

*D*eath Becomes *Her* When The Lady Vanishes

[. . .]

The Syncope Effect Of Hysteria and Hunger on The Ecstatic *Her*

“Sometimes you can’t be sure the person is still breathing. This kind of intensity only lasts for a short period at any one time. When the profound suspension lifts a little, it seems like the body slowly comes back to itself and is nourished only to die all over again and give fuller life to the soul. Total ecstasy does not last long.

But even after the rapture has passed, the will remains so deeply absorbed and the mind so transported that so days the mind is incapable of understanding anything that does not awaken the will to love. And the will is so wide-awake to love that it is fast asleep to all attachments to any creature.

Oh, what bewilderment the soul feels when she returns to herself! How intense are her desires that God use her however he wants! The soul would gladly have a thousand lives to be able to give them all to God. She wishes that everything on earth could be a tongue to help her praise him. She has this strong urge to sacrifice herself for him, but the power of her love makes the soul feel that what she has to offer is insignificant. She realizes that the martyrs didn’t accomplish much in enduring the torments they endured because with the help of our Beloved such suffering is easy. Sill our souls complain to His Majesty when he deprives us of the opportunity to offer ourselves as sacrifice to Him”.

*I*ntroduction

PG 4~7

*E*ngastrimythic

PG 8~14

*E*cstasy

PG 15 ~20

*E*dwarda

PG 21~27

L. A. Raeven & Maria

PG 28~35

Introduction

Anorexia mirabilis is an extreme religious and spiritual practice associated with young women and girls of the Middle Ages who held aspirations toward martyrdom. Literally it means a 'great' starvation and a 'miraculous' lack of appetite. The practice, predominantly engaged by young Catholic women ~ Miraculous Maids ~ supposedly employed it as a vehicle to attain higher relations with God, hoping to receive His divine voice. The absence of sustenance in the gut in exchange for divine vocalic sonority, *anorexia mirabilis* was frequently accompanied by self-mutilation, self-flagellation, and a variety of self-induced inflictions. Life long chastity was a prerequisite for the young women, who performed their holy starvations in an attempt to cultivate an inner purity and piety, many survived on the Holy Eucharist to signify their total devotion to Jesus, and the fasting could extend to months, years, or to a final tragic conclusion culminating in their premature deaths. The allure of the 'special achievement' of prolonged fasting was confirmation to these female practitioners that the body was a separate entity from the spirit. It has been suggested that some felt inebriated by the *hunger for* God, and claimed that from this edible absence they experienced possessions of religious enlightenment, which then made them spiritually replete.

*"Food was not, however, merely a metaphor for interaction with the divine. It was the heart of religious practice. Whether or not penitential asceticism in general characterized their lives; the women all fasted in order to prepare themselves for Christ's body and blood. Several of them were incapable of eating ordinary food when they experienced the filling of Christ The mass (and / or reception of the Eucharist) was frequently the occasion on which these women received ecstatic union with Christ. And the sweetness of ecstasy was often experienced as palpable food"*¹

Anorexia mirabilis participatory Saints include St Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) and St Veronica (1st C A.D.). St Catherine would refuse food but would allegedly feast on the sores of the sick and diseased and St Veronica would fast for five days and then would chew five orange pips representing the wounds of Christ. St Rose Of Lima (1586 – 1607)) was the first Catholic Saint born in the Americas in Lima Peru, and in emulation of St Catherine of Sienna she would only digest bitter herbs in the pursuit of spiritual fortitude. St. Rose wore a circlet of silver studs around her head concealed by roses imitating the crown of thorns worn by Christ, it is alleged every night as a penance she slept on a bed of broken glass and stones. She was known to self flagellated three times a day and in keeping with the rigors of her ascetic life, disfigured her face by cutting it and infusing the scars with pepper to detract admirers. St Rose of Lima took a vow of perpetual virginity which thereafter she re-doubled her penances. For fourteen years she

¹ Caroline Walker Bynum *Holy Feast and Holy Fast; The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (PG 117)

received voices, visions and revelations with intermittent periods of intense ecstasy. Such self-imposed cruelties as seen in the lives of St Rose and other female saints have not been uncommon. Saints and Martyrs who practiced anorexia mirabilis were rewarded for their chaste and ascetic lives and sometimes had privileges bestowed on them in the form of divine visions and ecstatic unions- although the perpetrators were not to expect such mystical gifts.

During the Renaissance the Church viewed the practice of anorexia mirabilis as heretical and possibly satanically inspired, especially in regard to its auditory hallucinations and accompanying Divine visions. The practice although not with religious intent still survives today and is now known by the more familiar nomenclature of anorexia nervosa. The corporeal disintegration and gaunt physiognomy of the female sufferer, practitioner and / or patient from the middle Ages to the 21st Century are exact in appearance, but the causation and initial reasons on the embarkment toward self-starvation would appear to be different. The Middle Ages dealt with the interiority of its subjects being and the 21st Century malaise served to chastise the exterior of the being, but these umbrella assumptions are far too simplistic. It would be an impossible task to attempt to chart the causation and individual pathologies of young women across centuries, extricated from their own historical context and separated from their governing social strata, one enters the problematic arena of diagnosing from a distance the anorectic epochal body. In Joan Jacobs Brumberg's *Fasting Voice; The History Of Anorexia Nervosa* she opines;

*“The symptoms of a disease never exist in a cultural vacuum, similarly in mental illness, basic forms of cognitive and emotional disorientation are expressed in behavioral aberrations that mirror the deep preoccupations of a particular culture. For the reason a history of anorexia nervosa must consider the ways in which different societies create their own symptom repertoires and how changing cultural context gives meaning to a symptom such as non-eating”*²

‘Fasting Girls’ is a Victorian term reserved for pre-adolescent girls who claimed to survive on little or no food, and who in return for culinary abstinence stated to have had miraculous gifts and religious powers bestowed on them. In an era where scientists attached great importance to empiricism, physicians agreed that the assertions of the fasting girls ought to be verified and put to the medical test. The fasting girls were often placed in psychiatric environments to substantiate their proclamations regarding starvation. Many of the girls were from poorer backgrounds and the public interest in them created a macabre celebrity spectacle. Many died anonymously but all gained some form of notoriety from outside their immediate environments as word spread from village to village and town to town. In Walter Vandereycken’s book *From Fasting Saints to Anorexia Girls; The History of Self Starvation* they recount the unfortunate event of Sarah Jacobs a Welsh girl born in 1857, who claimed to have not eaten any food at all after her tenth birthday. The local vicar originally skeptical became her most ardent supporter. The prolonged disbelief of physicians married to the prolonged fasting of the little girl, incited the overly confident vicar - who was convinced of her authenticity - to subject her to supervised medical tests. With

² Joan Jacob Brumberg *Fasting Voice; The History Of Anorexia Nervosa*, Vintage Books (PG 161)

her parents permission Sarah was admitted to Guys Hospital in 1869 where she received many gifts of encouragement and donations from the public in support of her miraculous fast. Under a rolling twenty - four hours supervised watch anything that passed her lips was to be monitored, recorded and diarized. Resolutely by her own will *Nil by Mouth*, Sarah Jacobs eventually began to display symptoms of starvation and her frail, fragile mental and physical state were becoming immense cause for concern. Dr Robert Fowler in *The Times* called her case one of ‘simulative hysteria’³ and implored the parents to call off the experiment Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs refused inciting they had often seen their daughter in similar emotional situations during her ‘miraculous fast’. Sarah Jacob died a few days later; the combined reports of the post mortem and the hospital results concluded that Sarah must have been eating surreptitiously prior to her admission and then tragically whilst in hospital care had self starved herself to death. The parents were accused of negligence and sentenced to prison, the physicians cleared of negligence as it could not be proved otherwise that all they did was offer advice to the nurses who were involved in the watch.

Bergan Euan cites the case of Therese Neuman (1898- 1962) in *The Encyclopedia Of Occultism and Parapsychology* (2001) in which I quote

*“ Therese Neuman is the most famous of the contemporary non eaters. The number of ecclesiastical and medical dignitaries who have vouched for the truth of her claims is impressive..... millions of sober sensitive people believe beyond doubt that this woman does not eat or drink”*⁴

Therese Neuman claimed that after 1927 nothing but the Eucharist had passed her lips and that she was also stigmatic but the Roman Catholic Church have never recognized or accepted her claims as being true. Scientific enquiry gained momentum in the Victorian era in regards of the medical phenomena known as ‘fasting girl.’ The shift from viewing fasting girls as miraculous pious females which then relegated them to malingerers, fakes and then finally diseased, is comparative to the establishment shift from religion having the ultimate authority to the placement then of faith in science and medicine in such matters. In Rudolph Bell’s *Holy Anorexia* he describes a conference given by the eminent Giorgio Baglivi in 1791 who held the chair of medical theory in Collegio Della Sapienza in Rome by appointment of Pope Clement X1 and clearly illustrates the symptoms of anorexia or voluntary starvation to hysteria and female neuroses.

“ And William Cullen groped for general explanations of a baffling variety of physical disabilities that seemed to have psychic origin. The term melancholy, hysteria, hypochondriasis, lowness of spirit, nervous disease, English Malady, and affliction of vapors (perhaps emanating from an unhappy uterus as it floated upwards and pressed upon the gastrintestinal organs) were used imprecisely in literature that never fully escaped from the ancient Egyptian association of emotional disturbance in women with

³ Walter Vandereycken & Ron Van Deth *Fasting Saints to Anorexia Girls; The History Of Self Starvation*, The Athalone Press 1996 (PG 55)

⁴ *The Encyclopedia Of Occultism and Parapsychology* (2001) (PG 109)

genital disease and the “wandering womb”. Even in the early nineteenth century writers describing symptoms typical of *anorexia nervosa* did so in the context of more general treatments of hysteria and the general “neuroses of women”⁵

Sacred starvation and divine dialogues beg the question of who is the ventriloquist in regards of the female body. The author and academic Joan Jacob Brumberg uses wonderfully apt terminologies such as ‘appetite as voice’ and ‘food vocabularies’ in relation to the starved body, in the case of received and divine voices, are these women listening to the interior polyphonic tones and timbres of hysteria? And what of psychosis, this sanctity through starvation that comes with its own vocabulary of absence; who is the narrator of these women’s lives of piety; are these women mute from the pain and hunger of their own bodily (mute)tilations?

The history of female starvation in the West has always been twinned with the history of hysteria. Both have been bound together with the ribbons of psychoanalytical discourse and medical diagnosis without ever looking at the whole human package. This essay sets out to engage a dialogue with the speech of hunger and the questions therein within the starved female body in relation to voice. And what does this hunger constitute; what is the satiation particularly in relation to *anorexia mirabilis*? By placing hunger within the psychoanalytical discourse and then collapsing that framework to investigate the corporeal linguistics of cannibalism (the disintegration of one’s own flesh alongside the neurological implications) specifically to challenge the subject /object of the female body in contemporary art today. By exploring the Holy Hunger associated with many female Saints, the discourse on hysteria and the performance of audience participation/ implication in the role of voluntary starvation. This paper aims to disrupt the notions of starvation and hunger among females tracing a history of hysteria and suggest alternative interpretive possibilities, especially those that relate to the received voice within religiosity and the position of the locators in the act of ventriloquism regarding that received voice. It will look at issues that relate to corporeality and the diminishing body recycled as word (word made flesh), and looking at the self-starvation as an act of subversion In order to self starve we have to have the gaze of the Other to be seen to be doing that, what then is the role of the Other in the performance of hunger? The case that anorexia is formed as a protest against the patriarchal issues of the day is a prevalent argument and one that is shaped historically and discursively and also one that we seem no closer to understanding. This paper attempts to detail the complex aural dimension of *anorexia mirabilis*, hysteria, possession and hallucination as modes of ecstatically conflicted Catholic experience through readings of the psychoanalytical discourse of hysteria and anorexia, St Theresa’s Ecstasies, George Bataille’s ‘Madame Edwarda’ and looks at starvation as performance with Dutch artist duo L.A. Raeven and works by Maria Abramovich.

⁵ Rudolph Bell *Holy Anorexia* University Of Chicago Press (PG 5)

 ENGASTRIMYTHIC

Hysteria

Hysterikos is a medical term first coined by the Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates (ca. 460BC – ca. 370BC) and alludes to the condition of the uterus (hystera) and its subsequent effect on the female neurological and respiratory system. Hippocrates classified symptoms such as irritability, insomnia, fainting, loss of appetite, low libido and a myriad of other perceived feminine malaises as *Hysteria* (literally meaning womb disease) as the affliction of spinster's with the only remedy for the ailment being the metaphoric marital bed. In the 2nd Century the respected physician Galen surmised that the disease of hysteria afflicted women of a particular passionate type of whom, for whatever reason had been deprived of the phallus, consequently the perceived uterus was free to roam around the body resulting in internal strangulation of the lungs leading to severe breathing deficiencies and other horrors. In Galen's opinion these women tended to fit neatly into certain sections of society; nuns, virgins, widows and on rare occasions married women. The male administered cure for such a melancholic malady was the treatment known as *Hysterical Paroxysms* (pelvic massage to orgasm) and was prescribed to women considered suffering a chronic form of the 'disease'. Deprivation of the phallus - it was believed - sent these women into hysterics, so the supplantation of manual genital massage to result in the 'petit mort' was not seen as a sexual exchange on account of the omission of the phallus, thus negating the event of the patients orgasm. Nowadays, the broadest consensus within the scientific community does not pertain to what *is known* about hysteria – but what is *unknown*. The gist of an interview given to the *New York Times* by Dr. Peter Halligan Professor Of Neurosurgery at Cardiff University Wales in 2006 ends the article in regards of research and prognosis by saying “We are only at the beginning regarding the ‘reality of hysteria’.¹ This is surprising. Rachel Maines in her excellent book *The Technology Of Orgasm: Hysteria, The Vibrator and Woman's Sexual Satisfaction* (1998) acutely observes and uncovers extensive practices of hysterical paroxysms occurring and recorded in the works of; ‘Hippocratic corpus, the works of Celsus in the first century A.D those of Aretaeus, Soranus, and Galen in the second century, that of Aëtius and Moschion in the sixth century, the anonymous eighth- or ninth-century work of Liber de Muliebría, the writings of Rhazes and Avicenna in the following century, of Ferrari da Gradi in the fifteenth century, of Paracelsus and Paré in the sixteenth, of Burton, Claudini, Harvey, Highmore, Rodrigues de Castro, Zacuto, and Horst in the seventeenth, of Mandeville, Boerhaave, and Cullen in the eighteenth, and in the works of numerous nineteenth-century authors including Pinel, Gall, Tripier, and Briquet.’²

She argues that ‘Given the ubiquity of these descriptions in the medical literature, it is surprising that the character and purpose of these massage treatments for hysteria and related disorders have received little attention from historians.’ She goes on to suggest that the nomenclature of the condition - which recorded written accounts span from the 4th Century to the eventual redundancy of the term by the American Psychiatric Association in 1952 - displays a ‘symptomatology’ which is conducive to a normal healthy

¹ September 26, 2006 (02/07/09) <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/26/science/26hysteria.html?r=2>

² Maines R.P. *The Technology Of Orgasm; Hysteria, The Vibrator & Womans' Sexual Satisfaction.* / John Hopkins Study/ 1998 / PG15

female sexuality for which satiation was to be attained by orgasm. She further states the androcentric definition of sex to be foreplay, penetration and male orgasm and continues “ Because the androcentric model of sexuality was thought necessary to the pro-natal and patriarchal institution of marriage and had been defended and justified by leaders of the Western medical establishment in all centuries at least since the time of Hippocrates, marriage did not always ‘cure’ the ‘disease’ represented by the ordinary and uncomfortably persistent functioning of women's sexuality outside the dominant sexual paradigm. This relegated the task of relieving the symptoms of female arousal to medical treatment, which defined female orgasm under clinical conditions as the crisis of an illness, the "hysterical paroxysm." In effect, doctors inherited the task of producing orgasm in women because it was a job nobody else wanted.”³

By the mid 19th Century hydrotherapy devices were being used to ‘alleviate’ the symptoms as physicians were not enamored by the tedious ‘job in hand’ (so to speak) and had contracted the work out to midwives whom allegedly achieved results in faster times. By 1870 a clockwork vibrator had become available to physicians for the treatment of hysteria and in 1873 the first electromechanical vibrator was used at an asylum in France. Although doctors acknowledged that sexual dissatisfaction was at the centre of their patients diagnosis they were less willing to announce the sexual connotation of the devices used to treat it. In 1918 the American Sears catalogue was running advertisements in their pages for home vibrators with attachments notably many considerable years before the advertising appearance of other home essentials such as irons and washing machines.

The Victorian era brought its own ‘ideal’ unrealistic template for female sexual behavior. There was an insistence, especially in literature for the frail consumptive aristocratic model, delicate, with a penchant for swooning and with an undemonstrative interest only in the sexual act for reproduction rather than erotic pleasure. This moral attitude founded the basis for the argument opposing contraception, and served only to fuel the sexual frustration of the Victorian female. Treatments in this era for ‘hysteria’ apart from pelvic stimulation also included bed rest, seclusion and an avoidance of stimulating activity (including social engagement) only served to push the consumptive patient into further depression. The female protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s novel *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892)⁴ is woman banished to the top room of an ancestral home after giving birth, written in the first person it charts the events leading up to her slide into insanity. She is clearly suffering from post – natal depression but a diagnosis of hysteria from her doctor husband and brother deem her recovery must be spent in isolation without the company of visiting friends and therefore in desperate loneliness. This gothic tale illuminates the lack of knowledge and consequent treatment for female depression and / or post-natal depression at the time. The yellow patterned wallpapers hallucinogenic property reveals it to contain women trapped under its patterns and mirrors the repressed female experience of women in Victorian England. The horror is her realization that her captors are male family members as they unwittingly aid her dialogue with the wallpaper and her

³ Maines R.P. The Technology Of Orgasm; Hysteria, The Vibrator & Womans Sexual Satisfaction. / John Hopkins Study/ 1998 / PG16

⁴ Gilman P.C. *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories* Oxford University Press (2009)

appointment with her eventual madness. The protagonist stifled by her husband and medical science of the day, denied access to write her diary, stays awake in the evening to watch the other imaginary characters shake the bars of the wallpaper as they and she slide into an avoidable psychosis.

Conversion Disorder was formally known as Hysteria and covers the symptomatic range of convulsions, fits and paralysis amongst other medically 'unexplained' bodily afflictions. It is considered a psychiatric illness and a corporeal response to a "real" trauma from a past life, as in an event from the past and not a regressive separate life. Although it had been prevalent throughout the millennia only real research began to develop at the end of the 19th Century with the respected neurologist Jean Martin Charcot and the psychiatrist Pierre Janet. The term 'conversion' is thought to have originated from a doctrine of Sigmund Freud's, who viewed the associated neurological symptoms as the result of 'intrapsychic distress', which was then thought to cause the brain to disengage or impair a bodily function, as a side effect of the original repression which served to retrieve the persons anxiety. Outward symptoms seem to be 'hysterical aphonia' (of which fear is concomitant to) 'hysterical paralysis', 'psychogenic non – epileptic seizures' and 'syncope'. Hysteria is a symptomatic dumping ground a loaded pejorative term because of its attachment solely to women, and it may now be suggested to derive from a total shut down or breakdown under the individual's response to threat, which can take many forms especially paralysis. Not all physicians agree on the diagnostic criteria of hysteria, and compounded to the confusion is the ever shifting inoffensive monikers attached to the symptomology such as non-organic and psychogenic, there is still no defining consensus of how conversion order (from mind to body) can be classified. Conversion order being the new umbrella term for the phenomena of converting distress and suffering into 'acceptable' manifestation of the patient's pain, quite often the gut replacing the heart 'as the most common locus of weakness'⁵ and this is common among many cultures.

Hysteria shelters many varied symptoms and nomenclature under its title and consequently it is known as a 'legacy diagnosis', its colloquialism describes a mind full of fear and / or excess of emotion and it is now known in more euphemistic parlance as psychosomatic, psychogenic and conversion disorder. The French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot advanced the modern interpretation of the differing processes of hysterical behavior from the medieval definition and terminology of demons, and discovered in his scientific research that the hysteric suffers from a 'dissociation of consciousness'. Any identifiable ailment could be associated with hysteria and Freud reclassified the numerous symptoms with his own diagnosis of 'anxiety neurosis', and many other symptoms of it cross-reference and encompass such varying afflictions of schizophrenia and anxiety attacks. Physical illness, exhaustion and excess of emotion such as fear and anxiety associated with a traumatic event will bring on hysteria followed by psychological misery culminating in an increase in dissociative phenomena. Psychiatry to day defines two types of hysteria (although the term hysteria fell out of favor with the medical profession some time ago); these are 'somatoform' and 'dissociative'. A dissociative fugue is characterized by reversible amnesia for personal identity including all identifying characteristics of identity. The person experiencing

⁵ Friedman B. & van der Hart O. *A Readers Guide To Pierre Janet On Dissociation; A Neglected Intellectual Heritage*
Department Of Psychiatry Free University (no date)

a dissociative fugue may have been recently suffering the appearance of an event or person representing an earlier life trauma; the emergence of an armoring or defensive personality seems to be for some, a logical apprehension of the situation. A fugue state would occur whilst acting out a dissociative fugue.

Hysteria as a term has been used to silence and label a vast array of Saints and witches and numerous female personality permutations in between this prescribed and all too obvious spectrum. The medical profession claims it has been defunct as a diagnosis since the 1960's it has clearly become invisible and carried on in many aliases and pseudonyms, or at least that is what the medical profession profess. The conversion disorder (from mind to body) diagnosis is a troublesome illness because it relies on negative proof, basically if you haven't got anything else wrong with you, you probably have it. Hysteria is now the diagnosis that dare not *scream* its name, probably on account of hysterical aphonia.

The evolution of the 'dissociative disorder' and 'dissociation' - formally known as hysteria - was vehemently pursued by the French clinical and scientific investigator Pierre Janet (1859 -1947), who laid comprehensive foundation stones for the real understanding of the causes of hysteria His findings led him to the revelation that the chief underlying mechanism of disorders such as post-traumatic stress, somatization, and borderline personality disorder was a dissociation of the self and he came about this revelation by using hypnosis on his patients. Janet was a professor of philosophy at Le Havre and one of his major influences was the publication of the neurologist Jean Martin Charcot's papers (Director of The Salpêtrière Hospital and a pioneer in the use of hypnosis and of whom Janet was a student of) on hypnosis which reestablished its importance in regard of its scientific status and use of in medical environments. Janet pursued investigations into the phenomena of hypnosis, suggestion, and studying modifications of consciousness whilst working at Salpêtrière Hospital. He began to form the basis of his theory of hysteria, and he published many studies on hysteria, phobias, compulsions and neurosis, which resulted in two volumes on obsessions and psychasthenia (*Les Obsessions et la Psychasthénie* 1903). The end of the 19th century brought an academic and medical backlash against the use of hypnosis in regards of hysteria with the implication of autosuggestion, suggestion and false memory whilst the patient was under its influence. The main argument for the defense being that hypnotism was a psychological phenomenon based purely on suggestion. With the sudden death of Charcot and the academic and medical climate of the time vehemently suggesting that hysteria was the disease of the malingerer on account of its sudden disappearance once treated with hypnosis; the implication being, that the symptoms disappeared by suggestion and persuasion whilst under a hypnotic state, at worst condemning it as morally reprehensible, therefore negating the disease of hysteria and further developments in the treatment with the aid of hypnotism. Hysteria and dissociation fell into disrepute and with it the medical legitimacy of Janet's treatment of hysteria and dissociation and he was forced to leave unceremoniously Salpêtrière Hospital. Contemporaneously Sigmund Freud published his works on psychoanalytical theories and observations that gained in popularity, leaving Pierre Janet's theories on the hypnotic resources compatible with hysteria to make little headway.

L'Automatisme Psychologique (1889) (Sub title; *Experimental – Physiological Essay On The Interior Forms Of Human Activity*) is one of Janet's first books and investigates the psychological phenomena attributed to possession, spiritism, hypnosis and hysteria and studies human activity in its simplest form – automatic. Automatic because it is pre-determined and to an extent unconscious and regular - although an activity no matter how regulated is never identical, it just functions as organizing the present and comments “at every moment of life, this activity effectuates the new combinations which are necessary to maintain the organism in equilibrium with the changes of the surroundings”⁶ Janet felt this psychological theory to be best studied in individuals who exhibit automatism in extreme degrees, these being patients suffering from hysteria who were found to be suffering from unresolved and therefore dissociated traumatic issues and memories. This analysis displayed a classic departure from the conventional psychology of the time and his conclusions that at the lowest levels of psychic life, where sensation and feeling exist so does movement. There is no consciousness without activity and even an idea follows through to develop itself into an act. Many disassociated elements combine with other phenomena to form complex states. The subconscious such as dreams and fixed ideas become the lynch pin for other phenomena to attach themselves to, resulting in a distinct and separate personality encompassing its own critical judgment, life history and accumulating in successive and parallel existences. Accesses to these multiple personalities were only usually accessed through a non- waking state such as hypnotism. Janet also observed that a patient might be predominantly visual in one state, auditory in another state various differing senses being the predominant sense in either a waking or somnambulistic state and many other interchanging variables within these binary modes.

Stigmata and accidents were the terms attributed to the symptoms of hysteria. The term stigmata obviously synonymous to the marks corresponding the Crucifixion marks on Christ's body, and the stigmata of hysteria are the essential constitutive symptoms of the illness. A hysterical attack is violent, immediate, periodically, of which the patient's normal consciousness disappears. Janet categorized several types of emotional attack tics, clownism, fixed ideas and ecstasies, and he interestingly also considered most cases of anorexia nervosa to be hysterical in nature. . Fixed ideas in this context are thoughts of mental images and / or auditory hallucinations of monumental proportions, and these fixed ideas can remain independent or attach themselves to other fixed ideas to create new impressions. In its simplistic interpretation a morbid fear of lilies or other funeral flowers is the manifestation of the primary fixed idea of a fear of death. Janet's genius and far-sightedness was his attention to and meticulous investigation of the emotional *accidents* of his patients, what initially caused the hysteria rather than the subsequent stigmata (symptoms) of the affliction. The dissolution of the fixed idea was integral to the cure and this could be carried out under what he called *confession*, either in a waking or hypnotic state allowing them to externalize, objectify and hence terminate their relationship on to the fixed idea. The confession of the fixed idea was necessary for the cure but alas by itself insufficient, but by introducing graduated amounts of the act of synthesis - for example what is in effect what is now known occupational

⁶ Friedman B. &van der Hart O. *A Readers Guide To Pierre Janet On Dissociation; A Neglected Intellectual Heritage*
Department Of Psychiatry Free University (no date)

therapy - to prevent the accumulation of new fixed ideas attaching themselves to the initial one due to low-level mental activity. The fixed idea exhausting the subject mentally to build a force of new fixed ideas to overwhelm and intimidate the patient. If the patient had severe fixed ideas, long term treatment with a breaking down of the auditory and visual image to attain a level of detachment to prevent an insurmountable build up of fixed ideas and consequently overwhelming the patient. Janet's research on hysteria surmised that it was characterized by a lowered level of mental functioning combined with a narrowing of the field of consciousness and an increased tendency towards dissociation that constitutes the sense of self.

“ Things happen as if an idea, a partial system of thoughts, emancipated itself, became independent and developed itself on its own account. The result is that, on the one hand, that it develops far too much and on the other hand, that consciousness no longer appears to control it. “

(The Major Symptoms Of Hysteria 1906)

Janet's lectures were well received in North and South America which he began touring in 1904 and in 1936 he received an honorary doctorate from Harvard His Harvard lectures were printed in 1908 *The Major Symptoms Of Hysteria* although he never gained full recognition in Europe for his theories, research and contribution to psychiatry and has been comparatively much neglected. At the time of his death Pierre Janet's last work concerned with the psychology of religious belief remains unfinished.

Sightings of apparitions and religious miracles are often attributed to hysteria, and it is a diagnosis that has been applied to a parade of female Saints, witches and mystics In Steven Connors Book *Dumbstruck* he argues,

“ The oracle at Delphi became the point of contact and distinction between the pagan and the Christian, the irrational and the rational, the female and the male, the bodily and the spiritual. The hold that the idea of the oracle took upon the Christian West was determined as much by the parallel relations between woman, utterance, and the body to be found both in pagan divination and in the story of the divine incarnation. In both cases, a woman's body is the mediator of the divine word: in both cases, it appears that a woman's body must speak and yet be silenced in being spoken through. In both cases, the divine word risks partition through being relayed through the vocal body of a woman. As a result of this appalling similarity, the absolute differences between the oracle and the annunciation must be insisted upon The presence from itself to the divine word must be guaranteed by the division between self divided speech (the demonic or frenzied speech of the Pythia) and the self present speech (the pure speech of the prophet, or the divinity itself uttering and outering itself in the form of the effective Word). ”⁷

⁷ Connor S. *Dumbstruck; A Cultural History Of Ventriloquism* Oxford University Press (2009)

*E*CSTASY

St Teresa Of Avila (1515-1582)

St Teresa Of Avila, the mystic, writer and nun expresses her notions on mysticism, devotion and ecstasies in her books, and through them gives great insight on the understandings of subjectivity, the body and sexual difference. She encourages the reader to think outside the restrictive oppositions, the binary differences of body and soul, emotion and reason and offers new alternatives in regard of the language and representation of these characteristics. *The Life Of Teresa Of Jesus; An Autobiography*¹ became an instant bestseller on its publication due to the direct accounts of her experiences of levitation and ecstasies within its pages. From the moment Teresa had her first mystical rapture until the moment she died she lived in fear of the Spanish Inquisition. She was alert to the threat of the Protestant Reformation and the Inquisitors, whom were always on the look out for unorthodox practices, so with tales of levitations reaching the ears of the oppressors, the Catholic Alumbrados (Illuminati) whose practice involved religious rapture and ecstasies over formal prayer, were cautious and fearful. The Illuminati was the name given to Spanish Mystics who appeared in the 16th Century and claimed to have direct intercourse with God. Their doctrine was one of external worship, they declared the reception of the sacraments useless and sin impossible in this state of complete union with Him Who is Perfection Itself, carnal desires maybe indulged and other sinful actions committed freely without staining the soul. The highest perfection attainable by the Christian consists in the elimination of activity, the loss of individuality and complete absorption in God. The Alumbrados were at least three different groups who attracted both educated and uneducated adherents, fiercely persecuted by the Inquisition accused of debauchery and ecstatic worship yet figures such as St. John of The Cross and St.. Teresa was suspected of Illuminism suggesting the proximity of the aims of holy groups in such prominent religious figures of the time.

Teresa de Cepaeda y Ahumadad (1515 – 1582) was born in Gottarrendura Old Castille, and is known by the more famous moniker of St. Teresa of Avila, She is attributed with the honor of being the most prominent Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun, writer of the Counter Reformation and the first of very few women to be awarded a Doctorate of the Church By Pope Paul in 1970, she was canonized in 1662 along with St Catherine of Sienna. Despite enduring hostility, suspicion and criticism in her early pious life from the Church itself, she instigated and formed her own order - The Discalced Carmelites - after trying to address the laxity she had found in her earlier convents as a nun, and through her lifetime she established sixteen convents. St Teresa's paternal grandfather converted to Christianity but was condemned by the Spanish Inquisition for allegedly returning to his Jewish faith. Her parents assimilated successfully into Spanish society with her mother keen to raise Teresa as a devout Christian and her father bought a knighthood.

According to legend, from childhood she along with her brother yearned for the status of Martyrdom, being influenced since a young girl by saint's hagiographies and accounts of martyr's vitae. Apparently gregarious by nature her early life was a dominated by 'distraction and vanity' and she always

¹ *The Life Of Teresa Of Jesus; An Autobiography* (1515 ~ 1582)

considered herself a sinner. After her mother's death she was taught by the Augustine nuns and at the age of twenty secretly left her father's house to join the Carmelites Convent of the Incarnatio at Avila. Whilst there she suffered a severe debilitating illness in which she was rendered paralyzed, losing the use of her legs for three years. During her incarceration she claimed to rise from the lowest stages of "recollection" to the "devotions of silence" or the "devotions of union" which was the state of ecstasy and in this final state she usually had a rich blessing of tears. The "devotions of union" is not only a supernatural but also an essentially ecstatic state, the state is characterized by a blissful state a conscious rapture in the love of God. The last (fourth) state is the "devotion of rapture" in which the consciousness of being and the body disappear.

*"Sense activity ceases; memory and imagination are also absorbed in God or fiery glow, a complete impotence and unconsciousness, and a spell of strangulation, intermitted sometimes by such an ecstatic flight that the body is lifted literally into space. This after half an hour is followed by a reactionary relaxation of a few hours in a swoon – like weakness, attended by a negation of all the faculties in the union with God. From this the subject awakens in tears; it is the climax of mystical experience, productive of the trance".*²

St. Teresa is one of the foremost writers on mystical theology; she always deals with her personal experiences. *"Why bother discussing these interior mercies? I don't know. Ask the men who ordered me to write this. I am under an obligation to obey them and not dispute it"*³

In 1556 a close religious associate convinced St. Teresa that her newfound knowledge was diabolical and not divine, from then on she began to inflict tortures and mortifications on herself and her flesh. In this critical period of her life her confessor St Peter Of Alcantara helped her enormously by his counsel and reassured her of the divine inspiration of her thoughts. Early in her sickness she suffered periods of intense religious ecstasy through the reading of devotional books such as *The Third Spiritual Alphabet (Tercer Abecedario Espiritual 1527)* by Francisco De Osuna which exemplified directions for the examination of the conscious, spiritual concentration and inner contemplation also known as oratio mentalis.

² St. Teresa Of Avila *The Interior Castle* Riverhead Books (2003) PG 255

³ *The Interior Castle* St Teresa Of Avila PG 81

In 1554 she experienced a deep religious conversion and received a profound vision of a “sorely wounded Christ”, from then on her pious life focused in the Passions of Christ, her counselor St Peter of Alcantara encouraged Teresa when she struggled on to have her new order recognized in Rome and Spain.

In 1556 she received apostolic permission for the new foundation of the new convent eventually meeting St John Of The Cross who was to be her confessor. *The Interior Castle, The Way Of Perfection* and *The Life Of Teresa* were produced, a prolific writer and at the command of her confessors (under obedience) she wrote works to assist the nuns with their prayer and for attainment for more holy lives in union with their Saviour. The books were aids to help the meaning and purpose of prayer and initially conceived for her sisters “*We pray to enter a living relationship with Christ Himself.*”⁴ In 1559 Teresa became convinced that Jesus Christ presented himself to her in a bodily form though remaining invisible, and these visions lasted uninterrupted for more than two years. In one vision a seraph drove the fiery point of a golden lance repeatedly through her heart causing her ineffable spiritual bodily pain as portrayed by Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini’s sculpture *The Ecstasy Of St. Teresa* (1647 – 1652). For Teresa prayer was the loving relationship between the soul and God with the attainment of the consciousness of the Divine prescience in one’s life, and for this the soul had to shed its self-awareness and vanity. *The Interior Castle* is concerned with the journey of meeting the Beloved and the subject is required to pass through several chambers before reaching the inner sanctum of Christ. Teresa has gone on to describe this process as a silk worm that must die to become the butterfly

*“ And now let us see what becomes of this silkworm, when it is in this state of prayer, and quite dead to the world, it comes out a little white butterfly. Oh, greatness of God, that a soul should not come out like this after being hidden in the greatness of God, and closely united with Him, for so short a time I tell you truly the very soul does not know itself.”*⁵

Obviously hand in hand with becoming a ‘butterfly’ is obedience, once the soul has decided to deliver itself into the Lord’s hand, the Lord is the guide and subjective will has been negated. At a time when it was especially dangerous for women to profess to and advocate knowledge of Scriptures, she desired to spread the secrets held therein. Teresa had no doubt that the spiritual life had to conform to Scripture, and

⁴ St. Teresa Of Avila *The Interior Castle* Riverhead Books (2003) PG 74

⁵ St. Teresa Of Avila *The Interior Castle* Riverhead Books (2003) PG 55

she believed hers did. *Sin amor todo es nada* (without love everything is nothing) is the maxim of the affective and spiritual life of St. Teresa

Regarding auditory hallucinations there is a history of received voices and generations of religious figures have understood this to be a Divine sonorous experience. In The 16th Century St Teresa Of Avila received

Divine locutions - messages without sound, or any discerning auditory - and argued that the nuns and holy women with more vivid visitations might be best understood as suffering from mental illness, but this may have been a ploy on the part of St Teresa to protect herself and her nuns by heading off the Inquisitors.

Daniel B. Smith questions in his book *Muses Madmen and Prophets; Rethinking The History, Science and Meaning of Auditory Hallucination*⁶ if the muse still *speaks*? He argues that the medical capabilities we have available to us today would dismiss auditory hallucinations by the use of anti- psychotic drugs, and look towards a neurological explanation of received voices rather than the accepted mystical understandings of the voices in our head. This argument extracts St Teresa from her own time – frame context and repositions her in modernity and the case doesn't take into consideration the many conscious literate twists and turns she may have employed to head off her death at the hands of her oppressors. Was the experience of an auditory relationship between St Teresa held dearly and secretively with Her Beloved, an acknowledgement of their inter- visibility?

*“It is actually hard work to put one in a state of weakness. In order to do so, mystics have no shortage of methods; crosses, crucifixions, stigmata, bones that are broken or that become paralyzed, ulcers that flourish and become wormy, even leprosy. One Scarcely knows what to chose as an emblem: Lydwena of Schiedam, Catherine Emmerich, Angela of Foligno, all of whose bodies became blistered, putrefied, bloodied flesh...Such is the extensive register of female Saints in the West, celebrated by adoring writers who were often infuriated and who appeared to be in need of orgasms.”*⁷

Giovanni Bernini 's statue The Ecstasy of St. Teresa (1647 – 1652) was based on the book The Life Of Teresa of Jesus (1515 – 1582) and conveys jouissance as a mode of ascetic pain indistinguishable from pleasure. The work articulates an episode of Divine vision where St. Teresa saw a young beautiful lambent angel standing aside her body. Some critics have explained it as the moment of orgasm or a syncopal religious experience. It is argued Bernini a devout daily churchgoer would never depict such a thing, that it is in fact a portrayal of the transverberation between life and death, matter and spirit. Teresa is represented in the 'Sleep of God', the heavenly encounter with the beatific angel piercing the heart. Bernini manages to express a fusion of physical craving and emotional transcendence. The Divine love between mystery and indecency, the flood of her sensations and the liquid bliss.

⁶ Smith D. *Muses Madmen and Prophets; Rethinking The History, Science and Meaning of Auditory Hallucination*, Penguin Press (2007)

⁷ Bataille G. *Eroticism* Marion Publishers (2006) PG 202

Jouissance is a French term that deals with the enjoyment of privileges and rights and has strong sexual connections but not exclusively so. Jouissance is not simply synonymous with orgasm and quite frequently pleasure can become the obstacle that inhibits the jouissance. It takes the subject beyond ecstasy and can be summed up as an eroticized death, the pleasure principle (jouir -to come). The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has used the term in a masochistic context where the slave provides the object for the master's enjoyment and George Bataille's exploration into female jouissance investigates the relationship between death and mysticism.

Dionysus is the god of syncope; he presides over intoxication ritual madness and ecstasy, the freer of oneself, the liberator, the unrestrained principle force of debauchery with music, wine and madness. The communicator between the living and the dead reveling in his indulgent liminal space of un-classification the neither or nor. In Catherine Clement's book *Jouissances; Between the Angel and The Placenta*,

“Syncope defends its territory by forbidding the ebb and flow..... Remain. From then on, words like ‘life’ and ‘death’ indeed lose their meaning, and we can cry out like St Teresa; ‘I’m dying of not dying.’⁸

Joan Jacobs Brumberg in her book *Fasting Voice; The History Of Anorexia Nervosa* has pointed out, for example, that in the nineteenth century many physicians believed that anorexia in young girls was a hysterical disorder. But the sheer number of hysterics before the middle of this century, and their virtual disappearance from history thereafter, suggests it is perceptions of the pathological character of these women's behavior that have altered, not the behavior itself.

Where have all the (‘hysterical’) flowers gone?

[...]

Where Am I? A question asked by both Catherine Clement in her book on rapture and the question asked by Georges Bataille's protagonist in his short story *Madame Edwarda*. A syncopal state can be brought about by a number of factors, excess emotion, sleep deprivation, emotional distress and the intake of too little food or fluids. Cerebral hypoxia, or syncope is the sudden loss of consciousness caused by lack of oxygen to the brain which result in fainting, falling down and a basic interruption of the mental and physical facilities of performance of the everyday, Symptoms are apparent by hyperventilation, fainting and collapsing, weakness of legs, loss or dimmed vision. Attacks do not last long, but are we to consider death as the extended syncope the immortal interruption? To quote the Bible ‘the dead will rise up’ but from what? The extended suspension of the syncopal episode? At the point of death are we in jouissance as represented by the face of St. Teresa in Bernini's masterpiece *The Ecstasy Of St Teresa*?

⁸ Clement C. *Jouissances; Between the Angel and The Placenta* (1990) PG 195

*E*DWARDA

Madame Edwarda

“ *It would be easy to collect all the accidents of thought, language and deed in Freud’s work, and to include syncope with them as a psychosomatic phenomena, with hysterical origins, rehearsing forever unknowable primal scream* “¹

Post- Modernist French writer and philosopher Georges Bataille (1897-1962), was acutely aware of the liminal space he occupied in literary and philosophical circles of his time; his works are often concerned with questions regarding contemporary understandings of religious mysticism. He published erotic fictions under pseudonyms and quite often his works were banned as in the case of his short story *Madame Edwarda* (1937) in regard of the pornographic content contained within it. He combined his research on the study of the sacred in different religions, alongside the mystical concepts of nihilism and the void. He theorizes on the limitation of mental capabilities, as he strives to capture the inner development of ‘being,’ using the *known* to attempt to convey the *unknown* of higher human experience. He warns that text, the written word, is reductive and subject to verisimilitude and often alerts the reader that he is himself bored with words, he states that they are redundant when trying to convey the experience of an event. Bataille plays with the futility of his media, using the reader as an accessory to the fact. He lures us to ecstasy, which he claims is the sacrifice of the mental and warns there is no ecstasy without fear. He announces we are all tragic in our pursuit of *personal* eroticism, and our refusal to see ourselves ‘in context’ of our being; our historicity; our relationships with each other; yet we are all sub - consciously aware of these deficits but we never fully address them. Consequently we seek to fill the void with power and knowledge, and then the realization that we fear, we actually know *nothing*.

A librarian, pornographer and devout Catholic, Bataille felt personal eroticism was dangerous, but impersonal eroticism was more in accordance with mysticism. For him the sacred was the forbidden elements that exist in the margins of society, the margins that no society can be without. The presence of the sacred was in all the matter that was dispelled, all extreme emotion and non- productive sexuality; anything that constitutes a non- utilitarian quality was sacred. Eroticism itself was an excess of economy and experience of limits, the ‘petit mort’ and death itself the absolute. He is interested in the sacred that implies the self-sacrificial debt to a community or collectivity, the collapsing of the personal. Bataille sought out his sacred eroticism, an eroticism of the non-personal specifically the anonymity of Parisian brothels which, as is widely known he considered to be his ‘church’ He looks for conduits for the primacy of language over experience, and he proffers women as the vessels of the unattainable infinite. Bataille has described his literary work as nearer to theology than to scientific or religious history and argues that “ *all eroticism has a sacramental character* “²

¹ Catherine Clement *French Feminists On Religion* Routledge Publishing (2002) PG 195

² Burrus V *The Sex Lives Of The Saints* University Of Pennsylvania Press 2008 PG 16

“ I drew near her; she seemed gone out of her mind, some foreign existence, the creature apparently of another world and, in the streets of this one, less than a phantom, less lingering than a mist. Softly she withdrew before me until in her retreat she touched against a table on the empty terrace. A little noise. As if I had waked her, in a lifeless voice she inquired; ‘Where Am I?’

Madame Edwarda

And so utters the words of the post orgasmic Madame Edwarda the anti-heroine of Georges Bataille's (under the moniker Pierre Angelique – suspiciously close to Pierre Janet), novelette of the same name. Where Am I? The question also asked by the French Feminist Catherine Clement in her book *Syncope; the Philosophy of Rapture* explaining returning from syncope of jouissance (of which I will speak later) when she questions *where* does one go? Georges Bataille's controversial pornographic short story in which Madame Edwarda a largely silent insane prostitute in a Parisian Brothel displays her genitals to the narrator and proclaims herself to be God and this proclamation is immediately followed by an orgasm! She is cast as a nymphomaniac, a sexual vampire without personal attachment to anyone just an eternal search for the next phallus, and then the one after that, only to be left glazed and empty until her hungry genitals are satiated. She abuses the jouissance until it leads to her “death”, spent *she is excess*. Eroticism is she and Bataille's form of expenditure it goes beyond its ‘useful’ value, it is non-reproductive impersonal sex multiplied by itself infinite It is the excess, and as Madame Edwarda spills her sex onto the Parisian pavements she immediately regurgitates and replenishes a newborn hunger of the genitals and has to feed again, The horror of this infinite limitlessness as she becomes divisible by nothing Bataille explains in the preface;

‘ If we are to follow all the way through till its last ecstasy in which we lose ourselves in love play, we have got constantly to bear in mind what we set as ecstasy's immediate limit: horror. Not only can the pain I or others feel, drawing me closer where joy slips into delirium: but when horror is unable to quell, to destroy the object that it attracts, then horror increases the objects power to charm”

Madame Edwarda is a composition where the prostitute's heart gives way, but to what? Resistance is what is redundant, it is excruciating erotic pleasure in amplification without religion or with too much religion too much ecstasy where boundaries are shattered and annihilation is defined. Madame Edwarda is a narrative with a host of problems attached to it, it deals with excess and mortality and the complacency in which we frenziedly dance toward our own death. It abhors and intrigues in equal measure and leaves itself open to be dismissed as a piece of literary pornography taken to its silliest extreme, self consciously controversial whilst attempting a laissez faire relationship with its reader. But I have been drawn back to

this text and there is a feeling Bataille is trying to get the reader to understand something greater than the semiotic on the page. In many cases throughout the preface of the story he is burdened with the word, the word is not light enough for him to convey that which he desires, or maybe it is too light. Never the less he carries on laboriously always warning the reader that words are not enough that there is a secret that he may or may not reveal, and would his penned word do his secret justice anyhow? It is left to the reader to decide if he inadvertently reveals the secret by the omission of actual type.

Madame Edwarda attempts to own a mystical state through sexual intercourse although one is never sure if she has been entered and possessed by an entity or if she undertakes this willingly. She seems to be in a permanent syncopal state, a genital hunger, painted as a hysteric with an emaciated body, she careers from one sexual encounter to the other toward the state of annihilation of the self, paradoxically a state of achievement Christian mystics hope to attain. Virtually silent throughout the narrative her proclamation that she is God is shocking on many levels. The content is grotesque and libidinous in its explicitness. It screams of blasphemy yet it demands a close reading and a cross pollination with mystical takes on holy ecstasies, and poses a spiritualistic question devoid of materialism. It is Dionysian in its intoxicated ecstatic state of which the active protagonist never seems to fully recover and exemplifies the dangers of the never-ending state of syncope jouissance, Whilst the narrator and therefore the reader are compliant, implicated even drunk on the sexual waste; the taboos; the impulse; the eventual ecstasy and the dregs of action within the narrative. Is this the extraneous sticky viscosity of jouissance, the left afterbirth of the event? The sacred abject that Georges Bataille proselytizes?

'Why,' I stammered in a subdued tone, 'why are you doing that?' 'You can see for yourself,' she aid, 'I'm GOD.' 'I'm going crazy –' 'Oh, no you don't, you've got to see, look . . .' Her harsh, scraping voice mellowed, she became almost childlike in order to say, with a lassitude, with the infinite smile of abandon: *'Oh, listen, fellow! The fun I've had . . .'* Madame Edwarda

There is more to fathom from the depths of Madame Edwarda's *engastrimythic* voice³ this voice of the obvious deluded hysteric. The declaration that Edwarda thinks she is God stops this female reader in her tracks, There must be more, this is the excess so I must work forward or backwards to the secret Bataille may or may not reveal? I found it hidden in the preface.

³ The inflamed and disconnected uterus suffocating and choking the patient. Engastrimythic comes from the Greek word gaster belly and muthos speech belly speech like the Latin ventriloquism ventor belly loqui speech It refers to speaking without speech and is especially associated with Pythia or women who acted as conduits for the voice of someone beyond the grave. The belly seems to be a euphemism and is infact thought of as the genital voice. It was usually linked to demonic possession or religious frenzy. As in Madame Edwarda's act of frenzied sex.

“Edwarda’s sufferings dwelt in me like the quick truth of an arrow; one knows it will piece the heart, but death will ride in with it. As I waited for annihilation, all that subsided in me seemed to me to be the dross over which man’s life tarries”

Madame Edwarda

Could this be the same arrow from the cherubic that brought the ecstatic jouissance to St Teresa? .

“ I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual; though the body has its share in it. It is a caressing of love so sweet which now takes place between the soul and God, that I pray God of His Goodness to make him experience it who may think I was lying’⁴

I have no need to try to sanitize Madame Edwarda or strip her of her possessed sexuality, only to compare and contrast her to St Teresa for the purpose of this paper and their superfluity of the ecstatic state. Both subjects held hostage by the jouissance syncope, the ‘non – limit’, from seemingly opposite ends of the sexual spectrum, the immoral and sacrosanct yet dealing with the same ecstatic currency. St Teresa in ascetic frugality the other Madame Edwarda in ubiquitous futility.

Female Martyrs; The Early Years Tony Finlay describes the prevailing sexual climate in early Rome, at a time when most martyrdom took place, and declares pornography was well accepted by both ‘high’ and ‘low’ echelons of the community. An age of bare breasted or diaphanous clad female gladiators and public executions of female criminals of which Christianity was a crime. With an exhaustive litany of barbaric punishments administered to women Christians he concludes,

“ Often the women were not put to death but were threatened (or sentenced) to rape or placed in a brothel. Thus the threat of violation and so-called judges, rather than a death sentence often resorted to sexual sadism. Tortures of a basically sexual nature were resorted to in many cases. Spread-eagling,

⁴St. Teresa of Avila Chapter xxix; Part 13, Life Of Teresa of Jesus

suspending a victim by one foot or leg, stripping and exposing to public gaze, cutting off breasts were some devices” ⁵

Finlay explains that female martyrdoms were as copious as men's but never received the same attention. Could Bataille be following the daughters of daughters of subjection with Madame Edwarda the female martyrs who escaping death had to live their lives in a brothel. Most female martyrs had taken strict vows of chastity and were determined to protect this at all costs. In the brothel the oppressors and repressors would have violently violated their abstinence. Looking at hagiographies and martyrologies the female voice is habitually aphonic, their vita translated by confessors and through obedience; authenticity of the sonorous female is questionable. But Bataille gives his heroine a monumental irreverent line, that *she* is God albeit that Bataille is the ventriloquist. Is Georges Bataille attempting to go back the hundreds of years to the matriarchal ancestors of Edwarda? The female martyrs of a mythical lineage related to his fictitious heroine, the martyrs whose exuberance of passion (*passio*) for the Divine Union with The Beloved was surfeit of mortal life itself? Did the excess of the starving mutilated female body turn into the fact to the word, the male scribed hagiography? The passionate death of the lamentable female who attains re - birth through the immortalization of the hagiographic text, but who forever remains mute?

“ It is not for nothing that hagiography turns sickly stench into the smell of roses, and excrement into cinnamon; that is precisely what syncope avoids and resolves”.⁶

Hagiographic books and texts were an important tool for bringing the lives and miracles of Saints to the illiterate public, Christian hagiography concentrates on the notable miracles of women and men who were canonized by the Church and those who were believed to be imbued with the sacred. It is considered an important literary genre and it is an uncritical reverential account of the Saints lives that can be traced, back to the 4th Century. Hagiographies consist of a *vita* (brief biography) an *acta* (used for the retelling of an individuals holy deeds) or a *passio* (which relays the account of the Saints Martyrdom). In the Middle Ages hagiographic narratives belonging to male and female Saints concentrated on the accounts leading up to and including the Saints deaths but there is an obvious gender difference in the retelling of these lives. Male Saints are recorded as bestowing cures and are frequently depicted during public decapitation, followed by an immediate removal of the body, Female Saints are depicted as both receiving miracles and

⁵ <http://tonyfinlay.co.uk/FemaleMartyrsChapter2.htm>

⁶ Catherine Clement Syncope; *The Philosophy Of Rapture* PG 43

cures, and suffering deaths of mutilation and tortures signaling the prevalent thought of corrupt female flesh. In Catherine Mooney's *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* she states,

*"Whether we speak of officially designated sancti or of those revered locally without papal canonization, there is no Saint without an audience"*⁷

Mooney argues that hagiography has been a microcosm of the study of European history explaining that there is a question regarding the 'linguistic turn' which raises the insistent problem of 'voice and perspective' and which of course produces a two fold problem of historical context and individual perspective. Considerations of issues such as ventriloquism; meaning and translation between genders (often these tales are told through a male confessor or under duress of some sorts so that the actual tonality of the female speaker is lost forever) so we often get a male account. Differentiating the differences between the voice of the hagiographer and Saint is difficult even when gender is not an issue.

Hagiographical texts will first tell us about their place in the world, from whence they came, their context, and within this is the interpretive use and misuse of the human recorder and the inherent problems associated with collaborations on texts. In the book *The Sex Lives Of The Saints; An Erotics Of Ancient Hagiography* author Virginia Burrus quotes the literary critic Geoffrey Galt Harpham,

*'Hagiographical narrative can thus by no means be simply identified with the interests of a phallic subjectivity, for example; "For within its fascinated concentration on the masculine, hagiography focuses on the doubling and self- subversion of the subject, in which it ceaselessly discovers gaps of concentration or desire. In other words, hagiography both establishes the masculine program and destabilizes it, 'feminizing' the subject by exposing its enigmas of desire even the 'masochism' of its rigors"*⁸

Is Georges Bataille casting himself as hagiographer (confessor) to a fictitious nymphomaniac, zombified by sexual saturation and tracing a fabricated lineage to female martyrdom, and the chaste unfortunates criminalized and thrown in brothels for their Christianity? Is this his linguistic turn, his secret, to correlate Madame Edwarda to St. Teresa skewered together by the spear in their excess jouissance?

⁷ Catherine Mooney *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* PG 10

⁸ Geoffrey Galt Harpham *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, Chicago: Chicago Press (1987) PG 81.

L A.RAEVEN & *M* ARIA ABRAMOVIC

L.A. Raeven & Maria Abramovic
Wild Zone 1 & 11 & Freeing The Voice

L.A. Raeven

Wild Zone 1 & 11 2002 Performance

Identical twins Liesbeth and Angelique Raeven (b 1971) are Dutch artists who form a collaborative artistic practice under the single moniker L.A.Raeven. Their work engages with themes such as dependability on the other / another and extreme thinness, which in turn opens up the vast obsessive abyss of debilitating co-dependency and self inflicted starvation. Their work sets out to question the intolerable measures women in the West place on themselves in pursuit of the perfect body and the idealization of the “soul mate” togetherness and compatibility; all seemingly attainable entitlements (prizes) when gorging oneself on the omnipresent self help literature and imagery of editorials and media, inflating around the cornea and blinding the peripheral and central vision of the female viewer during what can be for some the perilous transition into womanhood. Their video installations addresses the societal influences and insecurities inflicted on women and the subsequent persistently damming interior monologue regarding such issues. L.A.Raeven make a visual plea for a moderation of the societal judgmental voice, to reappraise the viewer’s questions as they present us with their skeletal unspeaking bodies. They themselves are objectified and so the works turns in on itself and then horrendously back out again, challenging the viewer’s own inherent judgmental character. (Playing with the twin analogies they work on themes of beauty, and their place in society as a double, they expose themselves as structures exaggerated and with the problematic task of building a childhood identity).

With their anorectic frame, co-joined in their hunger, captured within the frame of the screen and contained within the space of the gallery – such neatly packaged containment – the artist(s) have found themselves to be icons on pro ana web sites, sites that promote anorexia as ‘ life style choice’. Twins are so often associated with cuteness, “oh how do we tell them apart in their same pink dresses?” But giving in to the separateness they collapse into their oneness physically and literally become the singular face of their own affliction – but still how can you tell them apart? Pro- ana - the bodies without a voice, the bodies that are always being silenced by science and medicine, the skeletal bodies of mutes, devoid of a voice within society and in any case without an ear to listen.

The anorexics opinion is always struck through, scribbled out as the tide of medical knowledge tells her about herself. The anorexic disappearing from the world both physically in the amount of space she takes up and vocally as she gets drowned out by remedies and cures. Is this the metaphor for obsessional love as we sacrifice our own identity and collapse into the other, packing away ourselves into someone else for

them to disappear later in the future taking us voluntarily with them to nothingness? Isn't the very state of nothingness the key to the full life led? If at the end we are left with our full rotund cherubic being, obese with the fat of ourselves, isn't that a tragic life, suffocating in our own mental morbid obesity? Where is the line? The line that stops us going too far, the line that stays on the right side of divine and doesn't venture to the diabolical, the line that gives and in the same measure accepts? Are the questions being ripped out of the skinny throats that ask them and then being trodden on by the weighty authoritarian tones of political correctness and medical discourse? The artist(s) incredulously deny having an eating disorder and they take on the well-worn feminist adage "personal is political". Reductive knee-jerk reactions to the corporeal condition of the artist(s) hinder the intention of the installations whilst at the same time being integral to the message it aims to convey. Its complicated, but emotive allegations regarding the physical and mental states of the artist(s) is throwing the baby out with the bathwater, and insistently and arrogantly ignoring its cries to be heard in the process.

In 2002 London's Institute Of Contemporary Art staged an exhibition of the work of L.A. Raeven. The large video installations titled Wild Zone 1 and Wild Zone 2 had already been exhibited in their native Holland and this was the first time the twins had used themselves in this work. In Wild Zone 1 the twins stare out at the viewer emaciated, their hard brittle bones against the harsh concrete of the gallery space. Expressionless with half drunk glasses of wine they intermittently feed one another half of a cracker. The religious implications of a Christian Mass do not need to be over stated here, although the use of bread would most definitely be a forbidden food (white carbohydrates which, along with potatoes are the devils own food according to most contemporary magazines,) -and the similarities to Saints claiming to live off the Eucharist and wine alone. As the potent smell of chrism perpetuates the architectural space of the church L.A.Raeven infuse their temporal space with the aroma of urine (their own), emulating and subversing the sophisticated olfactory seduction technique employed to snare shoppers in luxurious shops. If public art galleries are the new Churches as claimed by David Hickey in his excellent Four Essays On Beauty L.A.Raeven seem to be putting themselves forward as the contemporary saints. With the sacrifice and starvation, they are simply following the book of how to be a saint in the contemporary world and if there was such a book they are following it to its frightening denouement chasing their own media martyrdom. But what is their jouissance, their rapture? It is the notoriety and fame, the controversial shock value of what they are / they present in their art. They are getting rid of the word and if the word is flesh and they intentionally or unintentionally corrupt that flesh are they already anticipating the negation of their message? Is the public questioning of their presence in their own artwork the full stop as opposed to the question mark?

In their video installation questions are posed regarding the exposure of the structure of responsibility for the exaggerated cult of the body and the increase in eating disorders, the diminishment of flesh from the female history. But where does this excess flesh go *to*? It transfers into words, column inches, critical pieces and medical reports. This surplus extraneous flesh becomes the word, it transforms into a series of linguistic and semiotic objects.

Wild Zone 1 and Wild Zone 2 are successful as performance pieces regardless or in spite of or because of waist measurements of the perpetrators. Like hunger strikers the message is loud and clear, “we want to live but not by your ideologies but your same ideologies require us to live”. In Barry Scwabsky’s 2002 Artforum article he states, “I’ve often been bored looking at art in a gallery, but I don’t remember ever before experiencing a work that seemed bored with me.”

“Who Am I? This, there, written in black on white, fragile and this is my body, has taken the place of my body frail.....I eat my work and from it; I drink the streaming production daily.”¹

Women have been the site of contestation, objectified without voice, a vessel for the receivership of the hungry female form, a mirroring of societies expectations, not the screaming mass media portrayals of the western females war on food but the emaciation inscribed on the female body throughout history.

Maria Abramovic

Freeing The Voice 1976 Performance

In this performance piece by the artist Maria Abramovic the artist’s head fills the screen, albeit upside down, as she reclines on a bed, head cast backwards so the viewer is confronted with the mouth at the top of the face and the hair hanging down. There is a childlike play in the unfamiliar placement of regular physiognomy. The mouth, agape, an aperture of which emits noise, invites you to lose yourself within the nonsensical, exhausted bellow, long and inconsistent through exhaustion. An interrupted wordless scream. The logical conclusion is that after a time the voice will be lost, but will it die and if so what remains after its internment into the atmosphere? Will there be the mute corpus, uncommunicative, deplete who speaks volumes, stripped of opinion but loaded with meaning inscribed on the air?

“If you have to lay yourself bare, then you cannot play with words, trifle with slow-marching sentences. Should no one unclothe what I have said, I shall have written in vain”.

Madame Edwarda

The scream itself seems genderless and is left to roam unsupervised by formulaic, prescribed language devoid of intonation and tonality. Originally a cry for help building to a crescendo of hysteria then faltering to an absence and converting to deep breathing. The voice turns into fierce opponent strangulating by exhaustion its own corporeal abode. The mouth, a void, refuses to be a compliant feature of communication anymore; it reveals itself to be a black hole screaming of its possession by a fleshy body, begging to break free from its carnal chains. These two separate entities are vying for control, one in the death throes, the final swan song. But is the death written on the flesh or inscribed in the exhalation? Is the physical frame deflating through the aperture? Mediated obviously by exaltation and inhalations of the artist’s breath it is without further outside interruption as it crosses boundaries of human endurance and imagined phantasmagorical qualities. The composition of the piece is of the artist on her

back on the bed which assumes a submissive role, not one that is dominated within the frame of an aggressive Other, but highlights the pivotal role of the voice in a master slave scenario. Not tied down by meaning, semiotic, coherent language, the sound mocks sonorous hierarchies. With continuous reverberation, resonance flows through pitch, but its message does not attach itself to a prescribed language, but neither is it purely animalistic, it is uncanny. How often do these opportunities for freeing the voice for the sake of it arise? How often do we let the voice escape without the weight of melody or message? In Steven Connors book *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* he talks about the way a baby's cry, a cry of anguish in search of food, is a drawing apart of the suffering to be re-invested into the body of the voice,

“This exercise both contains the suffering, and violently prolongs it, since its strategy and effect are to tear the voice out of the body, and to turn the voice on itself. Eventually, if left for too long, a hungry baby will become lost in and for a time inseparable from its own desperation, having surrendered its own body with its once- satisfiable needs to the appalling, ecstatically sundered body constituted and consumed by the conflagration of its own screaming voice.’²

This noise that Abramovic expresses, neither joy nor pain nor both, is telling the viewer something regarding their early vocalic experience of the world. This noise is on our auditory landscape either a priori as an infant or empirical *auditio (n)*. This hum, scream, mutter and mumblings, this buzz of our being is negating the semiotic importance of self-conscious meaning. Abramovic puts her body to the test, by pushing both the physical and mental capabilities to their exhaustive limits she lets nothingness enter her, mind and body emptied into the surrounding space. The scream has taken her conscious being with it, she has sacrificed her voice and endurance to let something else in, something which negates materialism. There is nothing left to consume, she is spent, the voice once lost now dead. There is vocal agitation, hysteria pacified by exhaustion, and the silence of nothingness that hangs ominously between viewer and artist is heavy with notions of the ineffability of language, the failure of formed words and sentences that lead us to nothing. This residue of sound fills the space independently. We are not in possession of the language that could answer questions posed by the corporeal body. There is just an awareness of the transference of energy between the artist and viewer.

“When you are screaming in this way, without interruption, at first you recognize your own voice, but later when you are pushing against your own limits, the voice turns into a sound object”³

There is a special relationship between acknowledgement, invitation, surveillance and implication from the artist, the audience and the sound object. The inter play of reversals between object and subject and the question of the title *Freeing The Voice*. Does freeing the voice submit the body or does it free the body of the voice therefore liberating the voice? In the minor architecture of space between viewer and artist these questions resonate in the place where the scream was audible, replacing it with the contemplation of its silence and absence. The switching off of consciousness to let something less prescriptive infiltrate and permeate. Ritual, discipline and purification are the main stays of Abramovic's work and similarities can

be drawn between her and the female Medieval Saints suffering from Anorexia Mirabilis, pushing against the physical limits of starvation, initially aware of their own bodies and the hunger but challenging their own bodily limits, the subjects body must be objectified by the subject.

In her *House With The Ocean View*, (interestingly the term 'oceanic' was used by St Teresa to describe her ecstasies) a 2002 performance piece, the artist had three raised open rooms constructed in the Sean Kelly Gallery New York, complete with plumbing so that every nuance of her day could be displayed including showering. The rooms were bare and minimal and she intended to spend twelve days without food, speech or privacy. Only water was allowed to pass her lips. Spectators had the added advantage of high-powered telescopes that could virtually count the hairs on one eyebrow but limited to approximately an inch of the body at a time. Spectators had full access to her presence, her image, but were denied her sound. Ladders were propped up against the three elevated ledges as the only means of escape, but the crux here was that the rungs consisted of butchers knives so any escape would be excruciatingly painful and without a doubt bloody. Abramovic stayed for the duration of the twelve days in silent, standing, dignified contemplation whose only communication was eye contact with the audience who came in droves to see the spectacle. Some approached with reverence some with aggression and subject/ object mirrored each other's moods. It was commented that there was a pilgrimage and reverence from the spectators as most watched the dignified self-starver standing in silence, meeting their gaze with hers. By day eight of the fast her body will have been devouring her own muscle. For the sake of artistic exchange her work includes the spectacle as she pushes her body and mind to their limits and the event is not merely orchestrated to be viewed and consumed, it is about instigating an interaction between the artist and viewer on the nature of spectacle and giving rise to questions of morality, physicality, personal religiosity and politics. Her ocean, it transpires, is viewed within the sea of faces that come to the gallery to participate and observe. She has access to the ocean of response and the thoughts of her audience by observing comments and the looks on her sea of faces.

Both with L.A.Raeven and Marina Abramovic it is their virtually wordless performances, their presentation of the 'vulnerable' corpus, set within the gallery arena, which therefore becomes the public domain that challenges us. What questions are raised today about self-voluntary hunger set in an art / performance context using the space of the white cube? Is the gaze of the Other the jouissance for these artists? Hunger in the West is usually presented as the hunger striker or the Martyr. Both have very different motives but it is not for lack of food that these people die, they die of their own lethal will. It is the will that eats away at the body. In the case of the hunger striker it is the oppressors food that is refused which then brings about the irony of the oppressor attempting to keep the prisoner alive when they had initially set out to destroy them. With the disappearance altogether of the subject under the oppressors regime the Martyr gives up what they consider most precious, the body. They do not seek death directly but this is the consequence of their action. Neither group sets out to wage war against food, cuisine is not the oppressor. These dreams mirror one another coalescing and disbanding, with their never-ending repertoire of unsaid words and undevoured food.

*“The mouths that lick their lips and move their jaws are also squirming with unspoken sentences, and it is impossible to say which is the greater agony; to be unfed or to be unheard.”*⁴

*

Andrea Byrne ~ 2009

¹ Ellman M. *The Hunger Artists Starving Writing And Imprisonment* Virago Press 1993 pg 26

² Connor S. *Dumbstruck; A Cultural History Of Ventriloquism* Oxford University Press (2000) pg 405

³ (<http://montevideo.nl/art/php?id=4457>)

⁴ Ellmann M. *The Hunger Artists; Starving Writing and Imprisonment* Virago Press (pg 95)