and Greek sources as well as their contemporary interpretations in psychoanalysis, modern fables such as the Frankenstein story, philosophy and feminism, Carter demonstrates the functioning of Western mythological conceptions. Our mythic epoch mishmashes a collection of stories together. For example, one of the primary myths tackled in the novel is “the notion of old Adam...all old Adam wants to do is, to kill his father and sleep with his mother” (16). This notion combines Genesis and the Oedipus story, the reformulation of which is central to Freudian psychoanalysis, and this combination displays how all of these stories form the master narratives that dominate everyday manifestations of Western culture. As a part of this literalization of this mythic mishmash, Evelyn, the Adam of the tale, does, sleep with his Mother, although it



actually happens via rape. Makinen agrees that Carter shows how “the mythic and the ordinary surely reinforce, rather than deconstruct, each other” (162); the literal and the metaphoric/mythic are not mutually exclusive domains. They inform and reinforce each other, which means literalizing myth to exaggeration is an especially effective method for critiquing more subtle articulations of the same narratives in everyday life. As the Mother declares, “life and myth are one!” (64). Overall, Carter does take her mythic inspirations to their extreme but does not need to change them in order for these stories to play out to unsettling ends.

Every character, especially Leilah, the Mother, Zero and Tristessa, in *The Passion of New Eve* represents their role so successfully that this success approaches astounding excess. Every detail exhibited by each character manifests a feature of their cultural conception. As such, the Mother is a giant, black, four-breasted, hyperbolic figure of femininity as maternity, and Caputo notes the function of such hyperbole. She posits that “hyperbolic interpretations of the norm reveals its perversity and becomes a critique of the current relationship between the sexes” (142). The Mother’s chosen location for Beulah displays this relationship in which women are both isolated underground, both by themselves and by a system that stipulates that they must be separate and sequestered in order to gain power. Beulah is buried deep beneath the harsh wasteland of the desert and is a place without men. The ending of the novel reinforces the reading that Beulah’s location suggests that the Mother can only have this type of domineering power underground and in the absence of men. The Mother ends the novel a drunken, show-tune-singing, bikini-wearing old dying woman in a plastic chair by the sea. In a text rife with mythological allusions from Ariadne to Tiresias to the sphinx to Jocasta to Venus to the stars of classic Hollywood, the Mother’s last appearance is the only Medusean moment. She is certainly not the darkly beautiful, laughing vital and astonishing Medusa of Cixous. Instead, she is an “old woman with hair like a nest of petrified snakes, old enough to have been either man or woman” and her milk is the scattered drops of vodka on her sunken breasts that catch the light from air-raids so that they “gleamed like pearllets of milk” (190). Also, show-tunes are perhaps not Cixous’ ideal torrents of luminous song. Carter’s disparaging view of the Mother and the mythology she builds is clear in this final image of her.

Blodgett notes that Carter “has a particular distaste for the myths that ostensibly aggrandize women in order to mask cultural contempt for them” (47). Carter repeatedly associates the women of Beulah with maternity, and she herself comments that “this theory of maternal superiority is one of the most damaging of all consolatory fictions...It puts women who wholeheartedly subscribe to it in voluntary exile” (qtd. in Schmidt 64). They are a “tribe of desert matriarchs,” chanting “now you are at the place of birth” (52). The (Holy) Mother’s arms are “the paradigm of mothering” (60) and, as she says, “I am Mama, Mama, Mama” (67). The night before her insemination, the night of her escape as an “absconding Madonna,” Eve explains that she “was terrified of motherhood” (82, 80) and this terror motivates her escape. “I’m not ready for motherhood!” cries Eve, despairing her “biological helplessness” (77). Therefore, Carter’s position is clear: revising current myths or reverting to old ones ultimately fails and the Mothers’s perspective on the constitution of gender turns out to be just as myopic of that of the epitome of raging misogyny, Zero (Johnson, “Textualizing” 48).

Butler suggests that “femininity is not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment” (BTM 232). This is indeed the case for Eve. Evelyn does not choose his gender (re)assignment; it takes place as a punitive consequence of his previous gendered behaviour. Eve explains: “somewhere, in the darkness and confusion of the city, I had transgressed and now I must be punished for it” (74). Eve describes her involuntary transformation as “mythic vengeance,” as the result of “wild justice” (50). Evelyn brutalized his partners, a fact especially evident in his treatment of Leilah, who herself receives punishment directly related to her gender performance.

Carter’s descriptions of Leilah reveal the violence that binary gender does to women. Leilah is rewarded for enacting gender correctly, because, as an exotic dancer, she is paid for her performance of woman as a sexual object. When Leilah transgresses her passive role and asserts her own sexual desires, Evelyn punishes her by tying her to the bed and beating her with his belt. Afterwards, Evelyn blames Leilah for seducing him; it is her fault that she becomes pregnant and her fault that he must force her to have a botched abortion that sterilizes and almost kills the 17-year-old. Leilah tells Evelyn that “it was [his] duty to marry her,” but to Evelyn “it seemed...that her pregnancy had

unhinged her" (32), and he refuses to give up his dreams of travel, the cross-country quest of the American hero. Hence, through Leilah, Carter explores the double-bind of binary gender, the contradictory stereotypes that stretch women in two directions if only to keep them in place. Specifically, Leilah is described in both bestial and mythological terms. She is frequently draped in furs with a heavy musky scent, an alluring fox with a bird-like quality and insectile accessories, like the antennae of her extravagant hair and purple beetle finger nails (20). Leilah is also described as a mermaid, a lorelei of the traffic river and a ghetto nymph, the prey of Evelyn (22, 23), whom she leads like a siren with her wordless song. Through these descriptions, Leilah is both dehumanized and apotheosized; she is the enticing, mystical innocent and the whorish sacrificial beast.

Evelyn secures the knots of Leilah's double-bind and is duly punished, perhaps ironically considering his punishment of becoming the woman he used to abuse. These punitive consequences not only are due to his wrongful treatment of Leilah, but also directly result from the fulfillment of his gender role. Berthold Schoene-Harwood reasons that men and women are "victims of the same processes of symbolic castration...the patriarchal system that enslaves women at the same time is systematically brutalizes men" (118). Blodgett agrees, writing that Evelyn is "gender trained to overvalue his virility and his right to 'love them and leave them'" (50). The result is that even the English-lamb of a professor is well trained in sadism by the films he watched as a reverent boy, worshipping Tristessa's portrayal of feminine suffering (Schmidt 64).

While critics such as Schoene-Harwood, Blodgett and Schmidt call relevant attention to Evelyn's own subjection to gender norms, Butler's work thwarts abdicating Evelyn of all blame. Butler is careful to emphasize two points. First, although gender is a construction, its construction takes place under constraints, such as the threat of punishment, and is not a system of utterly arbitrary or free play. Second, gender is also not fully constrained, and its repetitive functioning permits variations, and thus subversions, in each individual instance of repetition. Therefore, "construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated" (Butler, GT 187). Evelyn is subjected to gender, but he is also a gendered agent who can still be held responsible for his actions.

*New Eve* also demonstrates Butler's claim that sex is sedimented through the ritual practice of gender norms (BTM 10). This ritual aspect comes to play again in both Leilah and Eve's transformation into ideal womanhood. Every night, Leilah transforms herself in the cracked mirror of her room. She paints her nipples, vulva, lips and eye sockets with garish colours and swathes her body in swathes of fabric meant to enhance rather than conceal. Carter describes Leilah's toilette as one in which "her beauty was an accession... a gravity and ritual that recalled witchcraft" (28). Subsequently, Eve's own gender transformation is a "ritual attrition of [her] change in ontological status" (71), a change also marked by more than one instance of ritualesque chanting of Beulah's inhabitants. This ritualisation suggests the sacred quality that colours gender and the sex it effects.

The order of the events of Eve's sex-change at first appears to evidence the primacy of the sexed body, for Eve gains a female body and then must become the woman that animates it. Upon menarche, Eve reflects:

I could scarce believe [the bright brown blood] dribbled out of me...beyond my own volition, the emblem of my function. Then I knew for certain that my change was absolute and I must climb inside the skin of the girl...and learn, somehow, to live there. (80)

However, Butler rejects this chronology, asserting that "gender must also designate the very apparatus of production where the sexes themselves are established" (GT 7). This is a view Carter shares. For instance, Eve's surgery is not complete when the last of the physical healing is finished; she still requires the psycho-surgery in order to orient her to a "woman's consciousness." Accordingly, when Eve looks into the mirror and sees her new shape for the first time, "the experience [comes] through two channels of sensation, her own fleshly ones and his mental ones" (78-9). Thus, the question of when Eve becomes a woman remains open for exploration.

Carter illustrates five settings in which Eve's womanhood may be established: Beulah, Zero's ranch, Tristessa's glass house, the desert and the sea-shore. Beulah can be eliminated from the list, especially in light of Eve's statement that she has "not yet become a woman" when she leaves this subterranean nest (83). Then, Eve enters her "savage apprenticeship into womanhood" as a member of Zero's harem (107). Eve

learns feminine speech and movement from the other wives, a position that she herself enters into upon her first sexual encounter in a woman's shape, which is her second experience of rape. Eve continues to be violated by Zero, whose treatment of her teaches the conditions women's experience in a system dominated by the phallus.

The phallic system manifests through hierarchal heterosexuality, which structures desire according to gender. As a result of gendering within the heterosexual matrix, to be gendered as a woman means to desire a man and vice versa. The heterosexual paradigm certainly governs life on Zero's ranch, where the opposition and hierarchy of binary gender are largely controlled through heterosexual sex acts. For example, the women buy meat with money earned by their prostitution in the city, their time is controlled by Zero's one wife per night policy and they believe that their continued health relies on their weekly injections from Zero's "tool." Incidentally, only within this heterosexualized space does homosexuality manifest.

According to Butler, systems of power such as the heterosexual matrix operate by positing and abjecting an outside that is really within the system itself, for the system depends on this other in order to establish its supposedly stable boundaries. Lesbianism, in a system where masculinity depends on submissive femininity for dominance, is a grave threat. Without his supplicants and their belief, Zero would lose his authority. In part, this greatest threat already infiltrated this phallic, for Zero believes that his potency was stolen from him by Tristessa, whom he calls 'Queen of the Dykes.' Eve recounts that Zero was watching one of Tristessa's films when she looked through the screen at him, causing him to feel a sharp pain in his groin, the signal of the lesbian witchery upon his seed. Zero is the only character in the novel to reference lesbianism and, according to him, 'dyke' is the biggest insult there is. This is because lesbian women do not depend on, or, more accurately, these women do not explicitly seek or submit to, male desire in order to bolster masculine authority.

In contradistinction to the ranch, the women of Beulah are curiously asexual. Through this juxtaposition Carter shows that lesbianism and feminism are not necessarily political bedmates, a distinction with which Butler agrees. Butler explains the introduction of the new edition of *Gender Trouble* that the book "sought to refuse the notion that lesbian practice instantiates feminist theory" (x). However, the result of these

various exclusions and foreclosures of lesbian possibility is that Carter's novel presents a world where lesbianism is either negative or absent<sup>15</sup>. In turn, this perhaps suggests that in this world of ongoing revolution where oppositional and hierarchal gender has a strong tie to heterosexuality, lesbian is not an intelligible subject position. In the least, lesbianism is abjected and, at the most, it is not completely out of range. This is because the only lesbian sex acts in the novel take place when Zero's wives grope each other in the dark, their desire ignited by the sounds of his copulation with that night's wife. These gropings take place outside of the immediate space of heterosexuality, Zero's room. However, they still remain within his house and under his attempts to control, for he scrutinizes the women for signs of tribadism, a crime punishable by death. The heavy punishment for lesbianism reflects its potential to be a large threat to phallocentrism.

Eve's two marriages, the first to Zero and the second to Tristessa, also play a role in consolidating her identity as a woman. Butler returns to the initial gendering interpellation when she writes that "'it's a girl' anticipates the eventual arrival of the sanction, 'I now pronounce you man and wife'" (BTM 232). This anticipation results from how gender norms always relate to the idealization of the heterosexual union. Heterosexuality regulates the binary of discrete feminine and masculine genders and manifests in concrete heterosexual practices, such as those valorized by the marital bond. When Eve becomes married to Zero, they become man and wife, a pairing that is true to etymology with its equation of "wife" and "woman." Namascar Shaktini notes this etymology and further explains that "even today the French word 'femme' means both 'woman' and 'wife.' The social idea of 'wife' has thus become indistinguishable from the bodily idea of adult, human female" (30). Then, when Zero orchestrates the marriage ceremony between Eve and Tristessa at the glass house, Eve describes how, up to this point, she "only mimicked what [she] had been; [she] did not become it. But [she] understood immediately that Zero intended to close the performance with a marriage" (132-3). Although Zero's intention seems to be more to redefine Tristessa's gender in order to resolve the unintelligibility of a woman with a penis, the ratification of Eve's

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<sup>15</sup> Gay men are also absent, but not due to a deliberate exclusion. There are not enough male characters in the novel for the possibility of gayness to be productively foreclosed.

womanhood also takes place (138), after the consummation during which Eve's desire is left unsatisfied.

Eve's desire is eventually sated in the only episode of sexuality not marked explicitly by violence (unless Tristessa's re-gendering counts as a violation). When escaping from the ruins of the glass house, Eve turns her narrative to Tristessa: "he, she – neither will do for you," she says (Carter 143). However, Tristessa's moment of gender ambiguity is brief; in the desert, when Eve embraces the full potential of her desire as a woman, Tristessa is invariably described in Eve's narration by masculine pronouns. First, this is the first and only instance of desire, which marks a deviation from Butler. For Butler, gender and its effects, sexed bodies and heterosexual desire form a complex tangle. Carter's separation of desire from heterosexual acts opens a space for Lorde's formulation of the erotic as an intuitive sense of personal satisfaction, especially considering that Eve's desire begins with the delight of her own body. This separation also emphasizes the functionality of heterosexual practice within gender norms. Second, the pronouns reflect the re-gendering evident in Eve's comment during their passionate tryst: "The glass woman I saw beneath me smashed under my passion and the splinters scattered and recomposed themselves into a man who overwhelmed me" (149)<sup>16</sup>. When coupled with Eve in her hyper-feminine desire of flows, excess and consumption, Tristessa can only inhabit the position of male subject, her natural compliment. Concerning Tristessa, Carter clarifies that "he had been she; though she had never been a woman, only ever his creation" (152).

Together, Eve and Tristessa form a Platonic hermaphrodite, a formulation that Johnson notes may be "dismissed by some as a heterosexual fantasy of recaptured unity" ("Textualizing" 47). Although Johnston does justifiably state that overall Carter intends a positive reading of this scene, any affirmative interpretation of the desert scene exists alongside the fact that this "love-making still equates active pursuit with masculinity and docile submission with femininity...hermaphroditism still adheres to the phallogocentric rule of the One and denies difference" (Schmidt 66). Moreover, the appearance of transgression in the coming together of these two doubly-gendered bodies is undermined

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* in which such destruction on account of passion reaches into the body's very cells instead of reconstituting coherence according to dominant categories.

by Eve's thoughts. According to Benedikz, these thoughts - "eat me. Consume me, annihilate me" (148) - "have an uncomfortable ring of the negation that Tristessa perpetuates" (152).

The scenes within the glass house and in the desert, Eve's womanhood depends on Tristessa, the (former) personification of feminine suffering, occupying her masculine counterpart. Johnson observes that Tristessa is re-defined as a man due to a system that coalesces around "desire and gender identity based on heterosexual physicality" ("Geometries" 173). This observation, in conjunction with critical tendency to interpret Tristessa as a man in drag, implies that the sexed body, or at least the sense of a sexed body, perhaps plays more of a role in gender identity than Butler allows.<sup>17</sup>

Tristessa's identification as a transvestite hinges on the moment of revelation of the "rude, red-purple insignia of maleness" (Carter 128), and the system of hetero-physicality that reads anatomy as the sign of gender. Rubenstein interprets Carter's representation of male to female sex change as highlighting "prevalent social constructions of male power and female powerlessness as, literally, extensions of their genitalia" (106). Anatomical asymmetry between apparently complementary sexes seems to indicate that the dynamics of heterosexuality and phallogocentrism originate in the sexed body, which is then gendered. Indeed, the authoritative doctor initially pronounces the gender of the infant, or often the fetus, by interpreting genital configuration so that sex becomes the sign of gender.

On the contrary, Butler argues that bodies do not pre-exist discursive practices, that gender does not express some authentic, humanistic identity and that the very materiality of the body is structured by signification. Butler does concede that affirming an array of materialities, such as biology, anatomy, hormonal composition, weight and death may be possible; "ultimately, they cannot be denied, but the undeniability of these 'materialities' in no way implies what it means to affirm them, indeed, what interpretive matrices condition, enable and limit that necessary affirmation" (BTM 67). Importantly, the doctor's pronouncement relies upon the two, and only two, proscribed and pre-scripted gender categories to interpret the multiplicity of genital configurations, which probably

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<sup>17</sup> This interpretation is perpetuated by critics including Benedikz, Blodgett, Bono, Caputo, Johnson and Rubinson.



have more variation than gender will admit. The current question of when Eve achieves her gender identity as a woman recalls that her gender is not achieved solely through the presence of the correct genitals.

The final potential instance of Eve's gender achievement takes place following exit from the cave and when Lilith offers the return Evelyn's genitals. Born from the past, from rock and from the m/other's inevitable abandonment, Eve rejects the miniature portable refrigerator and its meaty contents, "since [she] did not want [her] old self back" (188). At this point of the novel, Eve intends to escape her state of exile by sea and she hopes to be taken to the place of birth. The nature of the exile and the birth are both ambiguous; however, Lilith and the old woman take for granted that Eve is pregnant by Tristessa at the end of the novel. Lilith comments that "the baby will have two fathers and two mothers" (187), while Schoene-Harwood, more pessimistically, claims that "the union of a transsexual mother and cross-dressing father is perhaps still as likely to produce a monster as a messiah" (129). Whichever way this child's genealogy is described, it is clear that the solid ground of the United States is not a viable land for its birth. Indeed, Eve must leave this solid ground and its supposedly stable reality and real categories at the end of the novel for a more fluid future.

Has the (re)birth of New Eve taken place at the end of the novel? Has Eve's passion, her suffering and her desire, resolve in ascension to new feminine subjectivity? Does Eve become a woman? The answer to these questions is no, or, at least, probably not. Each of the five sites of Eve's gendering presents a recitation of norms that continually generate her identity. For Butler, identity is a necessary error, inevitable and useful but also something that is never fixed and always becoming, a process of incessant doings regulated by instances of interpellation, punishment, ritual and heterosexuality.

Gender is an assignment that can never be fully completed, and so Butler concludes that this 'being a man' and this 'being a woman' are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norms that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely. (BTM 126-7)

Butler's analysis of drag demonstrates how gender functions, especially in regard to resignification when a feminine gender clothes a male body. Butler's infamy for her drag example is a cornerstone of her legacy. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains that "drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and the notion of a true gender identity" (GT 174). The performance of drag, which overtly displays the discontinuity between gender and sex, illuminates the fact that gender does not express the natural or inherent state of bodies, sexes or identities. Instead, gender constructs the very identities that it appears to express.

The transgender necessity to pass delimits the subversive element that is initially crucial to Butler's analysis of drag. Hence, following *Gender Trouble*, Butler finesses her analysis to take into account the transgender drive to achieve rather than disrupt normativity. In tempering her view, subversion becomes a possibility and not an inevitability of drag performance. Butler explains that "drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced" (BTM 125).

Returning to Tristessa's identification as a man in drag, especially if drag is defined as subversive, raises the question of whether this is an identification that truly fits. An important aspect of drag is the open secret of the disjunction between the gender and the sex of the performer. When drag performance becomes an effort to pass as the presented gender, the subject of this performance seems more suited to transgender identification. Tristessa lives her life as a woman and receives wide-reaching fame for her flawless and seamless performance of the ideal woman. As Johnson, explains the result passing in that passing as "the attempt to *project* a 'pure,' uncomplicated gender identity...leads to a kind of logical conclusion: invisibility" ("*Geometries*" 174, my emphasis). Carter agrees, for upon retreating into reclusion, all anybody knows at that point is that Tristessa "was alive and well but she'd become perfectly invisible" (105). Additionally, the fictions of the passing autobiography not only erase transsexual experience but also operate as another aspect of invisibility, specifically the invisibility of the space between genders, a loss that then reifies binary gender categories and renders transgender subjectivity unintelligible.

Carter's depiction of Tristessa continues to align with transgender theory. This alignment is particularly evident in how Tristessa abhors her male organ, seeks sex reassignment surgery from the Mother in LA and fabricates a fictional autobiography to tell the story of her life as a woman. Sandy Stone refers to these fictions as "expensive and profoundly disempowering" due to the loss of the "ability to authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experience" (351). The price of the unlivability of the male woman is Tristessa's sanity and her happiness. As she listens to Tristessa recite stories from her fictional past, Eve realizes that Tristessa is quite mad (143). Also, Eve never knows Tristessa's previous name; her history is erased, and therefore the film star is defined by her current name, which comes from the French word for sadness, *tristesse*. These important details about Tristessa completely dismantle readings of her as a drag artiste and comprise a narrative of a pre- or non-operative male-to-female transsexual woman.

Butler remarks that "the name orders and institutes a variety of free-floating signifiers into an 'identity'; the name effectively 'sutures' the object" (208). Tristessa's name ties together her embodiment of sadness and the passivity that teaches sadism, tying her to an iconography rather than an ontology that the history of her naming would establish. Tristessa's surname is de St. Ange, a name straight from the Marquis de Sade himself. In Sade's *Philosophy of the Boudoir*, Madame de St. Ange is the young ingénue's teacher of sadistic libertinage<sup>18</sup>. Conversely, Eve's naming history is clear, as she describes "the plastic surgery that turned me into my own diminutive, Eve, the shortened form of Evelyn" (71). Carter's novel voices her protagonist's transition from Evelyn to Eve to New Eve. Carter describes that "Eve was a creature without memory" (78). New Eve does remember and thus can narrative her tale. Butler provides insight into the importance of the new. She writes that the new "is itself only established through recourse to those embedded conventions...that have conventionally been invested with the political power to resignify the future" (BTM 220). New Eve resignifies the convention of Adam's Eve, of subordinate and derivative woman. Moreover, the

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<sup>18</sup> Given Carter's studies of Sade, she would have been well aware of this character. See Carter's book *The Sadean Woman*.

distinction between the naming of Eve and of Tristessa marks the distinction their subject positions as well as Eve's unique position, which gestures toward future possibilities.

Just as Tristessa is unjustifiably read as a transvestite, so too is Eve unjustifiably read as a transsexual. However, Eve does not display the features of transsexualism: she does not desire a sex change, abhor his or her physical attributes nor fabricate an autobiographical tale of cohesive gender experience. Indeed, by narrating the journey of her transformation, Eve embodies Stone's figure of the post-transsexual. Stone elucidates her notion of the post-transsexual:

I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forgo passing, to be consciously 'read,' to read oneself aloud – and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to *write oneself* into the discourses by which one has been written – in effect to become a...posttranssexual. (354)

Recalling Butler's notion of bodies as boundaries and surfaces, Stone defines bodies as screens onto which are projected the norms of dominant discourse. The double meaning of project sheds light on Tristessa's gendering as a project or assignment and as a projection of ideal femininity onto the surface of her body and then onto the surface of the movie screen. Her projection reel becomes real, for as Pauline Palmer postulates, "in achieving a sex change, [Tristessa] employs neither surgery nor psychological conditioning. Her willed performance of femininity, combined with the audience's belief is that she is a woman, are sufficient" (30). This postulation shows the collective aspect of gender performativity.

Butler's earlier conception of the performative acts that constitute gender maintained that these acts were theatrical. This theatrical sense casts this acting into the realm of "shared experience and collective action" ('Performative' 409). Although Butler revises her sense of performativity in latter works so that theatricality becomes citationality and acting becomes the acting out of gender melancholy, the sharing and publicity involved in gendering should not be overlooked. For Tristessa, public confirmation of her private experience of her gender has ramifications that affect her identity as a transwoman. This confirmation takes place visually because Tristessa's medium is film and because Carter describes her primarily in terms of light and glass,

white and silver. Tristessa's visual representations of her gender in her films (and also in Eve/lyn's photos of her) are granted legitimacy by the viewing audience, whether movie goers or Zero's and his wives, on account of their coherence. However, when her audience discovers the visual anomaly of her penis, this visual sign of incoherence has the power to reorient her previous well-established identity. Butler then provides a reminder that seeing alone does not provide evidence for redefining judgement; the categories through which the body is seen determine what is seen in the first place (GT xxii). These categories are governed by mutually informing discourses of phallocentrism and occularcentrism, which collide in the authoritative one I/eye<sup>19</sup>.

If the transsexual body is a screen, the posttranssexual body is a sheet, specifically a sheet of paper. Rather than being hidden under a covering and concealing sheet, the posttranssexual body tells its story, its history. In a rare moment of present tense, Eve explains her post-operative state: "I am a tabula erasa, a blank sheet of paper...I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman's shape. Not a woman, no; both more and less than a real woman" (83). This shift from screen to paper parallels Butler's shift to citationality and to an overall emphasis on language.

New Eve's ability to narrate her story is a very large privilege within the context of the novel. Carter is acutely aware of which characters get to speak and how they do so. From Tristessa's "unused voice of a revenant" to the boy scout "souldiers" whose voices crack uncontrollably or who speak in Spanish and thus in a language that Eve does not understand (138, 153, 170), all of the characters in the novel are marked by how they speak. Evelyn loses the job he emigrated for before he even begins due to his "cut-glass vowels and prissy English accent" (13). These same vowels connect Sophia, a daughter of Beulah who takes care of Eve, to Lilith near the end of the novel (175). Leilah's speech is unintelligible to Evelyn. He remarks: "her argot and patois was infinitely strange to me, I could hardly understand a word she said" (26). The women of Beulah speak in "stuttering, invocatory yowls" (60), the unified chants of demented maenads or as a disembodied "crisp voice with the intonations of an East Coast university" over the loudspeaker (53). Zero's wives are not allowed to speak in human speech and instead

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<sup>19</sup> Zero only has one eye, for he lost the other to a broomstick in a prison brawl (Carter 104).

“hooted, roared, mewed, squeaked and clucked” (85). Accordingly, like clucking hens in cages, Zero forces them to have their front teeth removed to prevent nicks during their wifely duties, an operation that would also affect their pronunciation. Eve learns more about life on the ranch, she describes how Zero “would bark, grunt, or squeak, toward his wives because he only used the language of animals towards his wives...[they] had to answer in kind...so [their] first words every morning were spoken in a language [they themselves] could not understand” (96-7). Thus, Zero’s control over language inhibits not only communication and expression, but also the wives’ understanding of themselves.

Echoing Butler and Carter’s attention to the importance of language, Stone translates gender into genre through her call for the writing from and of the posttranssexual body. The translation to genre creates styles of embodied becoming, a celebration of creativity in place of the inevitable and stressful failure of fully being one or the other gender. Thus, the posttranssexual body is one of intertextuality that cites and recites various texts and sexes as well as intersections between them.

Lee observes that Eve “has to learn to be a woman because she is *seen* by others...as a woman” (239 my emphasis). She forced to perform her gender due to the visual categories that define her body. This posttransexual body is still the site of compelled gender performance but it is also where the revision and recitation of a narrative that subverts the gender categories and that demands this marginalized performance takes centre stage/page. Eve’s posttransexual status coheres with how she is “both and neither male and female” (Lee 246), a paradox leading Eve to the insight that “masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another” (149).

Overall, Eve and Tristessa are different on account of their bodily sense. Stone mentions the transgender sense of being in the wrong body, and notes that this “wrong sense” requires theorization. Prosser takes up the wrong sense of body as a feeling originating in corporeal interiority. Prosser contends that

the transsexual doesn’t necessarily *look* differently gendered but by definition *feels* differently gender from her or his birth—assigned sex...transsexual narrative depends on an initial crediting of this feeling as generative ground. It demands some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority. (271)

For Prosser, recognition of this corporeal interiority would revalue what Butler erases when she positions the body as a phantasized surface defined by gender melancholy and dominant discourses. Seemingly, Prosser uses the wrong sense in order to assert the type of humanistic core of authentic sense of self that Butler goes to such lengths to deconstruct. In her analysis on Wittig, Butler makes a comment that just as accurately describes her own theory as Wittig's. She writes that this "position [of sex as unnatural effect] is counterintuitive, but the political cultivation of intuition is precisely what she wants to elucidate" (GT 145).

Ultimately, whether this intuitive sense is cultivated, transplanted or just naturally grown is irrelevant. This intuitive sense within individuals ranging from cisgendered to transsexual is Lorde's erotic. The erotic gives the negative definition of wrong sense a positive valence, for she defines it as an internal standard of the human capacity for joy or contentment that can be expressed in all action. All individuals strive to meet the measure of their erotic, but doing so requires a spectrum of opportunities for life and its expression and representation. Butler's critique of gender in its the black and white binary shows that gender not only paints human potential in the uniform prison-stripe of normativity but also carves up the body of human potential. Carter shows us how this body can be sutured back together, living to tell the tale of new horizons on the eve of revolution.

## **Postscript**

### **Eating Words as Just Dessert**

This project has been gestating for a long time. It began with the question of whether red ink instead of white would be a more appropriate metaphor for Cixous' *écriture féminine*. After all, red ink avoids some of the sticky spots in textual maternity: the external impetus of a fathering force, the linearity and singularity of birth and pregnancy, and the invisibility of white ink on a white phallogocentric page. Red ink slashes a white page, capturing a not un-Wittigian violence, aggressive and vibrantly celebratory. Red is an in-your-face kind of colour. Red escapes the black and white binary and can never white-out other lines, those of men and women who are not

mothers. Also, red ink recovers the contemporary taboos surrounding and silencing menstruation, a circular and female embodied experience, and acknowledges the Medusa's bloody yet creative death, while also extending to the red blood that circulates through all human bodies, regardless of sex, gender, orientation, class, race or location. Moreover, Marlatt's *Ana Historic* supports the translation of white to red ink with the contrast of the birthing scene and Annie's experiences of menstruation as scribbling.

I still believe red ink is a fruitful way in which to think through writing that creates and legitimates subjectivities, especially in contrast to white ink. However, reading more of Cixous' work, especially her comments about her own writing process in conjunction with Derrida, Ricoeur and theories of metaphor, shifted my attention to what Cixous might have been trying to get at with milk-white ink: the giving and nurturing qualities of writing. Not to mention the fact that the process of writing a project is not unlike birth: the torturous labour, the fatigue, the growing ideas that somehow get out through impossibly small spaces or through surgical precision. But writing is also like a body at work in its own cycles; an idea comes that has been building up for a while and then seems to flow if not effortlessly maybe only with a little uncomfortable bloating and cramping. And then it happens again. Thus, it seems writing can be white or red. Both metaphors speak to and have something to say about what it is like to write. Accordingly, *The Passion of New Eve* includes scenes of birth and of menstruation, but these scenes occur as part Eve's process of becoming a woman and as part of her overall experience of living as an embodied subject. Thus, in the end, a more Cixousian interpretation of white ink attends to the fact that white contains within it all colours, the infinite one, the "whole made up of wholes."

However, this plurality is not to say that any metaphor works. What we say still matters, and there is still the matter of bodies that need care. These bodies exist in relationship with language, especially with metaphoric language. Language has effects on the body and in turn the body affects language. Eating words is a particularly apt metaphor for this affecting and effecting relationship because this relationship is an incorporation. The body eats words and thus makes them part of itself. Language also bites back, incorporating bodies into language as both a gathering together, a bring into company with, but also as a corporate take-over, a business venture with an eye for profit



a whatever expense. Even writing in white ink risks becoming White Inc., if we do not foster awareness of the wide-reaching effects of language.

Therefore, eat your words. An imperative, an admonition, an encouragement. Take back the harmful ones and swallow without voicing the ones meant to hurt. Eat your words like you eat your vegetables; they are good for you, and can, sometimes perhaps, be delicious, especially according to some vegetarians and voracious readers.

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