Louise Bourgeois *Le mot pitié m'a apaisée*, 2002
Fabric (Lithography with red thread additions), sheet: 13 1/4 x 10 1/2" (33.7 x 26.7 cm)
Collection: Museum of Modern Art, NY. Photo: Christopher Burke

Desidero, for the Love of the Thing and the Word

Shanna Carlson de la Torre

In this essay, I consider art pieces that I read as giving expression to the kinds of problems feminine subjects can encounter in engaging in the work of femininity, which I define as the articulation of the drive with aesthetics. Opening a feminine approach to the question of the "duty"[1] of the analysand, to come to be where "it" was ("*Wo es war, soll Ich werden*"),[2] these pieces shed light on logical moments a feminine subject can confront in an analysis, providing no model for how a given subject may traverse those moments, but elucidating in their own terms[3] the conversions[4] some feminine subjects operate at the risk, otherwise, of

1 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 7.

2 Sigmund Freud, quoted in Lacan, *Ethics*, 7. The essay's title also makes reference to this formulation: if the subject is to come to be where it was, it does so by way of desire. Lacan writes that "*Desidero* is the Freudian *cogito*" (Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, trans. Alan Sheridan [New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998], 154).

3 Here I am inspired by Fernanda Negrete's *The Aesthetic Clinic: Feminine Sublimation in Contemporary Writing, Psychoanalysis, and Art* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), as when she explains: "Throughout this book, I have insisted that an artwork establishes its own reading conditions and constraints; in order to welcome its transmission of sensation, one must learn, each time, how to read beyond the effort at retrieving meaning, according to the work's singularity" (258).

4 Here I am inspired by Jamieson Webster's *Conversion Disorder: Listening to the Body in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

being worked over from within by the ravages of the death drive.

Turning to a piece of fabric art by Louise Bourgeois, Robert Eggers' film *The VVitch: A New England Folktale*, and the life work of medieval mystic Marguerite Porete, I argue that these examples bring into relief key logical moments in feminine experience.[5] Specifically, Bourgeois' fabric piece and Eggers' film, I propose, illustrate what is at stake in the surge of the superego that can arise when a subject asks herself what she wants, and the surge of the jouissance of the Other that can accompany the failure of seduction. Marguerite's life work, I propose, illustrates what is at stake in a third logical moment, specifically, the surge of the free drives and access to the Other jouissance (or feminine jouissance) that accompanies the fall of the Other, where what is at stake is the discovery that the Other is radically absent and the corresponding assumption of subjective desire. The beauty of interest to me springs from this work of articulating the drive with aesthetics. While each example is thus concerned with femininity, Marguerite — who was burned at the stake because of her refusal to stop distributing her book *The Mirror of Simple Souls* — provides a particularly stirring example of how far a subject can go in transforming such work into an enterprise.

As provisional definitions for concepts that inevitably, and fortunately, exceed their frames, I propose to define the feminine as the experience of the drive in the body; recall that for Jacques Lacan, all drives are the death drive. I would further like to define femininity as a work at articulating the drive within us with aesthetics, thus an articulation that originates within a beyond that exists within each one of us. Finally, I would like to define the Thing as that bit of the real at work in the body seeking expression. And I hope to elucidate such formulations as the failure of seduction, the jouissance of the Other, and Other

5 While masculine subjects too may confront each of these logical moments, I focus on feminine subjectivity here because I am interested in how those subjects in the symbolic without limit access femininity in traversing such moments.

or feminine jouissance — each of which I take up following from the metapsychologies founded and renewed by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Willy Apollon — with the help of the examples that follow.

"Pure culture of the death [drive]" — Sigmund Freud

"The analyst must not judge, never interpret. Interpreting is giving a signifier. Morality is forbidden in the site of analysis." — Willy Apollon

Femininity and the Thing have been linked in psychoanalytic theory and practice since Freud's first forays into the territory of those "childhood impulses towards incest which persist in the unconscious";[6] recall Jocasta's words to her son Oedipus, cited by Freud, "'Many a man ere now in dreams hath lain / With her who bare him.'"[7] She adds, forebodingly, and comically, "'He hath least annoy / Who with such omens troubleth not his mind.'"[8] Freud and Lacan, heeding her words as analysts do, will of course take up that unique trouble and augment it, "fe[eding] with blood the shades that [...] emerge[ ]" from *The Interpretation of Dreams*.[9]

When Lacan introduces his concept of the Thing in *Seminar VII*, he states his intention of building from Freud's progress in the field of ethics: while other approaches to ethics concern themselves with "the field of the ideal, if not of the unreal," Lacan notes that he "will proceed instead from the other direction, by going more deeply into the notion

6 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 281.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid. Lacan would go on to elucidate that, in formulations like Jocasta's, the Mother is the Thing, a point to which I'll return when discussing Eggers' film (*Ethics*, 67).
9 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 32.

of the real."[10] Patients entering analysis, Lacan explains, arrive with a question that goes to the heart of the "moral experience" they are living, and whose trajectory Freud maps thusly: *Wo es war, soll Ich werden* (Where it was, I shall come to be).[11] The real is here upon arrival—that "accomplice of the drive"[12] that Freud revealed to be, in Lacan's words, "originally unwelcome,"[13] structuring the patient's experience, her successes and her ills, her "I" and her flights from the social as such — or, as Christopher Meyer has noted, "The end of the analysis was already spoken in the first session; but you couldn't know that."[14] Underscoring the ethical dimension of a patient's demand for analysis, Apollon notes that "[a] patient comes to ask for a psychoanalysis because something is undermining his life from within, something that science — and in particular medicine or psychiatry — is unable to address."[15] Neither can the patient address it — that is, she cannot address it to anyone, for there is no Other who can receive it. It's not for nothing, however, that it can't be addressed to anyone or, indeed, cured; in the course of an analysis, that real that has been undermining the patient's life from within will become, Apollon writes, "something without which his very existence would no longer matter to him."[16]

10 Ibid, 11.
11 Freud, qtd. by Lacan, *Ethics*, 7.
12 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 69.
13 Ibid.
14 Christopher Meyer, "The Graphs of Desire, Desire, and Its Interpretation" (Seminar Lecture, the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis, Online, January 11, 2020). It's important to underline that this statement applies to the end, but not the term, of an analysis: the end and the term constitute two different logical moments of a cure, and the latter involves a creation that constitutively could not have been spoken at the beginning of one's analysis.
15 Willy Apollon, "Psychoanalysis and the Freudian Rupture," trans. Tracy McNulty, *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2017): 8.
16 Willy Apollon, "The Untreatable," trans. Steven Miller, *Umbr(a): A Jour-*

Perhaps counterintuitively, the drive brings us to the question of "I"; Lacanian psychoanalysis maintains that identity is repression, yet there is "I" — it's just that "I" is not that. Lacan explains in *Seminar XI*: "It is in so far as the drive is evidence of the forcing of the pleasure principle that it provides us with evidence that beyond the *Real-Ich*, another reality intervenes, and we shall see by what return it is this other reality, in the last resort, that has given to this *Real-Ich* its structure and diversification."[17] In *Seminar VII*, he outlines:

> That 'I' which is supposed to come to be where 'it' was, and which analysis has taught us to evaluate, is nothing more than that whose root we already found in the 'I' which asks itself what it wants. It is not only questioned, but as it progresses in its experience, it asks itself that question and asks it precisely in the place where strange, paradoxical, and cruel commands are suggested to it by its morbid experience.
>
> Will it or will it not submit itself to the duty that it feels within like a stranger, beyond, at another level? Should it or should it not submit itself to the half-unconscious, paradoxical, and morbid commands of the superego, whose jurisdiction is moreover revealed increasingly as the analytical exploration goes forward and the patient sees that he is committed to its path?
>
> If I may put it thus, isn't its true duty to oppose that command?[18]

Lacan articulates here that the root of the "I" which comes to be where "it" was, is the "I" that asks itself what it wants. In so doing, "I" likely encounters the superego, whose "strange, paradoxical, and cruel com-

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nal of the Unconscious: Incurable (2006): 25-26.

17 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 184.

18 Lacan, *Ethics*, 7.

mands" intervene and intercede, answering what "it" wants by way of the formulations found in the conscious and unconscious expressions of parental dissatisfaction — "the ways in which they have been blocked in their desire"[19] — that have been "heard," as it were, by the child. Freud proposed that the superego is "always close to the id," that it "reaches deep down into the id and for that reason is farther from consciousness than the ego is."[20] Danielle Bergeron concurs, noting that the parts of the superego that are not named — formed not by words said by caregivers but through "gestures, reactions, faces they do, or things they do that say something else than what they say" — are "more difficult to work through in an analysis."[21]

For it is precisely because the superego is bound up in the drive that it surges there where the "I" asks itself what it wants, attempting thereby to waylay the beautiful, precipitous encounter with unconscious desire by tying the subject to the suffering — and the satisfactions — of repression instead. About this "Sadean master," the superego, Anne Dufourmantelle writes:

> This Sadean master decides what is true and what isn't, doable or not... In the name of what we should be — or worse: should have been…Trying to convince oneself that this really is about fate… The psychoanalyst hears this lack of gentleness. On what shore must we stand in order to believe that we can change what is called 'fatality'? The perception of gentleness comes afterward. A boundary breached, a death overcome, a forbidden border stepped over, shamelessly...It is a state of

19 Danielle Bergeron, "The Symptom Gives Access to the Fantasy" (Training Seminar, Groupe interdisciplinaire freudien de recherche et d'intervention clinique et culturelle, Québec, May 30, 2018).
20 Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, ed. James Strachey and trans. Joan Riviere (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1960), 49.
21 Bergeron, "The Symptom Gives Access to the Fantasy," May 30, 2018.

grace that doesn't last. But regardless, it will have taken place.[22]

How indeed can we change such fatality, exchanging that death for another wherein the drive is free? Whether it happens in an instant or unfolds within a logic of becoming, calling for renewal unto the end, this work — of boundaries breached, deaths overcome, and forbidden borders shamelessly stepped over — is the very material of transformative transgression — transformations, moreover, that become discernible after the fact, in their effects — a point worth underlining as it signals that it is not so much conscious intentionality that sees such traversals through, but unconscious agency accompanied by the ethics of speech, or the continuing election to go on speaking and to go on listening to what is said and to what cannot be said. I see maneuvers in the service of such transformation, as well as an expression which itself constitutes such a transgression, in a piece of fabric art by Louise Bourgeois,[23] where she has lithographed, on what appears to be a dish towel, the sentence "*Le mot pitié m'a apaisée*," or, roughly, "The word pity soothed me." The words here, in red, are broken by bright and pale blue lines, the dyed design of the dish towel. They are spare, appearing in alternating squares. The alternating square pattern keeps the sentence slow and open, even measured, and there are more blank squares than written ones, by which Bourgeois essentially creates space — for desire. *Pitié*, *apaisée*, *mot*, *m'a*: to my ear, it's a light rhyme for a heavy day. And since it's inscribed on a daily rag (or a rag for the uses of the day, as it were), it's as though the news every day is of the drive — not only those days one is "on the rag," and not only in those bodies that experience menstruation. And since the daily rag is a dish towel made art, it exemplifies for me that what the drive wants, every day, is not so much a cleaning but a writing, some play of the signifier — not (just)

22 Anne Dufourmantelle, *Power of Gentleness: Meditations on the Risk of Living*, trans. Katherine Payne and Vincent Sallé (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 79-80.
23 Editor's note: See the image at the beginning of this essay.

pity but "*le mot pitié*" — as well as some creation — maybe the creation of a sentence, or maybe the creation of a red sentence lithographed on a blue-lined towel. These are blood colors, blood in the body and blood out, oxygenated, allowed to breathe. In short, it wants some work of femininity.

Part of the uniqueness of psychoanalysis is that it posits that the very possibility of that work comes from the "letters of the body," Apollon's term for the sites of the body that have been inscribed by unbearable, originary traumas; the letters of the body inaugurate the singular sensibility and singular aesthetic of the subject.[24] In an analysis, these letters are mobilized by the analyst's desire to know, so that the analysand can construct some knowledge as to what is at work in her body and seeking expression in her symptoms, dreams, fantasies, lapses, crises, repetitions, failed acts, losses, illnesses, successes, creations, desires, and acts. This knowledge comes from the unconscious, and it reaches an impassable limit, a limit that progressively takes form as a reef beyond which the "out-of-language"[25] acts.

To take one step more, then: what the drive "wants" is to create, unboundedly, from the other side of that reef, by way of "signifiers selected by the letters of the body"[26] and by way of acts.

Consider by contrast the sentences of a superego: they may be sentences heard, as well as sentences served, this latter for the crime, of course, of unconscious desire; they can leave a body bound indeed, until uttered, traversed, transformed in some way — until, in other

24 Willy Apollon, "The Letter of the Body," in Willy Apollon, Danielle Bergeron, and Lucie Cantin, *After Lacan: Clinical Practice and the Subject of the Unconscious*, trans. Robert Hughes and Kareen Ror Malone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 103-115.
25 Willy Apollon, "Adolescence, Masculine and Feminine," *Correspondances, courrier de l'École freudienne de Québec*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2017): 49.
26 Christopher Meyer, "Dreams, Symptom, Fantasy: A Clinical Case Seminar in the Aftermath of Lacan's Return to Freud," (Seminar Lecture, the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis, Online, February 22, 2022).

words, the subject finds ways to take a new position with respect to the unspeakable and to make a place for it in her life. I hear Bourgeois intervene here, assisting the free drive, her own and others': The word pity soothed me. This is part of femininity too: taking what's real and granting it new expression — sometimes, publicly. So I add to Dufourmantelle's account — boundaries breached, deaths overcome, forbidden borders shamelessly stepped over, and sentences overturned.

The feminine subject can become fixated on the cruel and paradoxical demands of the superego at the cost of the assumption of desire and the experience of feminine jouissance, precisely because what is at stake in feminine subjectivity is the lack of a limit. The superego paradoxically supplies its own, mortifying version of a limit — an extreme one: "Enjoy or die" summarizes its imperative and function. Fortunately, "Here, in the field of the dream, you are at home. *Wo es war, soll Ich werden*"; so said Lacan, following Freud.[27] He explains: "…the subject is there to rediscover where it was — I anticipate—the real": "Where it was, the *Ich* — the subject […] must come into existence."[28]

Taking the Side of The Thing: The VVitch: a New England Folktale

The *VVitch: A New England Folktale*, a horror film written and directed by Robert Eggers (2015), tells the story of a family banished from a New England village because the father refuses to compromise his understanding and promulgation of, in his words, the "pure and faithful dispensation of the Gospel." Set in the 1630s, the film is notable first — and interestingly, given its premise — for its exquisite use of language, reportedly drawn from archives and artfully adapted to the Yorkshire accent of the actor who plays the father, William. From the outset, however, viewers are invited to share the trepidation of the ado-

27 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 44.
28 Ibid, 45.

lescent girl confronted with the family's situation: hers is the first (and the last) face that we see, as well as the only, amongst those of her family panned in the opening scene, that registers either doubt of the father's position (discernible in her sharp look at him as the banishment is proclaimed) or acknowledgement of the grave consequences of that position (discernible when, as the rest of the family files dutifully out of the hall, she stands frozen and alone, as if unwilling to go, and has to be beckoned by her younger brother, who states her name, "Thomasin"). As the family departs, travelling by wagon, Thomasin sits facing backwards, looking into the village as its gates close to her and her family; she accompanies her mother, who we later realize is pregnant, her father, and her three younger siblings, two of whom are twins. As they depart, Thomasin's mouth is closed, but we dimly hear that the family begins singing, their religious song eventually overridden by the score's crescendo of dissonant string notes, a separate song that serves as the other, and perhaps the Other's, strange accompaniment.

For those who have not seen the movie, the plot is as follows: after banishment, the family sets up household in the country and struggles with the corresponding hardships. One day, when Thomasin has her eyes covered in a game of peekaboo with her baby brother, he is snatched from her; we see the baby again, in a scene suggestive of ritual sacrifice, but the family does not. The family is shocked by the loss, and when the middle son Caleb goes missing as well — also while accompanied by Thomasin — then returns naked, bloodied, and babbling — matters deteriorate still further. Caleb never recovers, and the mother Katherine suspects Thomasin. Thomasin is also at odds with the twins: the twins accuse Thomasin of being a witch, and she in turn accuses them of making covenant with the Devil through the figure of the family goat. When Caleb dies in a fever, the father William locks all three surviving children in the barn for the night. In the morning, the twins have gone missing, the goat attacks and kills William, and Katherine, emerging to see Thomasin kneeling near her father, accuses Thomasin of having killed them all, of reeking of evil and having made a covenant with death, and, finally, of having taken Katherine's husband and son from her by bewitching them "as any whore" with her "sluttish looks."

Thomasin protests, crying that she loves her mother. When Katherine pins Thomasin on the ground and Thomasin defends herself with the billhook lying nearby, Katherine begins to strangle Thomasin, and Thomasin kills her mother.

The director has said that, through this film, he wanted to evoke the realness of the fear of witches lived by the Puritan people in New England at the time, stating, "When I discovered what the idea of the evil witch was — that the fairy tale world and the real world were the same thing in the early modern period; people really thought these women were fairy tale ogresses, and they needed to be exterminated — I thought, 'Well, hell, we've got to get back to this time if we're going to believe in a witch. We have to be in their minds, and this has to be a Puritan's nightmare. It's an inherited nightmare.'"[29] Interestingly, the film's entry into the realness of this fear — which we might also call a fantasy — also takes the occasion to represent something that lies beyond the logic of extermination. Specifically, the film seems to me to be interested in what can be at stake for a feminine subject grappling with the work of the Thing in the body; moreover, in its representations of that interest, the film takes the surprising position of allegiance to the side of the Thing, over and above that of either society or the individual.[30]

29 Tasha Robinson, "The Witch director Robert Eggers talks about bringing Puritan fears to a modern world," *The Verge*, February 19, 2016, https://www.theverge.com/2016/2/19/11059130/the-witch-director-robert-eggers-interview.

30 It would also be fascinating to consider the film with respect to Silvia Federici's powerful arguments in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Dublin: Penguin Classics, 2021). Moreover, given Federici's exploration of the transition to capitalism from the feudal Middle Ages through the 16th and 17th centuries, and the crucial role that the violent subjugation of women and their bodies played in capitalism's horrific emergence, it would also be interesting to consider both of this essay's latter examples— Eggers' *The VVitch* and the Marguerite Porete's life work —

To broach these proposals, let's first consider certain structural elements of the film. The family's banishment from the community of believers who, to the father's mind, fail to uphold the purity of the Gospel, finds its repetition within the family in the figure of Thomasin, who exists at a painful and ironic remove from the piety of her parents, the antics of the twins, and the chosen-ness, as it were, of her middle and baby brother, both of whom are represented as favored by the mother. Since Thomasin is an adolescent, such a remove may be thought of as structurally inevitable, but it is also a break that, due to the severity of the family's repression of the feminine, takes on phantasmatic proportions which, in turn, reach violent ends.

It would be a mistake, however, to attribute the severity of this repression to the family's religious ideals; instead, the religious ideals function as mechanisms called upon to bastion psychical barriers that the mother and the father of the family are just barely maintaining, barriers with respect to which, we might say, each member of the family takes a different position. What then is being barred? The father William speaks desire's transgression, expression, and repression, when he explains to his son Caleb why they need to hunt in the woods. He has invited Caleb to join him early one morning and been met with Caleb's concern: Caleb says, "You and mother have always forbad us to set foot there." The father responds, "[…] our harvest cannot last the winter. We must capture our food if we cannot grow it. We will conquer this wilderness. It will not consume us." In a curious reversal, it is the son in this case who articulates the prohibition coming from the mother and the father, and the father who, by negation, links the wilderness to the thrilling fear of being consumed, that most filial of fantasies, often linked to the fantasy of being devoured by the m(O)ther. The wilderness in this rough metaphor is, naturally, the Thing, or the Mother as "extreme good."[31] Taken together, Caleb and William's logics strike me as consummately masculine: they delimit a forbidden territory, then

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with respect to Federici's claims.

31 Lacan, *Ethics*, 73.

shake things up by proposing they will set foot in it to pursue no mere substitute — as in Freud's account of the dissolution of the Oedipus complex — but a part of it (the paternal synecdoche, perhaps, which isn't really a "no" at all?). It's striking therefore that the animal they target to kill — the hare — not only escapes but returns to lead young Caleb to the very doorstep of one of the witches of the wilderness.

William's language, for which his son functions as mouthpiece in the scene that follows, evokes the Thing by way of the figure of sin as well. After William's dire work of foreshadowing, the next scene sees father and son walking in the wilderness, and we hear William ask pedagogically, "Art thou then born a sinner?" Caleb speaks the responses his father would appear to seek:

> "Aye, I was conceived in sin and born in iniquity."
>
> "And what is thy birth sin?"
>
> "Adam's sin imputed to me, and a corrupt nature dwelling with me."
>
> "Well-remembered Caleb. Very well. And canst thou tell me what thy corrupt nature is?"
>
> "My corrupt nature is empty of grace, bent unto sin, only unto sin, and that continually."

Structurally, I think Lacan would agree! That is, according to Lacan, the drive "'moves around'"[32] the object, and nothing ensures its consistency except the object "as something which must be circumvented."[33] "One might dream," he notes, "of a total, complete, epidermic contact between one's body and a world that was itself open and quivering, […] hope for a revelation of harmony following the disappearance of the perpetual, insinuating presence of the oppressive feeling of some

32 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 168.
33 Ibid, 181.

original curse […] [but] Freud […] emphasizes a point of insertion, a limit point, an irreducible point, at the level of what we might call the source of the *Triebe* [drive]."[34] In other words, one might hope for total satisfaction—complete contact with an open, quivering world—but psychoanalysis maintains that, because of the fact of language—that insertion at the level of the source of the drive — there is no hope for a revelation of harmony, no return to a mythical, impossible jouissance, no hope for (re)union with the Thing towards which one is bent, "and that continually." Furthermore, subjective structure has a role to play in how this impossibility is apprehended or experienced: for neurotics, according to Lacan, try to experience satisfaction by "reproduc[ing] the initial [impossible] state" in different ways: The behavior of the hysteric, for example, has as its aim to recreate a state centered on the object, insofar as this object, *das Ding*, is, as Freud wrote somewhere, the support of an aversion. It is because the primary object is an object which failed to give satisfaction that the specific *Erlebnis* [lived experience] of the hysteric is organized."[35] By contrast, for the obsessional, it "literally gives too much pleasure."[36]

These last points are, admittedly, a detour. What is important to emphasize for our purposes is the question that emerges from both William's pedagogy and Lacan's clinical discoveries, which can be phrased thusly: How not to be consumed by the wilderness within, into which we are (sinfully) born and unto which we are continually bent? Or, in psychoanalytic terms — those of Apollon — how to "convert" the energy of the drive into desire "for anything else,"[37] and take up what Apollon describes as "an ethics where desire feeds on the failing of jouissance"?[38] I would hazard that this is a question for every subject

34 Lacan, *Ethics*, 93.
35 Ibid, 53-54.
36 Ibid, 54.
37 Apollon, "The Letter of the Body," 106.
38 Willy Apollon, "Symptom," in Willy Apollon, Danielle Bergeron, and Lucie Cantin, *After Lacan: Clinical Practice and the Subject of the Unconscious*,

of the drive, and it is also a distinctly feminine question, inasmuch as it is concerned with that which femininity safeguards, which is the aesthetic — in other words, to rephrase the question one more time, how to go to the very doorstep of the witches of the wilderness, in and with beauty, and then generate (more) beauty, rather than violence? My claim is that the film risks the hazards of taking the side of the Thing in approaching it, and that it does so particularly powerfully by way of its representations of what can be at stake for a feminine subject grappling with the work of the Thing in the body.

Two scenes from the film are for me particularly striking in this regard: the scene wherein Katherine recounts a dream she had in adolescence and the scene with which the film concludes, in which we see Thomasin ascending into the night sky, now one amongst the other witches of the wilderness. To my mind, these scenes bring forth the film's preoccupation with the feminine in a very particular way, for while *The VVitch* could be read as a cautionary tale about the dangers of religion or jealousy — or witchcraft for that matter — it also expresses deep sympathy with the very Thing that can ravage the body from within — sympathy, I would add, that rests with the Thing itself, not with the suffering it can beget when it fails to find aesthetic expression.

Katherine's dream appears in the narrative at a moment of crisis for the couple: William has conceded that they must return to the village or starve and stated as much. Katherine, however, is inconsolable. William in turn demands, "What dost thou want, Katherine? Tell me and I will give it thee!" Katherine responds that she wishes to be back in England, that she knows she has become "as Job's wife" to William, but that since the loss of their baby, her heart has turned to stone. Then she tells her dream: "I had dreamed once, 'twas when I was of Thomasin's years, that I was with Christ upon earth. I was so very near him, and in many tears for the assurance of the pardon of my sins, and I was so ravished with his love towards me, I thought it far exceeding the af-

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trans. Robert Hughes and Kareen Ror Malone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 140.

fection of the kindest husband." When she chooses to share her dream to answer her husband's question (or plea or demand), Katherine elucidates a structural fact, which is that desire is not something that can be satisfied: what she wants is not something that can be given to her by her husband; it is not a thing that can be given at all. Katherine thus answers the question, "What do you want?" in part by refusing the notion that there is a possible object for desire. Her dream opens onto a different scene, as well as what I am reading as a feminine economy of desire — a scene of a love that ravishes, from an Other who is absent but near, who, in an act that "far exceed[s] the affection of the kindest husband," pardons sins — or who, perhaps, takes the side of the Thing.

Thomasin's ravishment will take a different, more devilish form. I read the scene that concludes the film as offering an image of Thomasin's ecstatic experience of a jouissance that is "too-much."[39] Both Thomasin's experience and position are instructive here. At this point, she has lost everyone and everything she knows, and her words and deeds — along with the things she did not say and did not do — contributed to these tragedies' acceleration and accumulation. Had the film ended two scenes earlier — in which we find Thomasin desolate and alone in her family's home — we might have imagined for her a future of expiation, a lifetime spent paying for her and her family's actions and inactions. Had that been the case, everything up to this point in the film would have been horrifying, but it might not have been all that surprising. Left to imagining a future wherein Thomasin effectively exterminated herself by way of expiation for having exterminated her family, we would have remained close to the logic highlighted by Eggers, underlying his understanding of the Puritans' phantasmatic relationship to the idea of witches, as the Other of jouissance to be exterminated. There, however, where we might have indulged in fantasies of expiation, the film offers something other, something it names "living deliciously." We only get a glimpse of it: Thomasin addresses

39 Willy Apollon, "Féminité dites-vous?" *Savoir: Revue de psychanalyse et d'analyse culturelle* Vol. 2, No. 1 (May 1995): 35.

the goat, asking that he speak to her as he spoke to the twins, and the goat — addressing Thomasin for the first time in the film — responds, "What dost thou want?", to which Thomasin replies, "What canst thou give?" Hearing his reply — butter, pretty dresses, to travel the world, to live deliciously — she assents, and then further assents to sign his book. She elects to join the witches. Walking into the wilderness, she sees the other witches dancing, and when they start to levitate, so does she. Lifting from the ground, she begins to laugh, and the expressions of exquisite pleasure and torment on her face — laughing and sobbing, with shadows from the bonfire in the distance distorting her face in a skull-like effect — bespeak without words that this beyond of the pleasure principle does not answer to what is "good" for the individual or for society.

In the conclusion of *The VVitch*, some Other is still upheld as responsible for the jouissance, or death drive, at work in Thomasin's body: it's the Devil! The film shows this very well in the scene in which Thomasin signs the Devil's book. Thomasin has broken with her family — violently, tragically, radically — and beyond that rupture we witness her experience of a jouissance that is "too-much." But in signing the Devil's book, she trades one set of signifiers coming from the Other — her family's — for another — the Devil's. In working through and thereby breaking free of the Devil's signifiers as well — by way of a "practice of the signifier"[40] anchored in signifiers coming from her unconscious, as well as a "practice of the letter"[41] — working on and from the letters of her body — practices that lead ineluctably and continuously to confrontations with the signifier's structural inability to

40 Lucie Cantin, "The Borderline or The Impossibility of Producing a Negotiable Form in the Social Bond for the Return of the Censored," trans. Mike Standish, *Konturen* Vol. 3 (2010): 200.

41 Lucie Cantin, "Ce que nous enseigne la psychose sur la clinique du symptôme: deux cas de figure," in Willy Apollon, Danielle Bergeron, and Lucie Cantin, *La cure psychanalytique du psychotique: Enjeux et stratégies* (Quebec: Collection Nœud, 2008), 289.

account for the subject's experience of the drive, and with the fact that there is no Other who can take responsibility for the drive in the subject's place — Thomasin could bring something new, something of her own making and desire, to the collective.

The Work of the Ravishing Farnearness and the Annihilated Life

"Psychoanalysis sustains the 'I don't know where.'" — Willy Apollon

Earlier I proposed that what the drive wants is a writing — to create unboundedly, by way of signifiers (and other aesthetic objects: musical notes, paint, clay, numbers) selected by the letters of the body, and by way of acts. I now want to explore the ways in which, for the subject taking responsibility for his/her/their own drive, feminine and masculine ethics find crucial supports in one another. More specifically, I want to explore the proposal that feminine ethics — concerned with what the signifier can neither account for nor reduce[42] — and masculine ethics — concerned with the act[43] — enable, together, acting on the basis and on behalf of that which the signifier can neither account for nor reduce, or the beyond of the signifier, which is itself inscribed in the letters of the body. I suggest that Marguerite Porete's[44] life work

42 Christopher Meyer, "The End(s) of Analysis: Last Words, and the Work of the Drive in Their Beyond," (Seminar Lecture, the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis, Online, September 26, 2020).
43 Lucie Cantin, "La masculinité au-delà du phallus, un style et une éthique pour la pulsion de mort," in *Savoir: Psychanalyse et Analyse Culturelle* Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2 (September 2000): 126.
44 See Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). Field points out that the trial documents for Marguerite usually referred to her as "'Marguerite called Porete'" (28) rather

exemplifies this relation of support. In her book *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, she works to articulate in language the impossibility of articulating in language what is at work in the experiences that, she suggests, freedom opens onto — experiences she calls "the work of the Ravishing Farnearness"[45] and "the annihilated life."[46] She is thus engaged in a very feminine project, in the expansive sense in which I am working with this term. And Marguerite's acts on behalf of her book extend the purview of this feminine project, such that the Soul described by Marguerite does not remain cloistered — in her ravishment, her annihilation, or her responsibility — but is raised, together with the book in which she takes form, to the dignity of a Thing for the collective. For by these acts, we might just as well call this a masculine project in the sense in which Apollon has written of the masculine, as "tak[ing] on the responsibility for that which will not know how to find its path in language with respect of the failing indications given by the civilization."[47] But first: what is this book, and how does it illustrate what is at stake in the surge of the free drives and access to the Other or feminine jouissance that accompanies the fall of the Other?

The Mirror of Simple Souls is a Christian mystical itinerary that draws on the vocabulary of courtly love to narrate a Soul's fall into Love and, from Love, into nothingness. Little is known about the author's life; we do know that copies of Marguerite's book were circulating by at least 1305,[48] and her death is recorded as having taken place

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than Marguerite Porete. Raising the interesting point that that poret meant "leek" in Old French "and figuratively could refer to any object of little value, in phrases such as 'that's not worth a poret'" (28-29), Field proposes that the name may have been more of a nickname than a family one (28).

45 Marguerite Porete: T*he Mirror of Simple Souls*, ed. and trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 135.

46 Ibid, 82.

47 Apollon, "Adolescence," 55-56.

48 Field, 43.

on June 1, 1310.[49] Beyond this, what is known concerns what has been recorded in connection to her efforts on behalf of her book and her encounters with the authorities that condemned her and it. When T*he Mirror of Simple Souls* came to the attention of Guido of Collemezzo, canon lawyer and Bishop of Cambrai,[50] he condemned it, and at least one copy was burned by his order in Valenciennes.[51] A copy or copies were probably burned again in Paris on May 31, 1310,[52] the day that Marguerite herself was sentenced to death, both she and her book now having been condemned as heretical[53] by King Philip IV's confessor and inquisitor William of Paris.[54] More accurately, she was at this time judged a relapsed heretic:[55] as William stated that day, "we condemn you by sentence, Marguerite, as not only lapsed into heresy but as one relapsed […]."[56] On the following day — probably on the same site, Paris's Place de Grève — Marguerite was executed by fire.[57] She was

49 Ibid, 2. Sean L. Field provides a rich and fascinating historical account of Marguerite's life, trials, and execution, and the contexts for these events, in *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart*. As the title indicates, he is also particularly interested in the figures of William of Paris and Guiard of Cressenessart, the latter of whom reported that he had, in a kind of vision, "been given the office of 'Angel of Philadelphia'" (35), who shows up in historical record by way of his dedication to Marguerite's cause (38), and who is imprisoned as well because of this.
50 Ibid, 40-41.
51 Ibid, 44. Field notes that the "event must have occurred between 1296 and 1306, because those are the years in which Guido held the bishopric of Cambrai" (5-6).
52 Ibid, 157.
53 Ibid, 155-157.
54 Ibid, 18.
55 Ibid, 146.
56 Ibid, 157.
57 Ibid, 159.

"the first female Christian mystic burned at the stake after authoring a book"[58] — more forcefully, she may have been "'the only medieval woman, and possibly the only author of either sex, who died solely for a written text.'"[59] The question as to what Marguerite died for from her perspective — while, of course, unknowable — is part of what I will consider here.

Marguerite's book describes the seven stages by which a Soul may arrive at annihilation of the self in union with God. In this itinerary, Love plays the critical role, speaking as Love does with a Soul "in the flower of [a Soul's] youth" in order "to unencumber" her; notably, those who "refuse[ ] [Love's] calls," Love observes, "live encumbered with themselves until they die."[60] As these brief glimpses already reveal, Marguerite's book features characters in dialogue: Soul and Love, predominantly, with Reason as their primary interrogator, and sometimes others, such as Holy Church the Little, the Holy Spirit, Truth, Fear, Desire, and even the Person of God the Father himself. "[T]he enterprise of this book,"[61] as Marguerite names it, unfolds, I suggest, because Soul has accepted Love's call, an acceptance that Marguerite locates beyond understanding: as Love remarks near the beginning of the book, "[I]f this Soul would possess all the understanding and the love and the praise which ever was given and will be given by the divine Trinity, this would be nothing compared to what she loves and will love. And she will never attain this love through understanding."[62] "Ah, certainly not, sweet Love, says the Soul" in reply.[63] What she loves and will love, and what is entailed in the Soul's acceptance of Love's call, constitute the primary subjects of the book, and Soul, Love, and Reason — this last is present until, at a certain moment, she faints away in

58 Ibid, 3.
59 Barbara Newman, quoted in Field, *The Beguine*, 3.
60 Mirror, 152.
61 Ibid, 92.
62 Ibid, 91.
63 Ibid.

death (only to return a few more times!) — approach something of the infinity at stake in the experience they aim to describe and its inaccessibility to language or sense.

One of the Soul's first acts, however, is concrete enough — she takes leave of the Virtues: "there is another life,"[64] as Love remarks — and Love's courtliness, Soul explains, "has placed [her] outside their service."[65] Soul addresses the Virtues:

> Virtues, I take my leave of you forever,
> I will possess a heart most free and gay;
> Your service is too constant, you know well.
> Once I placed my heart in you, retaining nothing;
> You know that I was to you totally abandoned;
> I was once a slave to you, but now am delivered from it.
> I had placed my heart completely in you, you know well.
> Thus I lived a while in great distress,
> I suffered in many grave torments, many pains endured.
> Miracle it is that I have somehow escaped alive.
> This being so, I no longer care; I am parted from you,
> For which I thank God on high; good for me this day,
> I am parted from your dominations, which so vexed me.
> I was never more free, except as departed from you.
> I am parted from your dominations, in peace I rest.[66]

The Soul refers to the Virtues' dominations as vexing, acknowledging that she had abandoned herself totally to their service and therefore to those pains. In psychoanalytic terms, she had abandoned herself to the project of attempting to satisfy her fantasy of the Virtues' demands of her, such that they function as an insatiable Other of demand ("Your service is too constant, you know well") whose signifiers she interpreted and responded to. That abdication — of her very heart, as the Soul explains — led to "great distress," not freedom; it was also a way of not

64 Ibid, 82.
65 Ibid, 84.
66 Ibid, 84.

facing freedom and of managing whatever it was in her that she abandoned in abandoning herself to that Other.

Taking leave of the Virtues, the Soul declares herself "never more free." Similarly, the Soul takes leave of Reason — but not without responding to its questions. Indeed, Reason's questions drive much of the text, and she remains a principal character for some time even after Soul declares that she has taken leave of her. As with the Virtues, taking leave of Reason is for Soul a source of joy. When Reason asks, "[W]hat has given you more joy?,"[67] Love responds, at Soul's prompting:

> It is from this, says Love, that she has taken leave of you and of the works of the Virtues. For as long as this Soul was cloaked in love, she took lessons in your school through desire of the works of the Virtues. Now she has entered upon and is so surpassing in divine learning that she begins to read where you take your end. But this lesson is not placed in writing by human hand, but by the Holy Spirit, who writes this lesson in a marvelous way, and the Soul is the precious parchment. The divine school is held with the mouth closed, which the human mind cannot express in words.[68]

Taking leave of Reason, the lessons the Soul had read before fall away. In their wake, she has new material with which to contend; and what she now reads is denoted as the inscription by the Holy Spirit that she herself — without herself — is, "precious parchment." Precious parchment: the human hand enters this scene by way of its negation — a lesson "not placed in writing by human hand" — but it's not certain that it's a divine hand that has acted in its stead; Marguerite notes simply that the Holy Spirit "writes this lesson in a marvelous way." The image proffered, rather than that of a divine hand, is that of a "divine school […] held with the mouth closed," which goes beyond what humans can express in words.

67 Ibid, 142.
68 Ibid.

What is a divine school held with the mouth closed? What is it here that humans cannot express in words? And what is it to announce this set of difficult and beautiful affirmations in a book that many human hands would appear to have participated in transcribing (testified to by the book's survival), a book that Marguerite anticipated at least some readers would encounter by way of the ear and therefore by way of the mouth?

In this passage, what circulates and resonates — hand, Holy Spirit, parchment, mouth, school — is beyond sense, and sensorial, with a particular emphasis on touch. Marguerite's book goes directly to a scene of reading and writing, I suggest, in order to hollow out something for which neither can account. By doing so, the book enacts what it is essentially about. And this enactment of what the book is essentially about is, I propose, in step with a depiction of what I think can be considered as a fall of the Other of seduction: Marguerite makes explicit that the Soul is no longer interested in the signifiers coming from Reason and the Virtues or in attempting to satisfy her fantasy of their demands of her. That subjection Soul describes as a source of "grave torments" from which it is miraculous she escaped alive. "This being so," Marguerite writes that Soul no longer cares. Most importantly, the writing now raised — while neither as material as the transports of Teresa of Avila or as prominent as the stigmata of Angela of Foligno — concerns the Soul's relation to something beyond words, and to a Spirit — or an absent Other — whose writing she "is." With Virtues and Reason left behind and the Soul as exemplum, Marguerite invites her book's readers and hearers to take an interest in both the Soul's and their own status as written "in a marvelous way."

And this is the beginning! To circle back to claims I made earlier in this essay: that femininity can be considered as the work of articulating the drive with aesthetics; that the possibility of that work comes from the letters of the body; and that Marguerite's book illustrates what is at stake in a third logical moment in feminine experience: recall that for Apollon, the letters of the body are inscriptions of originary trauma; they are inscriptions of a real for which there is no signifier in language. As he has noted, "You cannot find a signifier for

that";[69] in Lacan's terms, there is an "inherence of a (-1) in the set of signifiers."[70] It strikes me as important to recall Apollon's reference to trauma at this juncture, for, with Marguerite's help, it points to what is (or can become) "marvelous" about that which is also activated in the two previous examples of this essay, namely, the surge of the superego and the surge of the jouissance of the Other discussed in connection to Bourgeois' piece of fabric art and the final scene of the movie *The VVitch*. In other words, trauma is at stake, and at work, in every surge of the drive. Marguerite's Soul poeticizes another issue for that which is put to work in each of these scenes. This is the case, I propose, partly because the Soul is no longer asking Reason or Virtues to manage something for her: if before she had placed her heart in them, finding there great distress and vexing domination, she is now delivered from the specific kind of management that that servitude occasioned and enjoined. More than that, inasmuch as it is at this very juncture — beyond Reason, beyond Virtues — that the Soul opens onto ravishment, she is no longer asking for "it" to be managed at all.

In other words, once again, the issue is aesthetic. There may be seven stages in a Soul's itinerary to annihilation, but Marguerite's focus is very much on stages five and six, probably because, as Love notes, "of the first four stages none is so high that the Soul does not still live in some great servitude."[71] What is at stake beyond servitude? Love answers: "the work of the Ravishing Farnearness":[72]

> Ah, for God's sake, says Reason, what do these Souls have to give who are so annihilated?

69 Willy Apollon, "The Psychoanalytic Symptom" (Training Seminar Lecture, Groupe interdisciplinaire freudien de recherche et d'intervention clinique et culturelle, Québec, June 5, 2017).
70 Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York : W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 694.
71 *Mirror*, 138.
72 Ibid, 135.

> Love: To give? says Love. Truly, says Love, whatever God has of value. The Soul who is such is neither lost nor sad. Instead, she is in the depths of the fifth stage with her Lover. There nothing is lacking to her, and so she is often carried up to the sixth, but this is of little duration. For it is an aperture, like a spark, which quickly closes, in which one cannot long remain; nor would that soul ever have authority who knew how to speak of this.
>
> The overflowing from the ravishing aperture makes the Soul, after the closing, free and noble and unencumbered from all things. This happens from the peace of the work of the overflowing and the peace lasts as long as the opening of the aperture. After such an encounter, the Soul keeps herself freely at the fifth stage, without falling to the fourth, because at the fourth she has will, and at the fifth she has none. And because at the fifth stage, of which this book speaks, she has no more will — where the Soul remains after the work of the Ravishing Farnearness, which we call a spark in the manner of an aperture and quick closure — no one would be able to believe, says Love, the peace upon peace of peace which the Soul receives, if he were not this himself.
>
> Understand these divine words in a divine manner through Love, hearers of this book! This Farnearness, which we call a spark in the manner of an aperture and quick closure, receives the Soul at the fifth stage and places her at the sixth as long as His work remains and endures. And therefore she is other. But she remains in the being of the sixth stage for a short time, for she is put back at the fifth stage.
>
> And this is not surprising, says Love, for the work of the Spark, as long as it lasts, is nothing other than the showing of the glory of the Soul. This does not remain in any creature very long, except only in the moment of His movement. Thus such a gift is noble, says Love, for He does His work before the Soul has any perception or awareness of His work.[73]

Marguerite explains that Soul's first encounters with the work of the Ravishing Farnearness induct her into a state in which she no lon-

73 Ibid, 135-136.

ger has any will, existing in peace and a state of overflowing, unencumbered from all things. She repeats at numerous junctures that the aperture occasioned by the spark of the Ravishing Farnearness has a quick closure, and the sixth stage it installs is a state in which the Soul remains "for a short time." While it's not a state in which she remains, experiencing it changes her, such that the Soul no more returns to the fourth stage, where she lived in servitude.

The passage cited above — returning again and again to the aperture and its closure, evoking in writing the Farnearness that receives, places, and replaces the Soul affected by its work — figures a passage in another sense as well: the Soul's, from the work of the Ravishing Farnearness to the annihilation of the self. For from here, the Soul experiences repeated falls into nothingness, falls primarily narrated by Love, until at a certain moment Soul breaks into song and then falls silent — that is, the book seems initially to have concluded with Soul's song.[74]

Love provides the first account of Soul's fall, saying: "I have said above that such a Soul has fallen from me into nothingness, moreover, into nothingness without limit."[75] In such a state of loss of herself and nothingness without limit, the Soul loses her name as well: as a body of water joining the sea, losing its course, she "loses her name in the One in whom she is melted and dissolved through Himself and in Himself."[76] And the effect of such loss is that "This Soul, says Love, is free, yet more free, yet very free, yet finally supremely free, in the root, in the stock, in all her branches and all the fruits of her branches."[77] Soul's fall into nothingness transforms her from root to fruit: free at the root, she is free in all she produces as well. Interestingly, the Soul at this stage is unencumbered not only from herself and her neighbor: she is even unencumbered from God: "And when such nothingness is,"

74 Field, *The Beguine*, *47*.
75 *Mirror*, 155.
76 Ibid, 158.
77 Ibid, 160.

Soul remarks, "then God sees Himself in such a creature, without any hindrance from His creature."[78]

"[A]lone in all things, and common in all things." — Marguerite Porete

After the *Mirror's* initial condemnation by the Bishop of Cambrai, Marguerite broke the Bishop's order and shared her book with more people.[79] She may have written more too, according to Field: "scholars have generally agreed that at least the final seventeen chapters of the *Mirror*…were probably added on after Marguerite's first brush with authority."[80] Field assesses her actions here thusly: "rather than accept the idea that her book contained 'heresy' and 'errors,' she sought to clarify and restate her ideas for the benefit of those who had not understood her properly the first time."[81] As she did so, she had additional brushes with authority, including encounters with readers of stature who approved the work — she herself shared her book with Godfrey of Fontaines, for instance, identified by Field as "a well-known master of theology."[82] However at some point in the fall of 1308[83] Marguerite was incarcerated, and it seems that from this point forward she fell

78 Ibid, 168.
79 Field, The Beguine, 46.
80 Ibid, 47. Field offers an interesting reading of the shifts in perspective and tone for this section of the book: "Starting with chapter 123, the text employs less dialogue, shifts dramatically to an authorial first-person voice, and at least initially focuses on devotional and hagiographic material that seems comparatively uncontroversial" (47). Among other things, Field suggests Marguerite has thereby "redirected her attention to those who might like to understand but have not done so as of yet" (48).
81 Ibid, 47.
82 Ibid, 61.
83 Ibid, 61.

more or less silent[84] — significantly, by refusing to take the oath asked of her by her inquisitor, William of Paris, "concerning speaking truly about those things which had been reported and revealed about her."[85] Refusing to take the oath already reestablished Marguerite as a heretic, according to canon law: "suspects called before an inquisition…to answer legitimate, substantial charges but refusing to swear an oath 'are from that very circumstance to be adjudged heretics.'"[86] Field reports that "[o]ver the course of eighteen months, [William of Paris] claims to have tried frequently to extract the necessary oaths, offering […] absolution in return."[87] When extracts of her book were condemned again, and Marguerite persisted in refusing to repent, she was judged relapsed and, on June 1, 1310, executed. While it's impossible to know Marguerite's reasons for refusing the oath or, indeed, anything about her interior experience, what we can observe herein strikes me as a stirring example of one who forged an ethic "beyond Sense, facing the void and at the risk of death…there where the voyage is known to be a one-way trip, done alone."[88]

What did Marguerite "not want to lose" for humanity — Apollon's formulation for the aesthetic?[89] While her path and its conclusion are hers alone, the question of what she didn't want to lose for human-

84 She was not necessarily literally silent; according to Field, "the impression of an absolute refusal to communicate is probably illusory. It is not evident that they refused to utter a sound, only that they would not take a judicial oath. There may in fact have been substantial conversations between the detainees and their inquisitor" (92). The "they" in question is Marguerite and Guiard of Cressenessart, who was imprisoned as well.

85 Ibid, 90.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Cantin, "La masculinité," 139. My translation.

89 Fernanda Negrete, interview with Willy Apollon, *Penumbr(a)cast,* podcast audio, December 2021, https://www.penumbrajournal.org/podcast. My translation.

ity — a question that Marguerite's life work gives us to think quite concretely — is one each subject can ask herself. Analysis affords such possibility, the possibility of knowing something about that which one loves in this way.

Femininity and Castration

"The analyst in his desire for savoir loves the thing in the analysand." — Danielle Bergeron

Society undoubtedly contributes to the problems any subject may encounter in engaging in femininity, structured as society is to repress the feminine within each of us. The ethics of psychoanalysis signal, however, that that which falls out of the social will never find its addressee in language, and that that very fact does not obviate the subject of the possibility — indeed, the ethical necessity — to find a way to express it, but instead creates it. Aesthetics finds issue here, and, as Apollon has argued, "Every one of us has that necessity to have an ethics based on our subjective aesthetic."[90]

As the talking cure, each analysis entails the creating of signifiers whose senses and non-senses touch and are touched by bodies, where the radically censored acts and will never be extinguished. "This is why," according to Apollon, "the signifier is only a means and not the object of the [analytic] process. It is a means that, in a way, fails to serve its purpose."[91] Apollon writes here that the signifier is a means in an analysis, but if it is one of them, it is surely a crucial one, for, as

90 Willy Apollon, "From the Cultural Construction of the Sexual to the Unconscious Desire" (Training Seminar Lecture, Groupe interdisciplinaire freudien de recherche et d'intervention clinique et Culturelle [GIFRIC], Québec, June 5, 2017).
91 Apollon, "Symptom," 140.

Bergeron has noted, it is "by speaking that she can get out of all this mess."[92] That is, according to Bergeron, "You as analyst have to guarantee by your presence that it is by speaking that she can get out of all this mess."[93] And when she, or you, or they, or any of us, get(s) out of all this mess, we speak some more: Cantin locates feminine ethics here, arguing that the assumption of castration for a feminine subject entails reckoning with and submitting to the "Law of the signifier" "in spite of its inconsistency,"[94] which opens onto the possibility of "producing a word and creating a space of metaphorization for the excess."[95] Juliet Flower MacCannell explains, "If this feminine Drive can not be articulated in language as such, the impossibility of its articulation can."[96]

In other words, the beyond of the signifier is not without the signifier — certainly not for Marguerite. Even as the characters of Marguerite's book stress at multiple points that what they are describing is beyond words, something for which they cannot find words — even as the Soul "*rejoices more in that which can be communicated to no one than what can be communicated*"[97] — it is in a fundamental way those very words — faulty, fallen, and, in Marguerite's case, written — that Marguerite dies for. This is another way of saying that they are words she lived for, words she refused to revoke. She did so, I propose, because she chose to live and die both for the love of that which they cannot say and for

92 Danielle Bergeron, "The Writing of the Symptom" (Training Seminar Lecture, Groupe interdisciplinaire freudien de recherche et d'intervention clinique et culturelle [GIFRIC], Québec, June 6, 2017).
93 Ibid.
94 Lucie Cantin, "La féminité: D'une complicité à la perversion à une éthique de l'impossible," *Savoir: Psychanalyse et Analyse Culturelle* Vol. 2, Nos. 1-2 (1995): 66. My translation.
95 Ibid, 67.
96 Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Facing Fascism: A Feminine Politics of Jouissance," in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, eds. Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 86.
97 Mirror, 109.

the love of the words that failed to say it.

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